

After nearly four decades, it's time to retire

It is with sadness – and joy, too – that I am announcing my retirement from my position with the U. S. Basketball Writers Association.

I'm staying on for one more year to help the new person during his/her transition period.

I've been involved in an official capacity with the USBWA for 38 years, first as editor of *The Tipoff*, and for the last 35 years as executive director.

The USBWA has been a passion of mine for nearly four decades. Leaving it after so many years is one of the hardest decisions I've ever made. It's like losing a close friend.

I never really thought about when this day would come, but now I'm feeling it's time for me to move on to the next chapter in my life.

I'm looking forward to spending more time with my family, including three grandchildren, two in Chicago and one in Los Angeles. My wife Sue, who has been by

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



my side every step of the way, and I plan to do some traveling now that she has fully retired as associate pastor of Kirkwood (Mo.) United Methodist Church. Sue and I will be celebrating our 50th anniversary this August.

I've often said the strength of this organization is its presidents, and I've had the privilege to work with some of the finest sports journalists in the country. Each one has been unique in their style of leadership, but all have had one common goal – to help writers do their

job covering college basketball with greater access, better media seating and improved working conditions at games.

I think my greatest joy is seeing how meaningful being inducted into the organization's Hall of Fame is to those being honored.

There are far too many individuals to thank in this column, but I do want to recognize a few who have helped me along the way and helped make the USBWA a strong and vibrant organization representing over 900 members.

Past president John Akers (2012-13) has done an outstanding job as *Tipoff* editor for the last 15 years, taking over a few years after the passing of former editor Larry Donald in 2000. The *Tipoff* is as good as any organizational newsletter in the country.

Ted Gangi has been our webmaster and a lifesaver for 16 years, and has had the patience of Job dealing with

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Mitch will be USBWA's toughest act to follow

Rarely does the *Tipoff* break news. But rarely does our organization's pulse announce his retirement.

And trust me, Joe Mitch is the U.S. Basketball Writers Association's pulse. His retirement as our executive director, a position he has graciously and tirelessly held since 1983, is a time for reflection – how the heck do we replace him? – and, mostly, applause.

By the time Joe presides over the 2019 Final Four in Minneapolis, he will have served as executive director for 36 years. The job's previous three occupants – Ed Schneider, Ray Marquette and Steve Guback – combined for 28 years of service.

But Joe's work transcends numbers. He is the USBWA's welcome mat, and most everything good about our group of 900-plus basketball mavens is rooted in him.

As your incoming president, count me among the most thankful that Joe has given us a year to unearth his successor. Following mentors and friends such as – deep breath here, because the list is lengthy – Bill Brill, Bill Millsaps, Malcolm Moran, John Feinstein, Hoops Weiss and Mike DeCourcy, Steve Wieberg, Jim O'Connell, Alex Wolff, Blair Kerkhoff, Bob Ryan, Robyn Norwood and Lenox Rawlings, John Akers, Dana O'Neil, Pat Forde, Ed Graney and, most recently, Vahe Gregorian, is humbling and unnerving enough. Doing so without Joe would have been downright terrifying.

My fervent hope is to further the progress those folks crafted so well.

David Teel
Newport News Daily Press
President



As my graying hair and expanding bald spot attest, the USBWA needs to get younger. We need more diversity and, most important, we need more members.

Strength in numbers, right? So I ask a favor: Recruit, recruit, recruit. There is no dead period or maximum number of offers.

After Villanova's dominance in San Antonio, I sat down with the USBWA directory – worth the price of admission, by the way – and cross-referenced our membership rolls with familiar reporters from the ACC circuit. More than 40 potential new members emerged, including student journalists on ACC campuses. I suspect many of y'all could compile similar lists of targets.

Anyone privileged to attend our functions at the Final Four saw the organization's selling points.

Thanks in large part to Vahe, Malcolm, John and the NCAA's David Worlock, the USBWA's relationship with the Division I men's basketball committee is cordial and respectful rather than contentious. We don't have enough courtside seats at NCAA tournament or

regular-season venues, or enough access to the committee's deliberations, but the dialogue continued in San Antonio and remains positive, witness the best-practices memo the Basketball Oversight Committee sent to every Division I program before the season.

Moreover, our awards continue to resonate. Sam Dowd (Most Courageous), Joe Castiglione (Katha Quinn) and Jalen Brunson (Oscar Robertson) were truly moved by their honors, as were, at other times and locales, Don Donoher (Dean Smith) and Tony Bennett (Henry Iba).

The USBWA was also front-and-center at the Women's Final Four – the games, just wow – where we honored our national player (South Carolina's A'ja Wilson), coach (Mississippi State's Vic Schaefer) and freshman (Texas A&M's Chennedy Carter) of the year.

And yes, we (rightfully) hail our own. The Hall of Fame acceptance speeches from Lew Freedman, David Jones, Kirk Wessler and Charlie Pierce were poignant, amusing and included this classic question: "Got any speed?" Nicole Auerbach affirmed what we all knew, that she richly deserved the Rising Star Award.

So as we head into a uniquely uncertain offseason – what's next, FBI? – I encourage you to email, text, call or DM with questions and suggestions for our organization. Since my first-grader requires well north of four timeouts per game, Worlock-like responsiveness is unlikely, but I promise to reply.

Until then, if you get a chance, thank Joe Mitch. He deserves it.

The United States Basketball Writers Association
803 Wildview Lane; Manchester, Mo.
63021. Visit us at: www.usbwa.com
314-795-6821; Fax: 314-444-4333

PRESIDENT – Dave Teel, Newport News Daily Press; O: 757-247-4636; C: 757-897-2049; dteel@dailypress.com

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT – Mike Waters, Syracuse Post-Standard; C: 315-416-6031; mwaters@syracuse.com

SECOND VICE PRESIDENT – Seth Davis, The Fieldhouse/CBS; C: 917-225-5788; sethdavishoops@gmail.com

THIRD VICE PRESIDENT – Shannon Ryan, Chicago Tribune; 312-451-7692; maryshan00@yahoo.com, sryan@chicagotribune.com

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Joe Mitch, H: 636-227-9113; C: 314-795-6821; mitch@usbwa.org

BOARD MEMBERS

DISTRICT I – Gavin Keefe, New London Day; C: 401-527-8625; g.keefe@theday.com

DISTRICT II – Joe Juliano, Philadelphia Inquirer; C: 215-932-7413; jjuliano@phillynews.com

DISTRICT III – Luke DeCock, Raleigh News & Observer; C: 919-812-7195; ldecok@newsobserver.com

DISTRICT IV – Jeff Greer, Louisville Courier-Journal; C: 502-593-9435; j.allen.greer@gmail.com

DISTRICT V – Mark Charboneau, Detroit News; C: 313-920-9056; mcharboneau@detroitnews.com

DISTRICT VI – Lee Barfknecht, Omaha World-Herald; C: 402-871-5739; leebee@cox.net

DISTRICT VII – Bob Holt, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette; C: 479-601-4339; bobholt59@gmail.com

DISTRICT VIII – Geoff Grammer, Albuquerque Journal; C: 505-206-0138; ggrammer@abqjournal.com

DISTRICT IX – Mark Zeigler, San Diego Union-Tribune; C: 619-246-3881; markzeigler@msn.com

WOMEN – Mel Greenberg; C: 215-815-5943; poll@att.net

AT-LARGE – George Schroeder, USA Today; C: 541-953-4080; gschroeder@usatoday.com

AT-LARGE – C.L. Brown, The Fieldhouse; C: 502-645-6142; cbrown@theathletic.com

SID – Mike Kern, Missouri Valley Conference; C: 314-435-4779; O: 314-444-4326; kern@mvc.org

NEW MEDIA LIAISON – Randy McClure, Rush the Court; C: 415-608-1837; rushthecourt@yahoo.com

TIPOFF EDITOR – John Akers, Basketball Times; H: 704-849-8627; C: 980-422-1294; johna19081@gmail.com

WEBMASTER – Ted Gangi, C: 214-909-9314; ted.gangi@sportswriters.net

Mitch

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a computer greenhorn like me. Ted also reformatted the membership directory, making it much more user-friendly.

The Final Four student-writing workshop and scholarship competition are now in the hands of past president Malcolm Moran (1988-89). The workshop has helped countless number of students looking to pursue careers in sports journalism and provided many with college scholarships. Malcolm also secured the organization's first major sponsor – Mercedes-Benz.

Dave Dorr, a lifelong friend for nearly five decades and a past president (1979-80), is largely responsible for getting me involved in the USBWA, encouraging me to join and later supporting me for the Tipoff editor's position while I was an assistant commissioner editing a weekly tabloid for the old Metro Conference.

I'd be remiss if I didn't thank NCAA media coordinator Dave Worlock and the late Dave Cawood before him. They were advocates for the USBWA in meetings with the basketball committee and created changes in media policies that helped all writers covering the NCAA tournaments.

I also want to thank the many members who served on the board as district reps and officers and might not have liked conference calls but participated on them anyway. I chuckled when one officer remarked that he's eliminating conference calls altogether when he becomes president.

People have asked me how I managed to get this job, considering I'm not a sportswriter, although I have a degree in journalism and worked as a student

reporter in college at Michigan State.

My career with the USBWA began in 1980 as editor of The Tipoff. Three years later, the USBWA was looking to replace retiring Steve Guback as executive director. Steve called me and asked if I would be interested in the position. I never hesitated in taking the job. It was an opportunity of a lifetime for me.

It's been an exciting and eventful time for me. I'll miss the relationships more than anything. But I'm leaving knowing the USBWA has not only grown its membership but also benefited from the hard work of presidents, district reps and members, people who really care about this organization.

I feel fortunate and honored to have been a part of it.

FINAL USBWA EVENT OF THE YEAR. The USBWA closed out the season with a banquet in St. Louis in April. The event served as a fundraiser for the USBWA and attracted a sellout crowd of over 400 people. The Missouri Athletic Club hosted the dinner.

SALUTE TO IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT VAHE GREGORIAN. Vahe continued the long line of presidents who made a difference in the organization. Vahe was a great ambassador who always made himself available for public appearances and news conferences.

JOB POSTING: Individuals interested in applying for the USBWA executive director's position beginning July 1, 2019, should send a resume and letters of recommendation to: David Teel, USBWA president, Newport News Daily Press, 10 Trotters Bridge Dr., Poquoson, VA 23662. The deadline to apply is Aug. 1.

Teel takes over as USBWA president

David Teel of the Newport Daily News moved into the USBWA's presidency position for 2018-19 at the association's annual board of directors' meeting during this year's men's Final Four in San Antonio.

Gregorian succeeds Vahe Gregorian, Kansas City Star, as president of the USBWA. Shannon Ryan of the Chicago Tribune was named third vice president. Moving up in the rotation of officers were Mike Waters, Syracuse Post-Standard, first vice president, and Seth Davis, CBS Sports and the Athletic, as second vice president.

Named to the board as district reps for three-year terms were Gavin Keefe in District I, Luke DeCock in District III, Brendan Quinn in District V and Bob Holt in District VII.

Gregorian named top columnist by APSE

Outgoing USBWA President Vahe Gregorian of the Kansas City Star was named the Associated Press Sports Editor's top columnist for newspapers in the over-175,000 circulation division.

Pete Thamel of Yahoo Sports took first place in beat writing in the over-175,000 division. Kelly Lyell of the Fort Collins Coloradoan won first place, along with colleague Matt L. Stephens, for breaking news in the under 30,000 circulation category.

Dave Dorr, a veteran sports writer of 35 years for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and a former Sporting News college basketball columnist, was named to the St. Louis Media History Foundation's Media Hall of Fame.

Best Writing contest deadline approaches

The deadline for submitting stories and columns that were published during the 2017-18 college basketball season for the USBWA's Best Writing Contest is June 15. Entries received after the deadline will not be accepted.

Entries can be submitted in five categories: column writing, moderate-length features, magazine-length features, spot news/game coverage and enterprise/investigative stories.

A plaque and a cash prize of \$150 will be awarded for first-place winners. Cash prizes will be given in every other category: \$125 for second, \$100 for third, \$75 for fourth and \$50 for fifth.

Only dues-paying members of the USBWA are eligible to enter the writing contest.

Members may enter more than one category, but can submit only one entry per category. A series of articles may be submitted in the enterprise/investigative category.

Entries must include at the top of each story the name of the category, the author or authors of the story, the publication or website in which the article appeared, the date it was published or appeared online and an email address and telephone number for the entry's writer or writers.

Entries must be submitted to contest@usbwa.com in a readable type size. Any entry submitted in type size so small it cannot be read won't be considered. Send Word or text files only. Do not send links to stories on the Internet and clippings from magazines or newspapers. Also, delete any advertising, photos and captions from the files and any unnecessary carriage returns.

Lodge Notes

Lauren Hill family gives Marz emotional boost

By JAMES FULLER
New Haven Register

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Four teams arrived at Nationwide Arena all with the same dream of leaving Ohio with a national championship. However, hours before the first basket was score or first rebound was secured, there was a reminder that some things are more important than even the pursuit of the national title.

Avery Marz played in 21 games during the 2017-18 season after a stroke forced the former high school classmate of former UConn linebacker Junior Joseph to miss three seasons with Saint Joseph's University.

Marz knew it was going to be a special day when she received the United States Basketball Writers Association's Most Courageous Award, but when the parents of 2014 winner Lauren Hill walked onto the stage and hugged Marz, there wasn't a dry eye among the audience consisting of All-Americans, high school, AAU and college coaches and administrators and media.

"It was emotional. My heart started pumping crazily up there," Marz said. "I am just so blessed that they were going to do this for me because they went out of their way and came here. I am so happy for it."

Of all the wonderful words uttered about Marz on Friday, none probably struck closer to home more than Lauren Hill's mother Lisa saying, "She reminds me a lot of Lauren."

Brent Hill echoed his wife's sentiments.



Lauren Hill



Avery Marz

"We support Avery for having the courage to overcome her (health issues) and get herself back in one piece so could play the game again," Brent Hill said. "It just gave butterflies in my stomach when I heard she was coming, it was such an honor to be able to present this and be here with Avery and have Lauren's story touch Avery was amazing. It really just stuck in our heart."

Doctors told Marz she would never play basketball again, a diagnosis that did not deter her. It was similar to how Lauren Hill, while fighting with the cancer that would claim her life at the age of 19, realized her dream of stepping back on the basketball court.

"Just seeing Lauren's story, how it impacted me, I think looking back on it I knew that if I could do this, I could also impact others," Marz said. "That is important, I am only one person and hope I can affect a whole lot of people."

"I would say at times there were struggles, at times it was amazing. I think it goes back and forth between the two a lot."

Video shot by her mom of Avery running proved to be a reminder to her of how much she had to overcome to make it back onto the court.

"Seeing how slow and uncoordinated I was, that was a hard day for me," Marz said. "People said you were going to get there, but seeing it for myself and how uncoordinated I was, that was a hard day for me."

Marz knows her story, much like Hill's, is a far-reaching one. The impact of Lauren's valiant fight to save her life can be felt to this day.

"How amazing is that?" said Brent Hill when asked about how Marz held it together emotionally in her statement after receiving the award. "That speaks for sports, the drive that they have in sports that keeps them going. Tons of pride, she (his daughter) continues to make tons of money for charity. We have events all the time; she is probably pushing \$2.5 or 3 million at this point in charity, all in her name. That this small town girl from a town in Indiana was able to do something like that, it is just amazing."

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Brunson, Bennett, Young claim top men's honors

The U.S. Basketball Writers Association's top player (Villanova's Jalen Brunson), freshman (Oklahoma's Trae Young) and coach (Virginia's Tony Bennett) were honored at the College Basketball Awards Dinner on April 9 at the Missouri Athletic Club in St. Louis.

Brunson was awarded the Oscar Robertson Trophy, Bennett the Henry Iba Award and Young the Wayman Tisdale Award. Former Missouri and Hall of Fame coach Norm Stewart and retired referee Ed Hightower each receive lifetime achievement awards.

Brunson was a consensus All-American who led the Wildcats to their second national championship in three years.

"Jalen Brunson is the most essential force on a terrific Villanova team, but a team player and dynamic individual talent," said USBWA President Vahe Gregorian of the Kansas City Star. "The USBWA is delighted to recognize him as our player of the year."

Brunson averaged 19.1 points and 4.8 assists while shooting 52.7 percent from the field and 41.4 from 3-point range. He was also a starter on Villanova's 2016 national championship as a freshman.

Bennett became just the second coach to be named the USBWA's national coach of the year, joining UCLA legend John Wooden (who won the award six times). Bennett also won the award while at Washington State in 2006-07 and for the first time at Virginia in 2014-15.



Jalen Brunson



Tony Bennett



Trae Young

Bennett guided the Cavaliers to a 28-2 overall record during the regular season, and they went 17-1 in the Atlantic Coast Conference to win their third outright regular-season title in five seasons by four games.

They spent the final four weeks of the season as the nation's No. 1-ranked team despite being unranked when they entered the season. They earned the school's first No. 1 ranking since 1982.

Young became the first player to lead the nation in points (27.5) and assists (8.9). He had four 40-point games, nine 30-point contests and recorded 12 double-doubles.

He became just the second player in 20 seasons to score 800 points in a regular season (joining Duke's J.J. Redick in 2005-06) and the second player in NCAA history to record 800 points and 250 assists

in a season, along with Oakland's Kai Felder in 2015-16.

Young first drew national attention this season with a 43-point game against Oregon. He shortly followed that with a 26-point, 22-assist game against Northwestern State on Dec. 19, tying an NCAA record for most assists in a game while breaking the school and Big 12 records. He is the fourth player in NCAA history to record 22-or-more assists in a game and the first since Sherman Douglas of Syracuse in 1989. No other freshman has ever recorded 20-or-more assists in a game.

In women's basketball, A'ja Wilson of South Carolina was named the winner of the Ann Meyers Drysdale

Award as the national player of the year, Vic Schaefer of Mississippi State earned the coach of the year award and Chennedy Carter of Texas A&M was the freshman of the year.

Wilson, a three-time All-American, averaged 22.6 points and 11.8 rebounds per game. Wilson led the Gamecocks to three Elite Eight performances, as well as the 2017 national title as the Most Outstanding Player.

Schaefer led the Bulldogs to the national championship game for the second season in a row. He was also named the Naismith and WBCA national coach of the year.

The 5-foot-7 Carter led all freshmen with 22.7 points per game and also contributed 4.9 assists per contest.

A weekend with the U.S. Basketball Writers Association

Photos by Bralyn Fox-Smith.



Dana O'Neil and Pat Forde (backs to camera) address students at the writing seminar.



Oscar Robertson addresses national player of the year Jalen Brunson.

Photos by Michel Fortier.



Executive Director Joe Mitch (far left) and President Vahe Gregorian (far right) with Hall of Famers Lew Freedman, Kirk Wessler, Charles Pierce and Dave Jones.



Other luncheon award winners included Joe Castiglione (far left, Katha Quinn), Sam Dowd (center, Most Courageous) and Nicole Auerbach (far right, Rising Star).