

President's Column



By **STEVE RICHARDSON**

A cold shoulder

It's a different era for the news media, particularly for the print media. Just got an e-mail from Providence. I doubt I will be covering the basketball Friars anytime soon. If I did, I am sure I would be in the hockey press box.

What a chilling thought. I love hockey. I have season tickets to the Dallas Stars. But to cover a basketball game in the hockey press box? Shiver.

That's a lot of what the media feels these days from some sports information departments – chill.

In some cases, SIDs have become merely marketers for the athletic department. They have been trampled on by their athletic directors who have sold out press rows and press boxes. Granted, some SIDs are in a no-win situation. SIDS must serve two groups. And guess which one is getting served? Not the writers.

But back to the Providence notice. I am not picking on the Friars. Providence College is not the first, nor surely will be the last, to give some of the media the boot off press row. In capital letters (the way it was e-mailed), here is the media directive from the Big East school.

"THERE WILL BE A NEW PRESS ROW SET UP AT THE DUNKIN' DONUTS CENTER. TEN OF THE 14 TABLES THAT EXISTED ALONG THE COURT HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED AND REPLACED WITH SEATS FOR FANS. THUS, YOU MAY BE SITTING IN A DIFFERENT LOCATION THAN YOU SAT IN THE PAST. FOR GAMES WITH LARGE AMOUNTS OF MEDIA WE WILL USE THE HOCKEY PRESS BOX."

I am sure Dunkin' Donuts executives will have some of those better seats to mingle with the big donors. And whether any of them know dunks from donuts makes no difference. They have bought their way there.

This is a growing and distressing trend for some sports information directors. And if your department (SIDs) and your school (beat reporters) show some of these symptoms, then the big chill effect is taking over.

The SID might be frozen out, as well. He is really just a marketing director who moonlights as an SID.

Here are some warning signs:

1. You can never get the SID on the phone. You are always getting his voice mail. He never calls back. Why? A) He is playing golf; B) He's working on the recruiting section; C) He's helping sell parking spots for games.

2. You can't find the SID's phone number in the guide because there is so much recruiting information as mandated by the school. It's easier to find the local bar

than an SID's number. Yes that happens. Sometimes you can't find the coach's office number in the press guide, either. The recruiting-guide-is-more-important-than-information-guide is a trend which has swept schools.

3. You get e-mails that have attachments that would take a computer expert to download. Or you could read War and Peace while they are downloading. A new favorite trick by some SIDs (undoubtedly dictated by ADs and conference commissioners to save costs) is to send their pre-season prospectuses by e-mail and then ask the writer to download the prospectus, using his ink cartridge and time. Next, they will be asking writers to download the entire media guide. SIDs already are asking if they can put their entire guides on disk and skip printing media guides. My guess is those recruiting guides would be the only printed matter coming out of the SID office. The disk media guide idea has merit, but many writers have not managed the split-screen technique on deadline.

4. And speaking of the media, uh, recruiting guides? Not only are some campus pictures doctored to the point of distortion, historical information is being dropped from the guides. One SID, excuse me MD, told me he was thinking of dropping his season-by-season results because the book had gotten too large. Unbelievable.

5. As mentioned previously, press boxes in football are constantly shrinking or press rows in basketball are moving to less desirable locations in favor of donor seating. In some cases, courtesy phones are non-existent. The schools feel they no longer need the print media writing about the major sports which are sold out. But they will still beg for coverage for the non-revenue sports because they still need to sell tickets to those events.

6. Access to coaches and players. The cell phone is your biggest ally for the coach. Get it. The coach often gladly will return calls to certain writers and often can be caught on the first ring. Players are more difficult. The best policy there is to be a member of USBWA and FWAA. Those organizations have at least a little leverage. If a school's players aren't made available, then why should they be considered for awards of those organizations? Hey, this is survival.

7. Getting scooped by coach's web site or TV show: This has become a headache for the SIDs as well as the writers. Some coaches, understandably so, (just like the ADs with the big cigars and sponsors) have more allegiance to outside income sources than they have in cooperating with the news media.

8. Some SIDs are big on good-looking releases. Some like to spruce up their releases with graphics and pictures, which is a cover for little substance. I often have seen releases which have the same categories the entire season. The SIDs merely plug in numbers every week. The other thing with the "pretty releases" is that they take forever to download. Ever heard of text e-mails?

Some SIDs spend less time trying to get to know their teams (for informational purposes) and more time on selling it. Hate to paint such a dreary picture. But it is a little chilly out there. And it's not even winter yet.

USBWA Top 25

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| 1. Arizona (7)..... | 221 |
| 2. Kansas (1)..... | 211 |
| 3. Oklahoma (1)..... | 207 |
| 4. Pittsburgh..... | 181 |
| 5. Duke..... | 164 |
| 6. Alabama..... | 161 |
| 7. Texas..... | 159 |
| 8. Florida..... | 148 |
| 9. Michigan State..... | 120 |
| 10. Connecticut..... | 115 |
| 11. Oregon..... | 113 |
| 12. Mississippi State..... | 103 |
| 13. Kentucky..... | 95 |
| 14. (tie) Georgia..... | 93 |
| Xavier..... | 93 |
| 16. UCLA..... | 86 |
| 17. Maryland..... | 84 |
| 18. Indiana..... | 71 |
| 19. Marquette..... | 61 |
| 20. Western Kentucky..... | 52 |
| 21. Gonzaga..... | 40 |
| 22. Cincinnati..... | 39 |
| 23. Virginia..... | 37 |
| 24. Missouri..... | 35 |
| 25. Minnesota..... | 22 |

Others receiving votes: Villanova 21, Notre Dame 15, Creighton 14, Wyoming 13, Wisconsin 13, Texas Tech 12, Penn 10, Georgetown 9, North Carolina State 8, Pepperdine 6, Louisville 5, Miami 2, Ball State 2, Boston College 1, UNLV 1.

McCabe receives Larry Donald scholarship

Kevin McCabe, son of USBWA member Mick McCabe of the *Detroit Free Press*, has been selected the recipient of this year's USBWA Larry Donald Scholarship, which is awarded annually to a son or daughter of a USBWA member entering college as a freshman or currently enrolled in a four-year institution. The scholarship is named in honor of former USBWA president Larry Donald, who passed away two years ago.

Kevin, of Allen Park, Mich., will receive a \$1,000 scholarship from the USBWA each year he remains in college, up to a maximum of four years.

He is the second McCabe family member to win the scholarship. Last year, Kevin's sister Katie was chosen as the scholarship winner.

O'Connell joins distinguished list in Hall of Fame

There has been some exciting news for the U. S. Basketball Writers Association since the USBWA held its annual meeting last April at the NCAA Final Four in Atlanta.

Most notably, past president **Jim O'Connell** of the Associated Press was named winner of the Curt Gowdy Media Award for print and was honored during enshrinement weekend in September at the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Mass.

O'Connell joins other past presidents such as **Bill Brill, Bob Ryan, Dave Dorr** and **Larry Donald** who have received the award in the past.

Also, during that same weekend, the Basketball Hall of Fame opened its new building in Springfield, Mass., and unveiled a media exhibit that included a listing of USBWA Hall of Fame members. Funding for the exhibit was largely due to contributions from USBWA members the last several years.

Steve "Tiger" Richardson of the Dallas Morning News takes over as the 47th president of the USBWA and

brings with him a wealth of experience working with writers association. Steve has served quite successfully as executive director of the Football Writers Association for the past several years.

An old friend of sports writers takes over the reins as media coordinator for the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament and this year's Final Four in New Orleans. **Bill Hancock**, former assistant commissioner and media director of the old Big Eight Conference, has assumed the role that **Jim Marchiony** had before Jim moved on this spring to the University of Connecticut.

USBWA members were concerned about the NCAA finding a capable replacement for Marchiony, considering the demands on the job and the need for someone in that position to have experience handling the media.

The NCAA couldn't have found anyone better. Hancock formerly had served as director of the NCAA tournament but wanted to move closer to his family in Kansas City. He will work out of his home a lot but also be at the NCAA offices in Indianapolis during weeks leading up to the tournament.

Hancock, you'll remember, was presented with the USBWA's Katha Quinn Award in 1999 for the service he has rendered during his career to sports writers covering college basketball.

Another "old friend," so to speak, is back with the USBWA. The good folks at Basketball Times, **Nanci Donald** and **John Akers**, will be producing a Tipoff

Executive Director

BY JOE MITCH
MVC



newsletter once again for the membership.

The USBWA took a one-year hiatus last year without having a printed version of the Tipoff and only making it available on the USBWA website.

But members said they missed getting a hard copy of the Tipoff in the mail, so Nanci and John will produce four issues of the Tipoff this year.

Members will also continue to receive complimentary issues of *Basketball Times* as part of their membership, a tradition started by Larry Donald more than a decade ago and one that Nanci Donald has honored since Larry's untimely death two years ago.

The USBWA web page will once again be in the capable hands of **Cody Monk** and editor **Ted Gangi** of HiTex Enterprises in Dallas.

The USBWA web site took on an exciting new look last year and offers members some features that writers covering college basketball will find quite helpful. Included on the USBWA web page is access to the web site of every Division I institution and conference in the country.

It's not too late to join the USBWA or to renew your membership. Application forms are on the web at www.usbwa.com.

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If you have not yet renewed your membership to the U.S. Basketball Writers Association now is the time to act. For your \$35 membership fee you will receive the most complete directory in college basketball and you will also get all 12 issues of *Basketball Times* and, as well, you will be eligible to enter our Best Writing Contest.

Send a check for \$35 and let the USBWA make your job of covering college basketball easier.

Title _____

Newspaper/Publication/College _____

Address _____

City _____ STATE _____ Zip _____

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Sweet nothings to tide the masses until Tip-Off

Gary Nuhn remains the gold standard. Before Jerry Seinfeld jumped into syndication heaven with a comedy about nothing, Gary Nuhn went into USBWA heaven with a monthly column about nothing.

Back when Nuhn was the president of the USBWA, I remember looking forward to reading his monthly column to discover how he was going to write about nothing that month. He always found a different way to say that he was writing his column for Tip-Off because Larry Donald had asked him to write a column for Tip-Off. Nuhn always left me laughing – and he always pulled it off without taking himself too serious.

And before I became an officer in this organization, several writers who preceded me warned me that the most difficult part of the job was the monthly column.

Running the Best Writing Contest was interesting. Working with the Most Courageous Award was rewarding. Dealing with the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee was important.

But the monthly Tip-Off column?

Who wants to spend their free time doing more writing? Now I understand their viewpoint.

So I'll make this month's offering short and direct. Only two things have popped into this football-squeezed mind:

1.) What can we do to increase our membership?

It's a topic we discuss every year at the Final Four. And then every year, as I count ballots for the all-district teams, I discover that the USBWA is an organization in which

more sports information directors than writers participate in the balloting. Not a good trend.

I've got nothing against SIDs – especially the ones that continue to understand the unfairness of booting us off courtside to make room for fat cat boosters.

But we need more writers and columnists in the USBWA to keep the organization vibrant and give us a more powerful voice. So if you're a member, please take a few minutes this week and help recruit more folks from your paper and coverage areas to join the USBWA. In particular, we could benefit from greater participation from younger folks just entering the business. They're the ones who whose opportunities to cover college hoops are going to continue to be squeezed.

2.) What does the membership believe is the No. 1 issue facing basketball writers today?

We always gather at the Final Four and talk about the

craft as well as the increasing number of obstacles that we face trying to do our work well. But we say little about it, or do just as little, the other 51 weeks a year.

So as the first vice-president of this group, my request is simple:

What issues concern you? Send them along to me at bozichra@aol.com. I'll pick the best half-dozen and discuss them in future columns. For me, I'd love to see the talk-radio clowns moved out of the press rooms at the NCAA Tournament sites and put in their own talk-radio area – just the way photographers are. There's nothing more annoying than sitting down on deadline to hack a column and find yourself sitting next to a guy screaming into a microphone about a substitution Gary Williams failed to make.

So send me some ideas, please.

There. I made it.

Gary Nuhn should be proud.

Vice President
By RICK BOZICH
Louisville Courier Journal



New NCAA boss might bring changes for best

If we want to find reasons to be alarmed about the changes Myles Brand might bring as NCAA president, we can.

In a 2001 speech to the National Press Club not many months after firing Bob Knight, Brand called for a slowdown of the "arms race" in big-time athletics.

"We are not sports franchises," he said.

Since we're all in the business of covering college teams as if they *are* pro teams, that might sound an alarm.

But let's stop for a moment and note a couple of things: He was speaking to the press, after all, and providing good quotes, which we all support.

But more important, Brand is more moderate and more cautious than he might seem at first glance.

Think of the Knight firing. Brand took heat as Indiana's president when he announced the so-called "zero-tolerance" policy. Many among us thought he was letting Knight off too easily.

What he was doing was setting a standard Knight couldn't live up to – and laying the groundwork to make the firing legally defensible.

End result: Knight was gone.

In Brand's mission to put academics first – again, something most of us support – he talks about "turning down the volume," of college athletics.

He's quick to say that doesn't mean turning off the game. He can count to \$6.2 billion – the CBS contract figure – as well as the rest of us.

"It will be interesting to see how he reconciles what he says college athletics should be and what they are," said Bill Benner, the former Indianapolis Star columnist who is now vice president of communications for the Indiana

Sports Corporation.

"The whole thing of reining in costs – well, Indiana certainly didn't do it."

Some of the more modest ways to "turn down the volume" that Brand suggests include such moves as limiting the days and times games can be played. (Fewer impossible deadlines would be fine with us all.)

"From what I've heard, I don't think it's that extreme of an approach," said Jeff Fanter, Indiana's assistant athletic director for media relations.

"I think, honestly, there's been an unfair label put on him. He's been very supportive and a great leader on our campus. He wants championship teams and strong student-athletes, the same as everyone else."

Anyone who covered Indiana's run to the Final Four last season remembers Brand was a very visible presence in the press room, quickly surrounded by reporters asking about Knight and Mike Davis all over again. (Granted, it was Brand's and Davis' moment of triumph, and Brand has the game ball to prove it.)

Vice President

By ROBYN NORWOOD
Los Angeles Times



"I think it showed a lot when he would walk into a room full of media," Fanter said. "He knew full well that if you're in there, it's understood you've made yourself accessible."

Even during the Knight crisis, Brand was fairly accessible.

"It wasn't like he was on 24-hour call, but he didn't duck the media, either," Benner said. "Doing that in the state of Indiana was a brave decision."

If a university president was going to become head of the NCAA – and it seems it was the likely course – it's good it is someone who is not an ivory-tower outsider, but someone who's been in the game, and has a history with the sporting press.

The appropriate stance is wariness and alertness: Reform could be good. We just don't want it to inhibit our ability to do our jobs.

Now that Brand has been chosen, let the headhunters move on to the Indiana president's job.

One Indianapolis Star reader had an idea: Robert Montgomery Knight.

Farrey, Weiberg dominate Best Writing contest

Enterprise/Investigative

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|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Tom Farrey | ESPN.com | "Where Dreams Come True" |
| 2. Steve Weiberg | USA Today | "Top Dollar, Top Coaches" |
| 3. Dan Wetzel | CBS Sportsline | "Letter of Intent Benefits Schools" |
| 4. Peter Abraham | Journal News | "Too Close for Comfort" |
| 5. Gary McCann | Herald (Rock Hill S.C.) | "Only CU Team to Make Final" |

Columns

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Tom Shatel | Omaha World-Herald | "CU's Taylor is Walking on Air" |
| 2. Bud Withers | Seattle Times | "Ralph Miller" |
| 3. Adrian Wojnarowski | Bergen Record | "To Have Never Said Goodbye" |
| 4. John Bohnenkamp | HawkEye (Burlington, IA) | "Back Home Again" |
| 5. Dan Wetzel | CBS Sportsline | "Verdict Looming" |

Magazine length feature

| | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Mike Kern | Philadelphia Daily News | "Life's Lessons" |
| 2. Tom Farrey | ESPN.Com | "Lenny Cooke" |
| 3. Rich Daniels | Greensboro News & Record | "Cruising the Lobby" |
| 4. Steve Henson | Los Angeles Times | "Me and My Shadow" |
| 5. Seth Davis | Sports Illustrated | "Home Team" |

Moderate length feature

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Pete Thamel | Syracuse Post Standard | "Talent and Toughness" |
| 2. Adrian Wojnarowski | Bergen Record | "Mike Davis" |
| 3. Michael Perry | Cincinnati Enquirer | "Logan Grew as a Player, Man" |
| 4. Tom Farrey | ESPN.com | "Tark, NCAA Investigation" |
| 5. Steve Weiberg | USA Today | "Fab Five: 10 Years Later" |

Game story/Spot news

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Steve Weiberg | USA Today | "Richardson: 'No regrets'" |
| 2. Gordon W. Jones | Lancaster (Pa.) Intelligencer | "Blue Jays Outlast Cabrini" |
| 3. Adrian Wojnarowski | Bergen Record | "First the N.B.A., Now the B.A." |
| 4. Pete Thamel | Syracuse Post-Standard | "High School Phenoms" |
| 5. Peter Abraham | Journal News | "Ram Makes Good" |

Steve Weiberg left his college-basketball beat at USA Today a couple of years ago, but he certainly did not stop producing quality pieces about the game.

Weiberg and Tom Farrey of ESPN.com dominated the USBWA's best-writing contest, each finishing with a first- and a second-place finish among their three winning entries.

Farrey took first place in enterprise/investigative writing for "A Place Where Hoop Dreams Come True: and second place in magazine-length features for the story, "For Lenny Cooke, It's All Academic." Farrey also finished fourth in moderate-length features, with "Tark Helped Take Bite Out of NCAA Investigation."

Weiberg took first in game/spot news coverage with his story on ex-Arkansas coach Nolan Richardson and second in enterprise/investigative reporting for the story, "Top Dollar, Top Coaches." Weiberg also finished fifth in moderate-length features, with "Fab Five: 10 Years Later."

Other winners included Tom Shatel of the Omaha World Herald in columns, for "Like Mike, CU's Taylor is Walking on Air;" Mike Kern of the Philadelphia Daily News in magazine length features, for "Life's Lessons;" and Pete Thamel of the Syracuse Post Standard in moderate-length features, for "Talent and Toughness."

Multiple winners were Thamel; Dan Wetzel, CBS Sportsline; Peter Abraham, The Journal News; and Adrian Wojnarowski, The Bergen Record.

Besides taking first place in moderate-length features, Thamel also finished fourth in game story/spot news with "High School Phenoms Offer Glimpse of Future in Hoops."

Wojnarowski placed in three categories. He finished second in moderate-length features with "Speaking His Mind: Mike Davis of Indiana," and finished third in both columns ("It Hurts to Have Never Said Goodbye") and game story/spot news ("First the N.B.A., Now the B.A.").

Wetzel finished third in enterprise/investigative reporting with "Letter of Intent Benefits Schools, Not Athletes" and fifth in columns, with "Verdict Looming in Troubling Case of High School Star and Rape."

Abraham took fourth place in enterprise/investigative reporting with "Too Close for Comfort" and "A Change for the Worse," and fifth in game story/spot news, with "Ram Makes Good."

Top finishers in the enterprise/investigative reporting category included Farrey, Weiberg, Wetzel, Abraham and Gary McCann of The Herald in Rock Hill, S.C., who finished fifth with, "Tigers' squad was only CU team to make tourney final."

In column writing, Bud Withers of the Seattle Times finished second to Shatel with "Ralph Miller." John Bohnenkamp of The HawkEye in Burlington, Iowa, finished fourth – between third-place Wojnarowski and fifth-place Wetzel – with, "Back Home Again."

Placing behind Kern and Farrey in magazine-length features were third-place Rich Daniels of the Greensboro News & Record for "Cruising the Lobby, Hoping for a Chance," fourth-place Steve Henson of the Los Angeles Times for "Me and My Shadow," and fifth-place Seth Davis of Sports Illustrated for "Home Team."

Following Thamel and Wojnarowski in moderate-length features was third-place Micheal Perry of the Cincinnati Enquirer for "Logan Grew as a Player and As a Man." Farrey finished fourth, and Weiberg fifth.

Gordon W. Jones of the Lancaster (Pa.) Intelligencer Journal took second in game story/spot news, behind Weiberg, with "Blue Jays Outlast Cabrini." Wojnarowski, Thamel and Abraham rounded out the category.

The winners will be awarded plaques and checks at the Final Four, April 5-7 in New Orleans. First-place winners will receive \$200; second-place winners \$175; third-place \$150; fourth-place \$125; and fifth-place \$100.



Tom Farrey



Steve Weiberg