

Fourth Annual HRWA Conference Brings Women Of Racing Together in Heart of Horse Country



Photo: Katie Jones

October 10, 2025, Lexington, Kentucky—The fourth annual Horse Racing Women's Association (HRWA) Conference, presented by Del Mar and FanDuel TV, brought together nearly 200 women from all corners of the Thoroughbred racing industry to convene in Lexington, Kentucky Oct. 8-9 for two days of invigorating panel discussions and networking activities.

Following Wednesday's welcome reception, attendees gathered Thursday at Limestone Hall in downtown Lexington to kick things off with featured speaker Lindsay Czarniak, an accomplished media personality with more than two decades of experience in sports journalism. Having spent time in the roles of host, anchor, sideline reporter, pit reporter and international correspondent for networks such as ESPN, NBC Sports, CNN, FOX Sports, CBS, CNS, Czarniak has expanded into horse racing in recent years through her partnership with America's Best Racing and their "Stake in Stardom" program.

“From writing on my dad’s racing notebooks to walking over for the Kentucky Derby with him, it all came full circle,” said Czarniak. “Every piece of that day turned into a memory I’ll never forget.

“I haven’t seen this before. They don’t do this in other sports. To be able to lean on each other as resources, mentors, and sounding boards, this is truly remarkable.”

Sharing her experience of balancing a demanding career in the world of sports journalism along with being a mother and wife, Czarniak expounded upon the importance of juggling it all with a sense of purpose while finding outlets that allow time to decompress.

“I’m learning to identify where I am and what my circumstances are as a worker, a creator, a mom, a wife, a friend, and a woman,” said Czarniak. “Finding your own balance is key and uncovering the places that make you feel alive is how you recharge.”

The first panel discussion of the day, entitled “Roadblocks to Relationships: Building Networks that Change the Game,” was moderated by Jessica Paquette, Track Announcer at Parx Racing, and led by speakers Caton Bredar, Racing Analyst and Commentator; Kate Galvin, Sales & Communications Manager of Darley USA; Sheri Holmes Stirling, Vice President of Administration at Gulfstream Park; and Lesley Howard, President and CEO of Stonestreet.

Each woman forged a unique pathway into the industry and in doing so, developed the fortitude to turn roadblocks into doorways while establishing and utilizing their support systems.

“Sometimes opportunity doesn’t knock softly, it just keeps showing up until you say yes,” said Stirling. “Every time someone said, ‘Hey, someone left — do you want to do this?’ I just said, ‘Sure, why not me?’”

“My mentors were men, but they gave me the courage and strength to find my own voice,” said Howard. “Just enjoy each moment. I spent so much time worrying about imposter syndrome and pleasing everyone else that I forgot where I was, at a racetrack, watching these beautiful animals compete.

“You don’t have to prove you belong. You already do.”

Following the momentum of the first panel, the second panel discussion – “Fueling the Fire Without Burning Out” – continued with Melanie Case, Director of Women’s Ministry at the Kentucky Race Track Chaplaincy; Erin Halliwell, Executive Director of the Thoroughbred Charities of America; Brittany Middlebrooks, Associate Veterinarian in Reproduction & Fertility at Hagyard; Kelley Stobie, Founder of Caribbean Thoroughbred Aftercare; and moderator Shannon Kelly, Director of Industry Relations for The Jockey Club and Executive Director of the Safety Net Foundation.

Though ‘fueling the first without burning out’ sounds easier said than done, the conversation focused on setting boundaries, knowing when to step down and reset, and establishing a core group of people as a guiding and supportive system.

“Just remember that you have to take care of yourself first. Because if you don’t take care of yourself, you won’t be able to take care of the animals and the people around you,” said Middlebrooks. “I used to think one person could mentor me in everything, but no one can do it all. So, I built a team of mentors, each inspiring me in a different way.”

“When you feel the weight of expectations, pause and redefine what success looks like,” said Case. “Compassion fatigue is real. That’s your cue to rest, not to quit.”

The afternoon was highlighted by the presentation of the 2025 Jane Goldstein Exemplary Leadership Award, presented this year to honoree Amy Gregory.

The third and final panel of the day, entitled “Horse Racing Ecosystems: Markets, Models and Money,” set the stage for a conversation unpacking the economics of racing and how market trends influence industry discussions. Moderator Alison Zeitlin, a Lawyer specializing in Equine Law at Stites & Harbison, was joined by speakers Kelley Kraeszig, the Senior Vice President of Operations & Administration at Equibase; Maggi Moss, an Attorney, Racehorse Owner, and Advocate; Katy Ross, Senior Director of Gaming Operations at Exacta Systems, LLC; and Anna Seitz Ciannello, Director of Client Relations at Fasig-Tipton.

“The perception that it’s the sport of kings, or royalty, or that you can’t have a part of it—I am a living example that you can,” said Moss.

“It’s a hard sport, but it’s a great sport — and there are a lot of people trying to make it better every day,” said Seitz.

The day’s discussion, providing the women in the room with a basis of inspiration, understanding, and hope, flowed right into the inspiring talk and subsequent interactive discussion led by renowned keynote speaker, Molly Fletcher. Making a name for herself as one of the first female sports agents, Fletcher pursued a nearly two-decade career that consisted of negotiating over \$500 million in contracts and representing over 300 of sports’ biggest names.

A World’s Top 50 Keynote Speaker, Fletcher delivers her inspiring messages to audiences around the world through being the host of a successful TED Talk, the author of multiple books, and the founder and host of the Game Changers with Molly Fletcher podcast.

A wealth of wisdom, experience and renewed insight, Fletcher shared personal stories that relayed the importance of establishing mindset, utilizing curiosity, and focusing energy.

“If we don’t decide where our energy goes, then everyone else decides for us. And it is too critical a resource to waste. Managing your energy is key to high performance,” said Fletcher. “Protect the things that give you energy, personally and professionally.”

“Mindset is paramount to our ability to be the best version of ourselves. Continue to unlock that every day.”

At the conclusion of the Conference, the HRWA Executive Committee announced that the Conference will return to Lexington in 2026.

The next HRWA event on the 2025 calendar will take place at Del Mar on Oct. 30 ahead of the Breeders' Cup World Championships, where attendees will come together for a day of racing, networking and handicapping. To buy tickets, click [here](#).

To learn more about the Horse Racing Women's Association and how to become a member, click [here](#).



Katie Jones Photo: Lindsay Czarniak



Katie Jones Photo: Amy Gregory and Family



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