The Women-led Legal Team Steering NASCAR Toward Success

Interviews and Profiles

The legal team steering the iconic racing company through a pandemic and social justice movement is led a group of diverse women.

NASCAR’s legal team includes General Counsel and Senior Vice President Tracey Lesetar-Smith; Associate General Counsel Katie Hoffman; Assistant General Counsel, Media and Broadcast Data Amanda Oliver; Senior Counsel, Digital and Privacy Data, Legal Nichelle Levy; Corporate Counsel Kelsey Pincket; and Assistant Media Counsel Jourdan Williams.

Tracey Lesetar-Smith is a trailblazer in sports law. Before joining NASCAR, she had been in the Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and fight industry for 10 years, serving as Bellator MMA’s first female GC and worldwide the first women to ever helm the legal department of an MMA promotion. Her experience with martial arts goes beyond her legal representation as she also practiced martial arts. Given this hands-on experience, she was never afraid of male-dominated industries, although she contends she never intentionally sought them out.

Tracey Lesetar-Smith

At times, being one of few women in these spaces could be lonely and challenging, but Lesetar-Smith reflects, “A more comfortable road wasn't really where I was at in life at that time. I think I was ready to sort of sprint off a cliff with a parachute in my hand. And if I flew, I flew, and if I fell, I went willingly into that leap.”

It’s safe to say that Lesetar-Smith has flown in her chosen profession. As GC and SVP at NASCAR, she leads its legal and government affairs operations, from national competition series to international races in Canada, Mexico, and Europe. As for her favorite accomplishments at the company, she lists the merger and subsequent integration of the International Speedway Corporation (ISC) after it was acquired by NASCAR in 2019.

Her priority in the integration was the people. She made certain to place employees in positions with the greatest opportunity for growth. Her measurement of success is the level of satisfaction those around her find in their jobs. “The team is continuing to accomplish its mission,” she shares, “but in a way where everybody feels good and loves the work that they're doing.”

Corporate Counsel Kelsey Pincket was initially an ISC extern and can attest to the work environment and team quality Lesetar-Smith has cultivated since the merger. “Once I got to Daytona, what

ultimately kept me here was the people. It’s so easy to work with this team, at every level,” she says.

Jourdan Williams

Part of what has maintained the cohesiveness of the team — and brought new members to it — has been its diversity.

With a family made of enthusiastic NASCAR fans, assistant Media Counsel Jourdan Williams has always had a great appreciation for the sport. That appreciation cultivated an interest in sports and entertainment law, but her decision to purse a position at NASCAR was spurred by her research into the legal team. “I learned just how diverse the legal team was compared to other sports organizations and that really motivated me to apply,” she says.

Diversity was also a motivator for Associate General Counsel Katie Hoffman when she joined ISC. With a decade of experience in the sports industry, including positions with the Kansas City Chiefs and Women Leaders in College Sports, Hoffman knew she had found something special in the stock car racing company. “They don’t hire just to fill some quota; they aren’t afraid to promote women to C-level positions or to put them in what might be typically male dominated roles,” she states.

Read more about how NASCAR is striving for diversity and inclusion in [“The Fast Lane to Progress.”]

But what really sets the legal team apart is its commitment to meeting the needs of the company through evolution.

Assistant General Counsel, Media and Broadcast Data Amanda Oliver has been with NASCAR since 2005 when she joined as intern after her 2L at the University of Southern California’s Gould School of Law. The legal team was small at the time, which allowed her to gain industry knowledge and hit the ground running once her employment became permanent.

Amanda Oliver

Over a decade later, Oliver has stayed with the company because “the job has continually evolved as the industry changed and new challenges are always arising.”

“I have never been bored during my time here,” Oliver says. One of her favorite projects was working with outside counsel on the 2017 heist comedy *Logan Lucky* filmed at NASCAR races in Charlotte and Atlanta. The experience was one where she felt like she was constantly learning, a feeling still present as she works on NASCAR’s gambling initiatives with casinos and gaming partners.

As for Senior Counsel, Digital and Privacy Data, Legal Nichelle Levy, she transitioned in-house at NASCAR in 2012, just as the company was taking back its digital rights from Turner Sports. Levy was

a part of a new digital strategy that included making NASCAR.com and mobile apps more fan-friendly and strategic for the business.

Since then, the digital and privacy space has only gotten more dynamic. From the General Data Protection Regulation in 2018 to the California Consumer Privacy law in 2020, the legal team has taken the changes as an opportunity to work more closely with other departments at NASCAR. Levy has prioritized her legal team's partnership with NASCAR's operational team, focusing on the how, what, and why of storing data.

She and Williams have also worked closely with the digital media team to develop a compliance strategy for websites launching in 2021. Williams, who mainly focuses on licensing, admits she was once wary of the privacy space but is now excited to see how the laws continue to develop and the impact they will have on their work.

Nichelle Levy

But the most recent impact on NASCAR's legal department, along with the rest of the world, has been the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did the legal team find themselves working remotely, but NASCAR had suspended all racing.

Priorities had to be readjusted. Hoffman had been working on a premier partnership model — moving away from title sponsors for races to an industry-wide sponsorship model for the first time in the

sport's history. The project was put on hold, and Hoffman had to shift her focus to maintaining partner relationships while reconfiguring what benefits would still be available.

But the team also saw the potential for innovation. Levy keeps returning to the mantra "Necessity is the mother of invention."

Pincket, who handles real estate development projects and events at the tracks, reflects on what she considers an exciting time as the business was pivoting. **"**We tried racing on a Wednesday night." she says, "We tried racing on the road course here at Daytona. We tried all of these things that I don't know that we necessarily would have tried in a non-COVID world."

NASCAR restarted racing in May 2020 without fans and returned masked-up fans to the track in June. It was a herculean effort with much coordination required, and it pushed the team to new creative heights.

Kelsey Pincket

Lesetar-Smith sums up the experience best: "We ran through a wall in 2020. We got through it together."

Read more about how the NASCAR legal team's innovation during COVID-19 in "Working Together, Winning Together."

As the team reflects on the start of the pandemic and the lessons learned, the resounding truth is that it has been a period of growth for the team, individually and as a unit.

Levy compares the experience to being in a cocoon. She asks both herself and her team, “What do you want for yourself, as we begin to emerge from this cocoon?” Her hope is that they come out of the experience “smarter, better, and stronger” than when they went into it.

Hoffman echoes Levy’s positive message. “You're stronger than you think you are. You can make it through anything,” she says. That strength has been apparent within the team, as everyone in the organization quickly learned that things cannot be accomplished in a vacuum — you must trust and rely on your colleagues.

Katie Hoffman

Part of cultivating that trust is through mentorship, something the team has been able to maintain virtually — although they can’t wait until they can see each other in person. Williams shares that she looks forward to continuing to have those personal conversations with the leaders in their group. “This is my first year, but it's been an incredible year, so I'm excited to see if we could top this,” she says.

For Lesetar-Smith, she’s looking forward to her team realizing how strong they’ve become “because whether it's through athletics or otherwise, the discomfort is where you grow.”

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