

# 2026 Conference Agenda

Friday, January 16th through  
Sunday, January 18th, 2026

## Building Resilient Programs, Coaches, and Players

\*Youth and High School friendly

### FRIDAY JAN. 16, 2026

10:00-3:00pm: **Elevate Working Group** (invite only) - **Platte River Room**

11:00am: **Registration Opens** - **Mezzanine Foyer**

1:00-3:30pm: **Senior Club AGM** - **Confluence C**

3:30-4:30pm: **\*Being Yourself While Building Your Expertise:** Russell Earnshaw explores why authenticity is essential in effective coaching and how staying true to who you are can enhance your impact. Participants will be invited to reflect on a key question: *How can you develop your expertise on a day-by-day basis?* - **Confluence A**

4:30pm: **\*Museum Opening: Why our history matters** (Kerri Heffernan) - **Lawrence AB**

6:00pm: **Opening Cocktail Party and U.S. WNT Fun:** with Jenny Kronish as Emcee. - **Mezzanine Foyer**  
*Come enjoy cocktails and games with Olympians Naya Tapper and Kris Thomas, World Cup players, McKenzie Hawkins, Bitsy Cairns, Jamie Burke, Kitt Wagner Ruiz, Sylvia Braaten, Hannah Stolba, Sarah Chabot, Naima Reddick, Candi Orsini, Krista McFarren, Liz Kirk, Alycia Washington, Kristin Zdanczewicz and more!*

### SATURDAY JAN. 17, 2026

8:30-9:00am: **Welcome** from USWRF Board Chair, Danita Knox - **Confluence A or Mezzanine**

9:00-10:00am: **\*Keynote:** Demystifying Resilience in Athletes. *Dr. Julia Cawthra is a lead sports psychologist and Certified Mental Performance Consultant for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC).* (Julia Cawthra, USOC sports psychologist). - **Confluence C**

10:15-11:05am: **\*Track One:** Planning Resilience: Preparing players for the game, the week, the season. *Maximize your team's potential by preparing your players appropriately for today's game demands. Explore ways to effectively periodize your season to peak at the desired times and how to plan your training week to manage overall training load and better align tactical objectives with the desired physical stimulus.* (Sylvia Braaten, Head Coach, TC Gemini, USAR WNT lead Physical Performance Coach) - **Confluence A**  
**\*Track Two:** Navigating Transitions. *This session aims to equip coaches, support staff and athletes with the tools to navigate transitions from various levels of play (high school to college, college to club and finally out of rugby).* (Naima Reddick, Occupational Therapist, member of three U.S. World Cup Teams) - **Platte River Room**

11:20-11:50am: **\*Half-hour coaching sessions:**  
**Track One:** Fine-tuning your attacking structures to your players' personalities (Ashley Potvin, Head Coach, University of New England) - **Confluence A**  
**Track Two:** Perfecting Your Line Out Throws (Kittery Wagner Ruiz, Head Coach, Boston Banshees) - **Confluence B**  
**Track Three:** Rugby for Everyone: Building a Program for Players with Cognitive Disabilities (Dan Salmon, Unified Rugby) - **Confluence C**

12:05-12:35pm: **\*Half-hour coaching sessions:**  
**Track One:** Defensive Structures (Sarah Chabot, Head Coach, Denver Onyx, Coach, 2025 U.S. World Cup Team) - **Confluence A**  
**Track Two:** Comms On: Explicitly Coaching On-Field Communication (Sharkie Harkness, Head Coach, Worcester Shamrocks) - **Confluence B**  
**Track Three:** A Framework For Skill Development (Hannah Stolba, Head Coach, Bay Area Breakers) - **TBA**

12:35-1:30pm: **LUNCH**

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\*Youth and High School friendly

SATURDAY, JAN. 17, 2026 (continued)

1:30-2:20pm: **\*Small group conversations:**  
 1: Building your professional presence/brand (Lisa Kelly, Executive Director, US Women's Rugby Foundation); - **Confluence A**  
 2: Taking your rugby strength into civic/political life (Senator Tiara Mack); - **Confluence A**  
 3: Taking your teams on the road: planning team trips abroad (Nancy Kechner, Head Coach, University of Virginia, Women's Rugby); - **Confluence A**  
 4: Rugby for All: Programming for youth with cognitive disabilities (Unified Rugby); - **Confluence A**  
 5: From TikTok to Tryline: How Flag Rugby Paired With Healthy Social Media Boundaries Builds Girls Confidence, Body Positivity, and Lifelong Rugby Players (Megan Lamke, Volunteer Rugby Development Officer for Minnesota Youth Rugby & Vice President of Awareness for Hopkins Rugby Board) - **Confluence B**

1:30-2:20pm: **\*Track One: High School Coaches Session:** Preparing your players to be recruited. (Laura Miller, Head Coach Bowdoin College; Ashley Potvin, Head Coach Univ of New England; Kelsie McDowell, Head Coach LaSalle College; Meredith Pyke, Head Coach St. Bonaventure College) - **Platte River Room**  
**Track Two: Scroll, Share, Support:** What Digital Voices Teach Us About Women's Rugby Fandom. As women's rugby continues to expand across youth, college, club, and professional levels, understanding why fans engage—and what makes them disconnect, is vital to sustaining growth. This presentation analyzes more than 900 posts and comments from Reddit's r/WERugby community, using text mining and tone/sentiment analysis to explore how fans express enthusiasm, loyalty, and frustration. (Annemarie Farrell, Director of Sports Marketing at Stonehill College) - **Confluence C**

2:35-3:25pm: **\*Track One:** Building an inspiring learning environment: questions every coach should be asking. A highly respected coach-developer, mentor, and educator, Russell Earnshaws creative, player-centered coaching approach is used worldwide. (Russell Earnshaw, co-founder of the Magic Academy, a coach development platform) - **Confluence A**  
**\*Track Two:** Managing the Chaos: Lessons and Tools from the Rugby Sidelines. This session will explore the key lessons learned from managing women's rugby programs at various levels. Attendees will gain practical tools and strategies for improving communication, organization, and team culture. (Mads McCormick, Manager of the New York Exiles; Sharkie Harkness, Head Coach, Worcester Shamrocks and Manager Boston Banshees; Annemarie Farrell, Director of Sports Marketing at Stonehill College, Manager Boston Banshees and Sallie Buckner) - **Confluence B**  
**\*Track Three:** Effectively Using Constraints Led Approach (CLA) with Six Degree Sports (Nick Leah, Director & General Manager, Six Degree Sports) - **Confluence C**

3:40-4:30pm: **\*Track One:** Feedback Sessions that work at every level. In this session we'll explore questions like "What skills will I need as a coach to give feedback effectively?", "How can my feedback be helpful, kind, and timely? "How can we help people receive feedback?", "How can I coach individuals in a team session?" (Russell Earnshaw) - **Confluence A**  
**\*Track Two:** The online game: leading with creativity, confidence, and care. This session explores digital resilience today - from navigating online visibility and setting boundaries to using creativity and storytelling to shape the culture we want to see. Through discussion and interactive moments, we'll unpack how coaches, leaders, and players can build confident, positive, and safe online spaces that strengthen the women's rugby community on and off the field. (Sam Lovett, Digital Content Creator) - **Confluence B**  
**\*Track Three:** Field Medicine: a guide for coaches. How to find and vet medical personnel; Understanding your risk as a coach and how to minimize it; Quick on-field fixes when you need them; Common injuries and what to do? (Katherine Henry, is the Head of Pro Health and Wellness at League One Volleyball (LOVB). Former Director of Medical Services at PR 7s, the Director of Content and Coaching for MAX Sports Health, and Former Head Athletic Trainer for US Women's 15s program and Rachel Sachs is the Team Physician for University of Missouri Kansas City and USA Women's XV team) - **Confluence C**

6-7pm: **Cocktail Hour** - **Confluence ABC or Mezzanine**

7pm: **Awards dinner** - **Confluence ABC**

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## SUNDAY JAN. 18, 2026

9:00-10:00am: **\*Opening:** Building a unique, resilient U.S. program from Youth to Senior WNT: A Conversation and Q and A with the coaches and players. (Martha Daines, Manager of U.S. Women's High-Performance Pathway, Tamara Sheppard, USAR Manager of Men's and Women's High-Performance Rugby) - **Confluence ABC**

10:15-10:45am: **\*Half-hour coaching sessions**  
**Track One:** Contact Confidence: How to safely train contact and build confidence from the ground up. (Jamie Frech, Head Coach, University of Michigan) - **Confluence A**  
**Track Two:** Difficult Conversations with parents, staff, and administrators (Karen Fong Donahue, Owner and Founder of The Rugger's Edge) - **Confluence B**  
**Track Three:** Feedback Sessions that work at every level (Russell Earnshaw) - **Confluence C**  
**\*Track Four:** Urban Rugby Americas/ROOTS Rugby: Building Inclusive Spaces for People of Color - **Platte River Room**

11:00-11:20am: Raffle Winners - **Confluence A**

11:20-11:50pm: **\*Half-hour coaching sessions**  
**Track One:** Passing and passing games (Josie Ziluca, Head Coach, Princeton University) - **Confluence A**  
**Track Two:** Comms On: Explicitly Coaching On-Field Communication (Sharkie Harkness, Head Coach, Worcester Shamrocks and Manager Boston Banshees) - **Confluence B**  
**Track Three:** Fine-tuning your attacking structures to your player's personality (Ashley Potvin, Head Coach, University of New England) - **Confluence C**

12:00-1:00pm: **Lunch**

1:00-1:50pm: **Track One:** WER: Building a U.S. professional pathway: Reflecting on the first year and preparing for year two (Women's Elite Rugby coaches and players) - **Confluence A**  
**\*Track Two:** Urban Rugby Americas/ROOTS Rugby: Building Inclusive Spaces for People of Color - **Confluence B**

2:05-2:55pm: **\*Track One:** Field Medicine: a guide for coaches. *How to find and vet medical personnel; Understanding your risk as a coach and how to minimize it; Quick on-field fixes when you need them; Common injuries and what to do?* (Katherine Henry, is the Head of Pro Health and Wellness at League One Volleyball (LOVB). Former Director of Medical Services at PR 7s, the Director of Content and Coaching for MAX Sports Health, and Former Head Athletic Trainer for US Women's 15s program and Rachel Sachs is the Team Physician for University of Missouri Kansas City and USA Women's XV team) - **Confluence A**  
**Track Two:** Sport-Adjacent Depression: Navigating Disappointment and Purpose in Women's Rugby. *Through open conversation, this session will explore how sport-adjacent depression shows up across roles, from players transitioning out of competition to coaches, administrators, and advocates sustaining programs with limited resources. By naming and normalizing these emotions, we can foster community, empathy, and sustainable engagement in the game.* (Alycia Washington, Women's Director, National Collegiate Rugby) - **Confluence B**

3:00-3:30pm: **Closing** - **Confluence C**

5pm: **Celebration at:** **The 99ers Sports Bar**  
909 E Colfax Avenue  
Denver, CO 80218

Denver's first bar dedicated  
to women's sports and their fans!

