

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 ABC

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?* - Platte River Room

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 Kris Thomas, McKenzie Hawkins, Bitsy Cairns, Jamie Burke, Kitt Wagner Ruiz, Sylvia Braaten, Hannah Stolba, Sarah Chobot, Naima Reddick, Candi Orsini, Krista McFarren, Liz Kirk, Alycia Washington, Kristin Zdanczewicz and more!

SATURDAY JAN. 17, 2026

7:15-8:15am: **Networking Breakfast** - Mezzanine Foyer

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

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: ***Session 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 C
***Session 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:**
Session One: Fine-tuning your attacking structures to your players' personalities (Ashley Potvin, Head Coach, University of New England) - Confluence A
Session Two: Perfecting Your Line Out Throws (Kittery Wagner Ruiz, Head Coach, Boston Banshees) - Confluence B
Session Three: Rugby for Everyone: Building a Program for Players with Cognitive Disabilities (Dan Salmon, Unified Rugby) - Confluence C
Session Four: Teaching the Contact Area (Jami Frech, Head Coach, University of Michigan) - Platte River Room

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

12:35-1:30pm: **LUNCH** On Your Own or (Working luncheon for High School and Youth Coaches) - Platte River Room

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SATURDAY, JAN. 17, 2026 (continued)

1:30-2:20pm: ***Session One: Small group conversations** - All in Confluence C
 1: Building your professional presence/brand (Lisa Kelly, Executive Director, US Women's Rugby Foundation);
 2: Taking your rugby strength into civic/political life (Senator Tiara Mack);
 3: Taking your teams on the road: planning team trips abroad (Nancy Kechner, Head Coach, University of Virginia, Women's Rugby);
 4: Rugby for All: Programming for youth with cognitive disabilities (Unified Rugby);
***Session Two: 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
Session Three: 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 B

2:35-3:25pm: ***Session 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 C
***Session 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, Asst. Coach, Worcester Shamrocks and Manager Boston Banshees; Annemarie Farrell, Director of Sports Marketing at Stonehill College, Manager Boston Banshees and Sallie Buckner, Co-Manager for the Twin City Gemini) - Confluence A
***Session Three:** Effectively Using Constraints Led Approach (CLA) with Six Degree Sports (Nick Leah, Director & General Manager, Six Degree Sports) - Platte River Room

3:40-4:30pm: ***Session 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
***Session 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
***Session 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** - Mezzanine Foyer

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

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SUNDAY JAN. 18, 2026

8:15am: **Networking Coffee & Tea** - Mezzanine Foyer

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 C](#)

10:15-10:45am: ***Half-hour coaching sessions**
Session One: Difficult Conversations with parents, staff, and administrators (Karen Fong Donahue, Owner and Founder of The Rugger's Edge) - [Confluence A](#)
Session Two: Teaching the Contact Area (Jami Frech, Head Coach, University of Michigan) - [Confluence B](#)
Session Three: Taking your teams on the road: planning team trips abroad (Nancy Kechner) - [Confluence C](#)

11:00-11:20am: **Raffle Winners** - [Confluence C](#)

11:20-11:50pm: ***Half-hour coaching sessions**
Session One: Passing and passing games (Josie Ziluca, Head Coach, Princeton University) - [Confluence A](#)
Session Two: Comms On: Explicitly Coaching On-Field Communication (Sharkie Harkness, Assistant Coach, Worcester Shamrocks and Manager Boston Banshees) - [Confluence B](#)
Session 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** On Your Own

1:00-1:50pm: **Session 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 C](#)
***Session Two:** Urban Rugby Americas/ROOTS Rugby: Building Inclusive Spaces for People of Color. (Shane Young and Kevin Battle, Co-Founders of Urban Rugby America) - [Platte River Room](#)

2:05-2:55pm: ***Session 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 C](#)
Session 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) - [Platte River Room](#)

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!

