

Rising Star: King & Spalding's TaCara Harris

By Emily Field

Law360 (August 14, 2024, 2:04 PM EDT) -- King & Spalding LLP's TaCara Harris' work investigating allegations of sexual assault by coaches in the National Women's Soccer League, as well as her work on the litigation over claims that Zantac causes cancer, is why she won a spot on the 2024 list of product liability Law360 Rising Stars.

Her biggest case:

When claims emerged in 2021 from women professional soccer players in the National Women's Soccer League that coaches had sexually abused them, the U.S. Soccer Federation needed someone to head an investigation into the claims. Harris was tapped by King & Spalding's Sally Yates, a former deputy attorney general in the U.S. Department of Justice.

"We put together an all-star, all-women investigative team of more than a dozen King & Spalding lawyers from across the country," Harris said. "The extraordinary work we did over the next 12 months was both revelatory and transformative, leading to reforms that will protect future generations of women in sport from the abuses of the past."

She said the all-woman team compiled a report, released in 2022, that "pulled no punches."

"The report resonated well beyond the confines of soccer, being downloaded over 250,000 times on the King & Spalding website alone," Harris said. "The open accounting of not only those who perpetrated abuse but also those who turned a blind eye has brought out from the shadows sexual and emotional abuse tolerated for too long in other sports and segments of society."

Her most recent interesting case:

Her firm serves as counsel for Boehringer Ingelheim in litigation claiming that Zantac's active ingredient ranitidine causes cancer. Harris served as trial counsel on one of the cases, which dealt with claims that 89-year-old



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STAR

TaCara Harris
King & Spalding

Age: 36
Home base: Atlanta
Position: Partner
Law school: Vanderbilt Law School
First job after law school: Litigation associate at Baker Donelson

Angela Valadez developed colon cancer in 2015 after taking the medication for years.

"Alongside my practice group leader and mentor Andy Bayman, I was honored to serve as second-chair for the trial, and I had the tall order of cross-examining the plaintiff, Ms. Valadez," Harris said. "Given her age and health, the challenge was walking a tightrope between advocacy and empathy. I focused on how to effectively cross-examine her to advance our defense themes, to highlight inconsistencies in her testimony, and to diminish the impact of an otherwise sympathetic witness while being kind and respectful and connecting with the jury."

The Chicago jury delivered in favor of the defendants.

"Being selected by Boehringer to serve as trial counsel and then winning one of their most important cases — the first case in sprawling litigation to go to trial and in a very difficult jurisdiction for corporate defendants — is a humbling honor and a highlight of my career," Harris added.

What motivates her:

Harris said her faith and family inspire her to be a good lawyer and leader.

"My father, with my mother by his side every step of the way, served 24 years in the United States Army and retired as a lieutenant colonel," Harris said. "Growing up in a military family, I witnessed firsthand the sacrifices, dedication and selflessness my parents made for our country and our family, and I developed a profound sense of pride, honor and commitment to serving my community."

She also said she is motivated to help lead the next generation of women and people of color.

"For example, I lead a number of the firm's pro bono and diversity efforts and was appointed as an adjunct professor of pharmaceutical product liability litigation at Vanderbilt Law School," Harris noted.

She added that her son Lincoln, born in May 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic also drives her.

"It's been challenging, but rewarding, and I am proud to be a lawyer, wife and mother, showing that women can and deserve to take up space in courtrooms and boardrooms, and as leaders and agents of change," Harris said.

Why she practices product liability law:

Harris said she finds the interplay between law and causation issues in regard to medicine, science and regulations to be very interesting.

"My clients and colleagues alike often say that my value add is my legal acumen, collaborative spirit and ability to creatively and strategically distill those complex concepts into simple narratives and defense themes that are persuasive in motion practice and compelling to a jury at trial," Harris said.

She also noted that she finds the combination of legal thinking and storytelling to be satisfying.

"Standing up and advocating for my client and sharing an affirmative story that the jury can both appreciate and relate to," Harris said.

--As told to Emily Field. Editing by Kristen Becker.

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2024 Rising Stars winners after reviewing nearly 1,200 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2024, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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