

## NEVADA TRAILBLAZERS

# Meet Karyna Armstrong:

## Former Track Star Keeping Moving in Law

BY MARY BACON, ESQ.

**John Armstrong, Karyna Armstrong's father, has always been impressed with his daughter and all of her accomplishments – be they on the athletic field or in a courtroom.**

“What really sets her apart is her devotion to her family and friends,” John Armstrong said. “She values being a good daughter, sister, aunt, godmother, cousin, and friend, and selflessly invests her time in those relationships.”

Karyna Armstrong was born in Las Vegas and her family moved to Reno when she was young. Reno is a special place to her. Her grandfather was a professor at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), and her parents fell in love there, where her mother ran track and her father played football. So, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Armstrong participated in track and field at the Division I level, and one of her brothers would play Division I football at the University of Oregon.

While Armstrong was always deeply interested in school and extracurricular activities, her elementary school years did not suggest sports would be her passion. She played in the American Youth Soccer Organization, and her coaches would tell you she was more focused on picking flowers and ensuring her uniform had enough pink than on kicking the ball. She would actually walk off the field

anytime she started sweating.

By middle school, Armstrong' love for pink and her aversion to sweating were history. She preferred to ride her bike, go outside looking for bugs, and sled down the dirt hill with her brother. Middle school is also where she found her love throwing the shot put.

However, high school is where she hit her stride. Whether it was academics, athletics, or extracurricular activities, Armstrong was doing it all. She excelled academically, was class president all four years, and gave the graduation speech. She also was a back-to-back regional champion in both the shot put and discus, which earned her a place in the McQueen High School Athletics Hall of Fame.

“High school was such a fun time for me,” she said. “In addition to everything going on at school, my freshman year coincided with my brother's senior year. We have always been close, and being able to hang out with him and his friends made me feel like I had group of older brothers.”

After graduating from McQueen, Armstrong attended Boise State University where the coach, the team, and Boise's incredible natural beauty made it the perfect college experience.

“In track, I found my group of friends,” she said. “We loved being in college. Being a student athlete has been one of the most important and fun experiences of my life.”

She continued competing in hammer and weight at track meets while obtaining a double major in criminal



justice and political science. After graduating from Boise State, she still had a year of track eligibility, so she enrolled at the University of Miami where she continued to compete on the track team while earning her master's in public administration.

At 22, Armstrong was the “oldest athlete” on the team, earning her the role of “team mom.” In what was a dream come true, her team won the Atlantic Coast Conference’s 2017 Women’s Indoor Track and Field Championship. The next year she earned her master’s degree in public administration.

While it was hard moving to Florida by herself to obtain a master’s degree and complete her college athletics eligibility, Armstrong always remembered the advice from her parents to keep going.

“I still hear my mom’s voice, ‘Don’t give up too fast or when it gets hard because meaningful moments happen after you weather the storm. That’s when breakthroughs come.’ ‘But what happens then?’ I asked. ‘You appreciate how far you’ve come,’ my dad chimed in, and then they both said, ‘And you keep going.’”

This was the best advice she received, and she continues to use it in her everyday life.

After graduating from Miami, Armstrong moved to Las Vegas and was a substitute teacher for the Clark County School District while she studied for the LSAT. She attended the William S. Boyd School of Law, but her law school wasn’t anything like the traditional classes, bar prep, and lunch seminars.

After one semester, COVID-19 ended her campus experience, and she was on campus only two more times before graduating. Nonetheless, Armstrong followed her parents’ advice and kept going. She made the most of her law school experience, taking an additional course load and graduating early in December of her 3L year. She also held leadership positions in numerous organizations. She was the Black Law Students Association treasurer and liaison for the Las Vegas National Bar Association, the Sports and Entertainment Law Association secretary, the Student Bar Association executive secretary and events committee member, and a Policy and Legislation Society member. She earned a Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction (CALI) award for legal writing and clerked for Judge James Mahan of the U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada. She was also selected to be the graduation speaker. After graduation and the bar exam, she decided to do some traveling before starting work and visited Costa Rica, London, Rome, and Milan.

Today, Armstrong is a busy litigation associate in the Las Vegas office of McDonald Carano – and she continues to do it all. She is vice chair of the firm’s Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee, member of the executive board of the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Bar Association, member of the board of directors for Family 2 Family Connection, volunteer for the Children’s Attorneys Project of the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, and mentors law students who join McDonald Carano through Boyd’s Professional Development Fellowship Program.

Armstrong thrives on helping others, making a difference, and inspiring positive change by sharing her experiences and insights as a member of speaking panels. In the last two years, she has participated in 10



McDonald Carano was recognized as Law Firm of the Year during the 2024 Las Vegas chapter of the National Bar Association thanks to Karyna Armstrong’s role in the firm. On hand for the award presentation were Robel Asefaw (from left), George Ogilvie III, Kenadie Cobbin-Richardson, Armstrong, and Caleb Green.



Karyna Armstrong shows off the 2017 Atlantic Coast Conference Women’s Indoor Track and Field Championship trophy.



Karyna Armstrong was joined by her dad, John, and brother, Karrington, as she was inducted into the McQueen High School Athletics Hall of Fame.



Karyna Armstrong enjoys a tour of Venice.

panel presentations hosted by the Black Law Students Association, Public Interest Law Association, Organization of Women Law Students, Boyd Law School’s Career Development office, Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada, ACLU of Nevada, Clark County Bar Association, and the Justice Michael L. Douglas PreLaw Fellowship Program. The advice she always shares are the words she lives by – “Always stay true to yourself and never let what somebody else says distract you from your goals.”

In her personal time, Armstrong loves to travel, read romantic comedies, practice Pilates, and spend time with her two fur babies.