



# FULL SPEED AHEAD



**Local Girl Lindsay Czarniak**  
IS ON THE FAST TRACK TO THE NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT  
*By Kate McDermott and James Eppard*



With race fans around the country tuning in for another adrenaline-fed season of NASCAR's Sprint Cup Series on TNT, Washington-area viewers are seeing a familiar face hosting the network's "Countdown to Green" telecast.



"I want someone watching a story I do to say, 'Wow, I didn't know that about this person,'" says Lindsay Czarniak.

Lindsay Czarniak, who many locals know as a sports co-anchor and reporter for WRC-TV/NBC 4 News, is driving TNT's hour-long pre-race show and providing mid-race updates and post-race coverage as well. It's a fitting assignment for the Northern Virginia native whose career has been speeding toward the national spotlight since she landed her first job as a production assistant for CNN just 10 years ago.

Those familiar with Czarniak's work for NBC 4, where she also hosts "Daily Connection" and co-hosts "Redskins Postgame Report," "Redskins Showtime" and "Redskins Gameplan" during football season, may be surprised to learn that Czarniak actually has as much experience working in the pits as she has working behind the anchor desk. She spent three years as a reporter for TNT's Sprint Cup Series coverage and for TNT's and NBC's

coverage of the NASCAR Nationwide Series in 2006. She has also logged time as a SPEED Channel pit reporter for its NASCAR coverage.

For some female reporters, covering the male-dominated world of NASCAR might have been as frightening as hurtling around a racetrack at 200 mph. But as she has done throughout her short-but-impressive career, Czarniak embraced the challenge with confidence and diligent preparation.

"I knew about racing because my family was into it," says Czarniak, whose father, Chet Czarniak, is a journalist and worked in USA Today's sports department for 17 years. But Czarniak knew that following racing as a fan and covering it as a reporter would require a shift into high gear.

"The prospect of going into a NASCAR garage for the first time was daunting," she admits. "I definitely had to throw myself into learning everything

I could." So Czarniak attended driver meetings and talked to crew chiefs and owners to gather as much information as she could to make sure race enthusiasts got the in-depth information they craved—and expected.

She acknowledges that hosting a pre-race show will present a different set of challenges, especially given the caliber of her co-hosts. "Kyle Petty and Larry McReynolds are legends in the field," she says. "In pit reporting you're down there in the midst of the action during the race, but in 'Countdown to Green' we'll be talking about topical NASCAR issues and get fans ready for the race. You have to be on your toes and know your stuff."

And she does.

### NOT JUST ANOTHER PRETTY FACE

Behind Czarniak's blond hair and blue-eyed, all-American good looks is an impressive sports reporting resume. A former lacrosse and field hockey player at Virginia's Centreville High School, Czarniak attended James Madison University and landed her first job as a production assistant for CNN in Atlanta.

From there she moved to CBS' WTEV-TV and FOX's WAWS-TV in Jacksonville, Fla., then scored a post with NBC's WTVJ-TV in Miami, Fla., where she was a sports anchor as well as a reporter and host of "Fins TV," the Miami Dolphins show.

She joined News 4 in 2005 and has done double duty for NBC Sports since then, serving as a sports desk reporter for the network's Olympic Winter Games in Turin, Italy, in 2006 and as a studio host for NBC's Olympic Summer Games in Beijing, China, in 2008.

Yet despite these high-profile accomplishments, Czarniak says, "I feel I'm in many ways still in the beginning of my career."

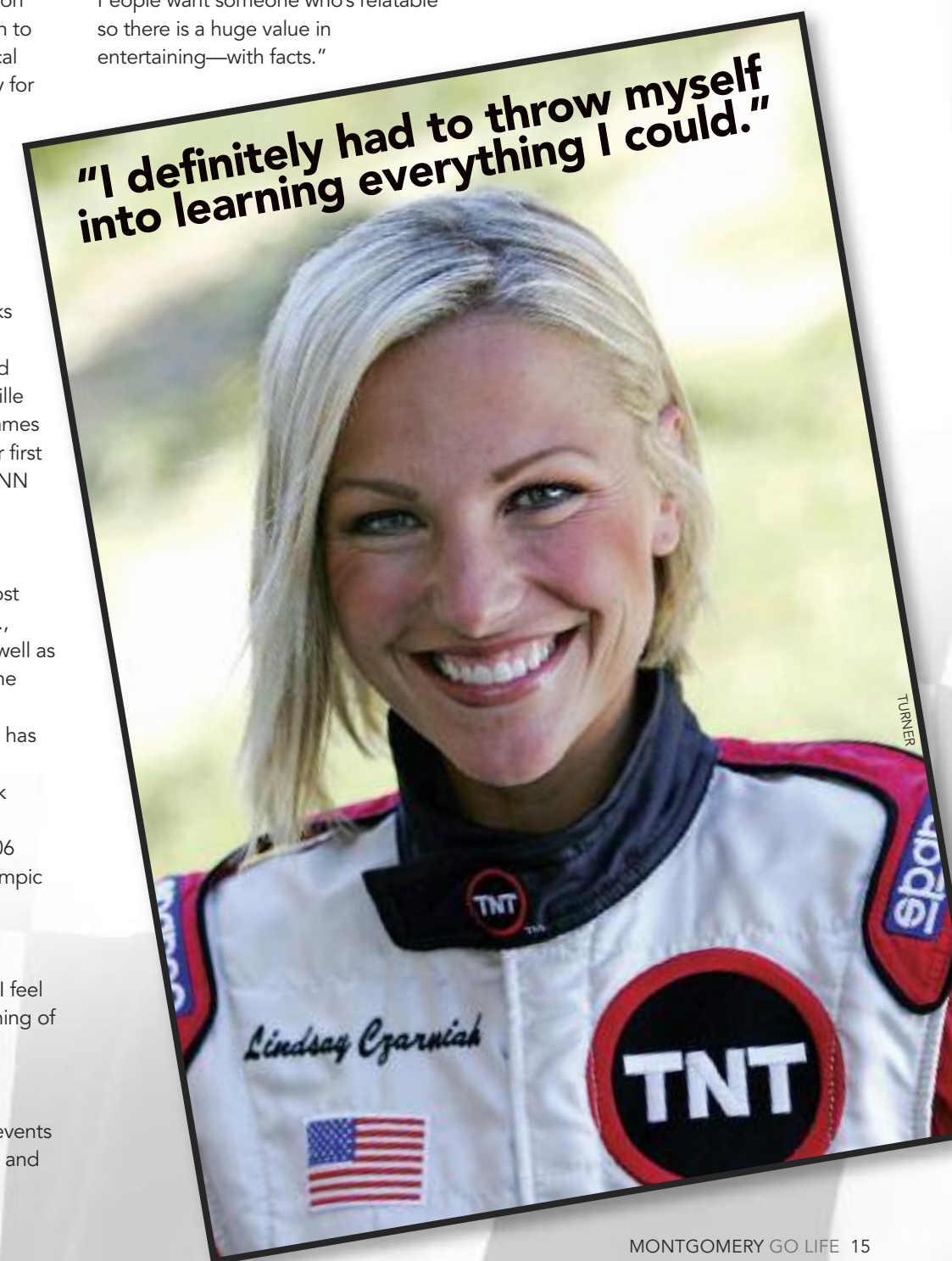
### MASTER STORYTELLER

With streaming video of sporting events now available 24/7 on the Internet and

mobile phones, Czarniak knows reporting in the digital age requires much more than a simple recitation of stats and scores. "People already know the scores because there are so many different outlets that provide them," she says, conceding that she often gets ESPN updates on her phone before the stories even hit the wires. "You can certainly still break news, in our area especially, but I think that you've got to be a lot more focused on content. People want someone who's relatable so there is a huge value in entertaining—with facts."

Czarniak credits that to lessons she learned from her mentor, legendary WRC-TV sports reporter George Michael. "I like to find out what I can that's different or unexpected. George really taught me a lot about that," she says. "I want someone watching a story I do to say, 'Wow, I didn't know that about this person.' That's why I tell my interview subjects, 'Look, here's the deal: My viewers at 5 want to have something they can remember you by.'"

**"I definitely had to throw myself into learning everything I could."**





**"I never envisioned having an opportunity to come back and do what I do here at home ..."**

TURNER

**Facing page:** Lindsay Czarniak has shifted into high gear this summer, co-hosting NASCAR/TNT's "Countdown to Green" telecast. **Below:** Fans cheer on the drivers at Bristol Motor Speedway in Tennessee. **Below, right:** Lindsay Czarniak says, "My daily schedule is never the same," whether she's inside the NBC 4 newsroom (top) or out on a story (bottom).



NASCAR

### THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

This recipe for success has made her weekly "Lunch with Lindsay" features a viewer favorite. Czarniak calls upon her breezy interviewing skills and extensive background research to help viewers see their favorite local sports stars in new and unexpected ways as they chat over everything from sushi to hot wings—away from the familiar confines of their ball fields, hardwoods or ice.

Although the segments are not shot in the studio, they represent another typical day at the office for Czarniak, who thrives on a schedule that includes reporting, anchoring, hosting—and "a lot of coffee. My job is not a 9-to-5 job," she says. "My daily schedule is never the same, but what I really love about what I'm doing is the variety. I thrive on the kind of excitement the different things provide."

It also helps that she gets to do it in her hometown.

"I never envisioned having an opportunity to come back and do what I do here at home," she says, with a bit of amazement. But don't expect Czarniak to go "T.O." with her celebrity status. For every superstar athlete like Terrell Owens, whose moment in the spotlight comes and goes as quickly as a lap at the Daytona 500, Czarniak has noted the game plans of much wiser—and enduring—athletes. "The most common thing that I hear them say is that you never allow yourself to get too high or too low. It's part of the key to success," she says.

That is why although her ease in front of the camera and the reporting chops behind it continue to earn her national attention, Czarniak says, "It would take something very special and significant to leave here.



NBC4/ROBIN FADER



NBC4/ROBIN FADER

"I think in this business it's very easy to be so focused and driven on your career that sometimes you don't realize how special it is to be around those that you love. I have the best of both worlds," she says. "I know that if one day I move and do something else or change jobs or whatever, it will be the hardest thing that will happen to me since I began my career because I've been given this amazing chance to be back home." 