

Top 40 Under 40

Kristi Blackwell



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Tyson & Mendes LLP

Title: Partner

Age: 35

Blackwell joined Tyson & Mendes straight out of law school and has been with the civil litigation defense firm since. She began as a law clerk and worked her way up, and, in 2014, became the firm’s first partner aside from co-founders Robert Tyson and Patrick Mendes.

Blackwell leads the firm’s retail, restaurant and hospitality practice group. She focuses on general liability, personal injury, premises liability and complex litigation. Her clients include insurance companies that hire the firm on behalf of their insureds, businesses and individuals.

Recently, Blackwell secured a full defense verdict following a three-week trial in which the injured plaintiff sought more than \$7.4 million in damages. The case arose when a rear tire disengaged from a vehicle and rolled into oncoming traffic. One vehicle was rear-ended and the passenger in that car claimed she developed seizures as a result. Blackwell represented the car dealership that worked on the truck that lost the tire.

“We have some pretty unique methods at Tyson & Mendes that we’ve developed at trial,” Blackwell said. “We make sure that we advance our theme with each witness, and through opening and closing. And when you have a corporate client, it’s really important to humanize the client.”

In addition, if Blackwell finds an award to be unreasonable, she provides a figure better supported by the evidence, even while seeking a defense verdict. In the lost tire case, she asked the jury to award \$300,000 should they find the car dealership liable. The jury agreed Blackwell’s client was not liable and issued a full defense verdict.

Blackwell also assisted in preparing the petition and opening brief in the landmark California Supreme Court case *Howell v. Hamilton Meats*. The court held personal injury plaintiffs can only recover the amount of medical expenses paid and accepted in full by the health care provider, not the higher billed amount. The case significantly impacted the damages a plaintiff may recover.

— Jennifer Chung Klam