

THE PLAN FOR 21-YEAR-OLD WUNDERKIND **LEXI THOMPSON** IS A SIMPLE ONE: MAKE THE US OLYMPIC TEAM, BECOME THE FACE OF WOMEN'S GOLF, DOMINATE HER SPORT FOR DECADES TO COME AND MAYBE BREAK THE INTERNET ALONG THE WAY.

DID WE MENTION THIS PLAN STARTED WHEN SHE WAS 8? **BY JOHN MIHALY**

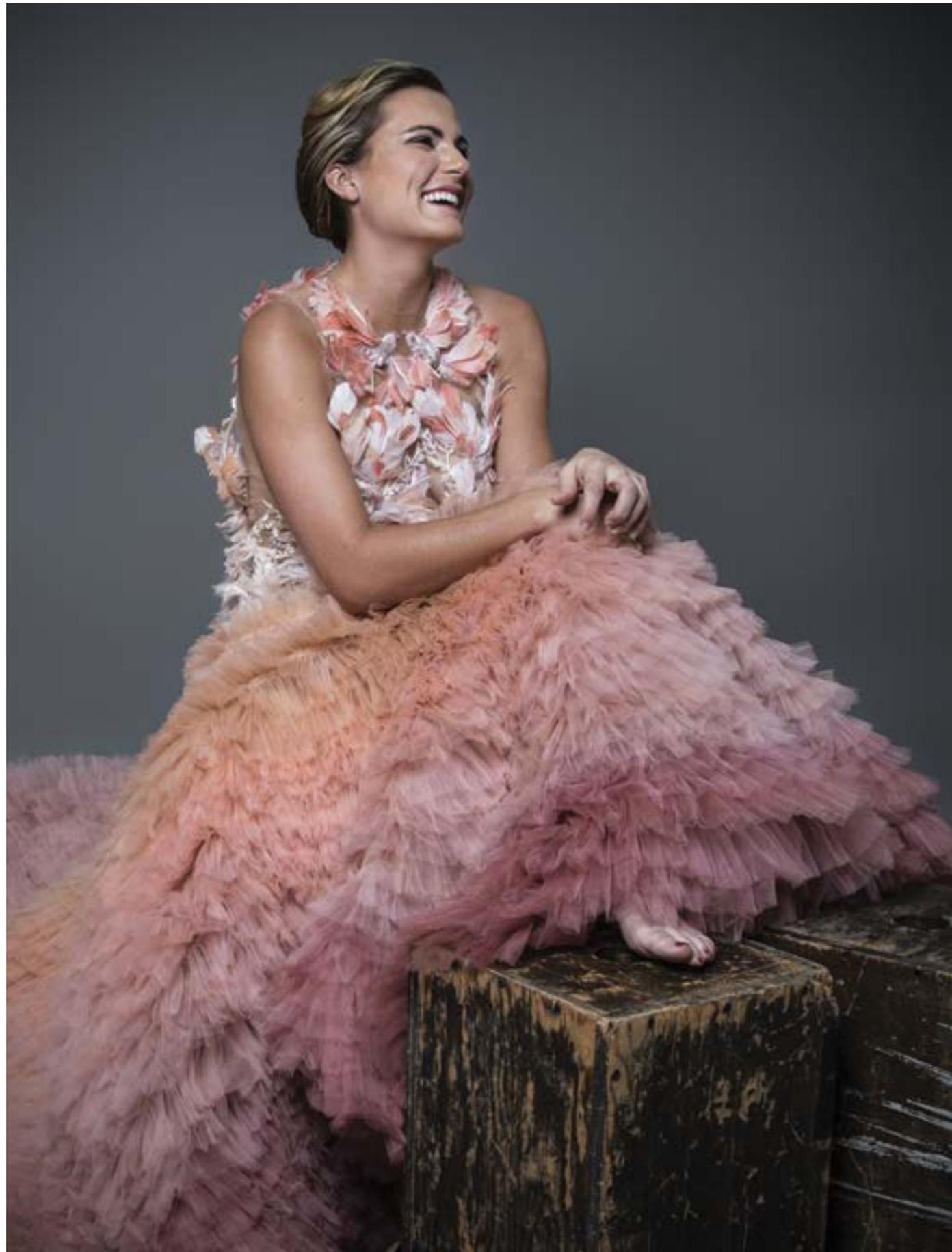
golden opportunity

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DRESS, DOLCE & GABBANA



DRESS, MARCHESA

In addition to being a star golfer, Lexi Thompson is an early adopter.

Just take a look at her Instagram—@Lexi—and you can tell that she locked in that handle well ahead of the curve, the kind of forward thinking for which early adopters are known.

Beyond social media, early adopters are bold, confident individuals who aren't afraid to embrace new and unexplored opportunities, those willing to follow their passions down barely-formed roads and see where the journey takes them despite the inherent risks. For Lexi Thompson, that journey started sometime around age eight, when she made the decision that she wanted to devote her life to becoming a professional golfer.

At that age, most kids have enough trouble trying to decide on their favorite television show. "It was a pretty easy for me," Lexi says. "After all, I did grow up living on a golf course."

From that moment on, Lexi has continued to adopt early and often in the golf world. At age 12, she became the youngest golfer to qualify for the US Women's Open. At 15, she officially turned pro. At 16, she became the youngest winner of an LPGA event. And at 19, she became the second youngest golfer to win a women's major. Now at the age of 21, she holds the third overall spot in the world Rolex Rankings, making her the top American female golfer.

"I'm a very competitive person having grown up with two older brothers who also played golf," Lexi says. "That was how I was raised. I think that's the way to better yourself, by always trying to improve upon yourself daily. I'm competitive in the gym where I'm always setting goals for improving my body. I'm competitive on the golf course where I have my goals every time I tee it up."

Not many 21-year-olds play a quick 18 in the morning at the Trump International, followed by an intense gym session

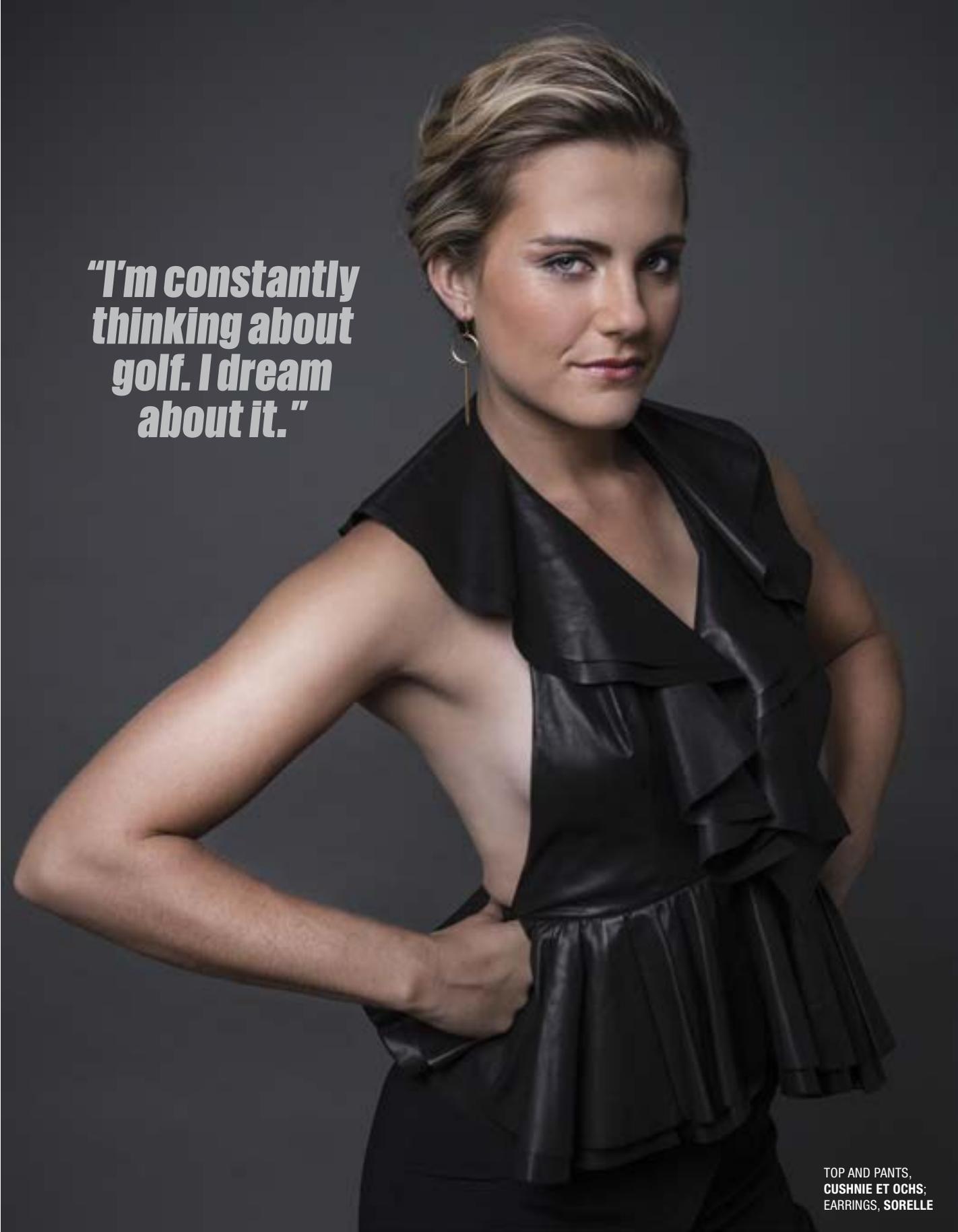
and then find the time for a magazine cover story interview (as the first female athlete ever to appear on the cover of *AQ*). But that's a "typical" day when she's at home. So as many of her peers around the nation are trying to figure out what to do with their impending college degree and how to pay off their student loans, Lexi's focus remains the same as it did when she was still able to count her age on two hands.

"It's tough sometimes because golf is my life," she says. "It's 24/7. I'm constantly thinking about golf. I dream about it. I don't know how I wouldn't dream about golf. Some dreams are good, some are bad. But there are a lot of them."

It's that dedication that has made her a sponsor's dream. A dream team of sponsors—Rolex, Lexus, Red Bull, Puma, and Cobra Golf—have already aligned themselves with Lexi. And soon, she will be on the sporting world's biggest stage this summer in Rio, when golf returns to the Olympic Games for the first time since 1904.

"It's big for golf," she says. "It just shows how much the game is growing and that's exactly what we want to see. Growing up I couldn't say that I wanted to be an Olympian, but once I heard that it was back, it was a new dream come true. It then became my number one goal to make that team. So I'm extremely excited. No pressure. I love representing my country. That's the highest honor and you have to enjoy every bit of it."

While that part about "no pressure" might not occur to Lexi leading up to the Games, it seems somewhat inevitable after their conclusion at the end of August. A good showing in Brazil, let alone a medal-winning one, could quickly propel Lexi into the stratosphere, not only in terms of her national following, but her worldwide appeal. Expect @Lexi to quickly



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TOP AND PANTS,
CUSHNIE ET OCHS;
EARRINGS, SORELLE

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jump into seven-figure follower territory. But in her own, very self-aware words, “That’s a good problem to have.”

So the question remains, “Is Lexi Thompson poised to be the face of American women’s golf for years to come?” The opportunities are certainly there—both on and off the green—and that seems to be the next logical step on her journey. But is she ready for that level of fame and responsibility?

“I love the game, so just playing makes me happy,” Lexi says. “Being the face of the LPGA would be yet another dream come true for me. But I’d want to be there not just for the talent that I bring to the golf course, but for what I give back to the game and to charity.”

To have success, change is key, as any early adopter knows, and Lexi sees it happening to her sport every time she steps on the course. “I think the biggest change I’ve seen is more fans, which is something we all really want to see. Even on those early morning tee times there are people out there following us. That’s what makes the tournament.”

It’s only a matter of time before Lexi Thompson enters the lexicon of the top performing athletes in the United States. She’s more than just her age-related records, her magazine covers and her social media followers. Most importantly, she’s an athlete who’s still very much at the beginning of her pro career, despite playing at a professional level for nearly a decade already. And she’s still improving her game.

“I’ve been fortunate enough with starting golf at such a young age to learn a lot about myself... I learned how much I’m willing to work for what I want and how determined I am and how focused I am. There are days that I really struggle mentally and physically when I need to work on myself. It’s an ongoing process. You can never perfect golf. That’s why I love it.” ■



DRESS, LACOSTE