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# USTA



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# Applauding Alexandra

**F**OR ALEXANDRA STEVENSON, life's all about having fun. She smiles constantly. She laughs easily when sharing even the obscure details of her young life. She sounds equally entertained when she giggles through anecdotes of acting with a monkey in a sixth-grade play and rehearsing with the cast of an off-Broadway musical last December.

The one-day acting experience was just one of the many opportunities Stevenson, 19, has explored since wowing the tennis world last year with a Wimbledon semifinal appearance as a qualifier (a feat previously accomplished only by John McEnroe in 1977) and a Pan Am Games bronze medal. Stevenson's Cinderella summer also brought endorsement deals which helped provide her with the means to relocate herself and her mother, Samantha, from a one-bedroom apartment in San Diego to a villa in Bradenton, Fla., where she's begun training with Nick Bollettieri. Even in her new home in the Sunshine State, Stevenson finds joy.

"Oh my gosh, for the first time I have my own bedroom. And it's pink," she says, her eyes wide, her perpetual smile

stretching across her face. "My bathroom's turquoise and purple, and the ceiling has clouds on it—purple, pink, yellow and blue clouds. And there's going to be hearts everywhere. It's going to be so cool. I'm going to have a purple leopard couch, and I'm getting a zebra print stool for my vanity table. And I'm going to have two stands for TVs, 'cause I watch two things at one time—like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, that conflicts with *Party of Five*, and I always like to watch both." She laughs, knowing how ridiculous this idea sounds. But she doesn't care that it's ridiculous, she only cares that it's fun.

"I've been in this business 30 years, and I tell you, if there's one girl who always walked on the court with a smile, that had to be Alexandra," says Robert Lansdorp, who coached Stevenson for nine years and last year recommended she move to Bollettieri's, where she could practice year-round.

While Stevenson does smile and laugh on court, she takes her tennis seriously. When not playing a tournament, she follows a full-time daily training schedule: practice on court from 8 to 10 a.m., work out in the gym from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2:30 to 4 p.m., and practice on court again from 4 to 6 p.m. And when she's coached, she listens.

"She's like a sponge," says Tracy Austin, who has worked with Stevenson and been her mentor on the WTA Tour. "Sometimes I've helped kids and you could tell they think they know it all. But Alexandra is just a pleasure to work with because she wants to learn, she wants to get better."

Getting better is the key to Stevenson's future. Though she has enough talent to win tough matches, she's not yet consistent at it. Since the Pan Am Games, Stevenson has won only four matches, and she lost in the first round of this

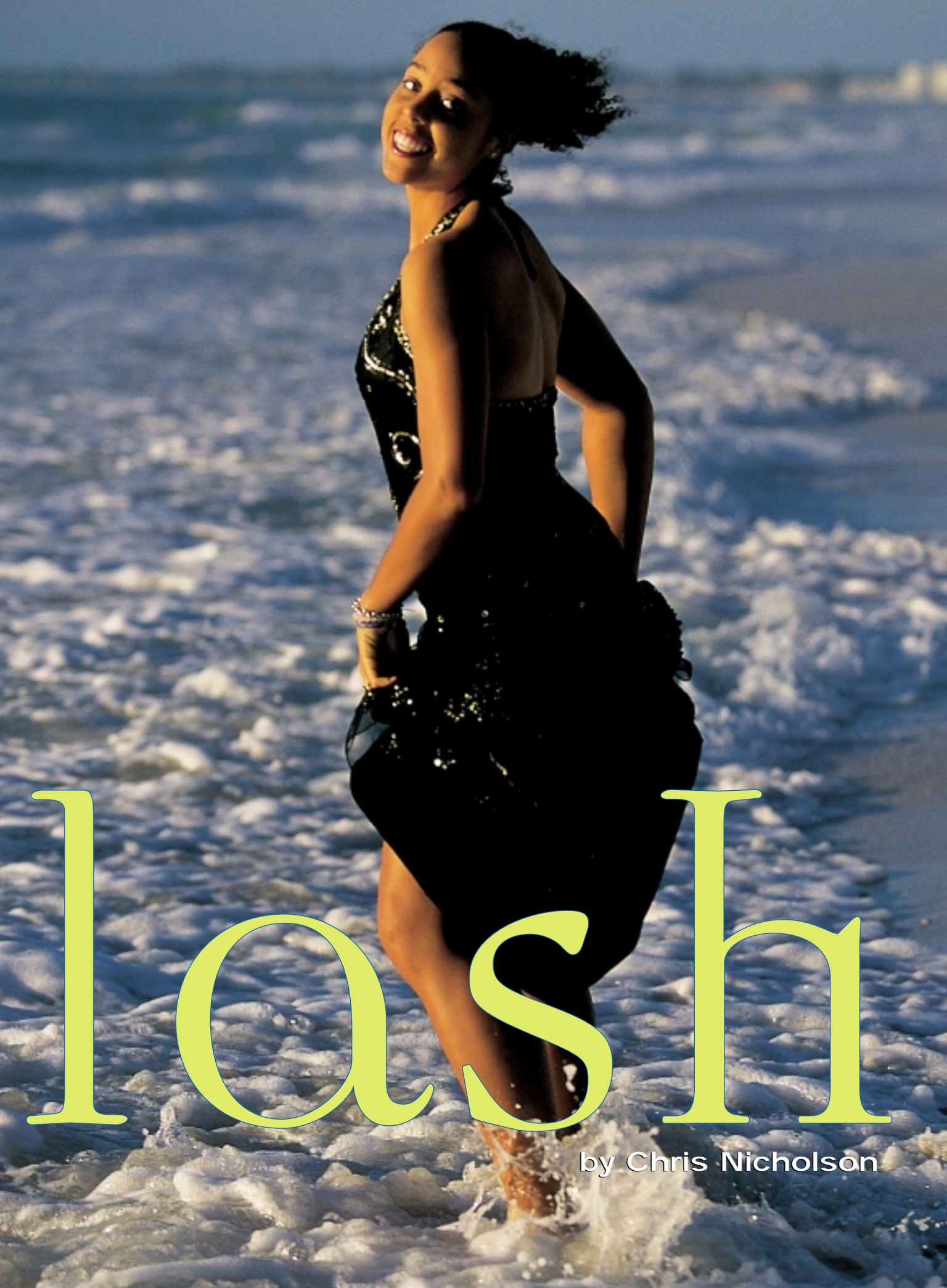
FRED MULLANE

*After dancing  
through Wimbledon,  
the always-smiling*

# Making a sp

*Alexandra  
Stevenson has  
dedicated herself  
to rejuvenating  
her game.*





# lash

by Chris Nicholson



"The whole sports world is a form of entertainment," says acting-buff Stevenson (below, rehearsing with the cast of the off-Broadway musical *Inappropriate* last December).



year's Australian Open. But Lansdorp believes that Stevenson's inconsistency is due to the immaturity of her game—she only became a full-time tennis player last summer. Samantha made her daughter finish high school first, and she will let her stay out of college only if she stays in the Top 50.

So while some see Stevenson as a girl who had a lucky summer, others believe her Wimbledon run was a glance at her future. "There are some kids whose game is basically formed at 16," Austin says. "My game was formed at 16. I wasn't going to all of a sudden become a serve-and-volleyer. Serena Williams' game wasn't close to being formed at 16, it was still pretty raw—you could see there was still a lot of potential. Alexandra is like that to me. She's still learning so much. She's going to improve her game, but she'll improve her mind on the court, and that's the biggest thing to me."

Stevenson has already developed remarkable mental fortitude, showcased especially well at Wimbledon when the press—and subsequently the world—discovered that former basketball star Julius Erving is her father. Through days of a typical British media frenzy, Stevenson simply admitted the rumor was true and then, with the mind of a champion, refocused all her mental energy on her tennis.

As for the physical part of Stevenson's game, Bollettieri has instituted a long-term plan to improve her conditioning and on-court movement. "When you hit as big as she does," Bollettieri says, "there'll probably be a lot of defensive balls that come back, so we want her to be able to move quickly into position and to capitalize on that."

"We don't think that we're going to do it in three to six months, but we feel in the next two years, with her type of



game and her athletic background, there's a darn good chance that she could be a winner."

Eliot Teltscher, a USTA National Coach who's worked with Stevenson since she was 14, agrees. "She's going in the right direction," Teltscher says. "She wants to get fitter, she wants to get faster. And at some point you'll talk about Hingis and the Williamses and Davenport, and Alexandra will be in the same breath. She's in the same group with all of them."

Bollettieri, Austin and Teltscher aren't the only people who think Stevenson needs to improve her game. Stevenson thinks so, too. "I need to work on everything," she says, "especially volleying and attacking the net."

For help with her volley, she already knows who to ask.

DAVE GOODMAN/USTA, MARY SCHILPP/CLP



"My mom is like my best friend now because we travel all over the world together," says Stevenson, with her mother, Samantha, above.

Olympic team. But, just as important, she intends to keep having fun, especially in her off-tour life. She's already studied acting, ballet, tap and jazz, and now wants to learn salsa. It seems a lot for an up-and-coming tennis star, but Stevenson doesn't mind the busy schedule. "You have to have

chaos every day or else life is just not fun," she says. "You have to try different things or else you're never going to know what you like. Keep yourself very interested in everything and you won't become bored."

Stevenson bored? She has too many dreams for that, and luckily for American tennis fans, Stevenson seems to have a talent for making her dreams come true. And though she went from "unknown commodity" to "budding prodigy" in just one short summer, she knows she has yet to see the potential of her star power.

"I'm not famous yet," she says. "I still have a lot to accomplish. I want to make it so I'm a presenter at the MTV Music Awards and the *Vogue* Fashion Awards, and I want to go to the Oscars. When I do that, then I'll realize that I'm famous. Then I'm there."

In the meantime, Alexandra is happy just having fun. 🐼

After playing mixed doubles with Stevenson at a charity event in New Jersey last fall, John McEnroe told her that if she wants to come to his home in New York, he'll teach her how to volley better. "I'm gonna take him up on that, so he'd better watch out," she says, laughing.

The idea of receiving a lesson from McEnroe doesn't intimidate Stevenson, because, for her, working with legends has become rather commonplace. Bobby Riggs once put \$100 bills under cones on court and told Stevenson she could keep the money from any target she hit. Don Budge met her after school to help her with her backhand grip. Ellsworth Vines convinced her to keep her one-handed backhand. She's also willingly accepted help from Stan Smith, Rod Laver, Roy Emerson, Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova, Chris Evert and Boris Becker (who said she's "like a baby Boris").

Stevenson has worked hard to better her game, and intends to keep working and improving, and to keep setting her sights higher—her goal for 2000 is to make the U.S.