

MATTY HONG

Age 26 / Boulder, Colorado

GENERATION 5.16

Thanks to the gym explosion, 9-5ers, weekend warriors, and kids can participate in our sport more easily than ever. As a result, waves of young crushers are coming up through the ranks, with unprecedented access to coaches and cutting-edge training facilities. As climbing is increasingly approached with a performance mindset, it begins to produce the same high-level athletes we see in other sports, sometimes in a few short years. The result is ultra-strong climbers who often retrospectively gain experience outside. At the forefront of the revolution is the youngest generation, climbers up to their mid-20s poised to take us to the next level. Here, we present 11 leading the charge and changing the face of our sport.

PHOTO BY GREG MIOWSKIE

MATTY HONG ATTEMPTS
A MUERTE (5.14D),
SIURANA, SPAIN.

IT'S NOT EASY BEING a professional climber and filmmaker.

"I struggle with balancing the two," says Matty Hong, 26, of Boulder, CO. "If it's filming someone on a climb, I have to jug a static line. It's tiring, but I also want to try my own project that day."

Still, he never climbs sans camera. In February 2017, this habit paid off: When Margo Hayes ticked *La Rambla* (5.15a) one day after he did, Hong delayed lowering her and was ready to capture the now-famous shot of her tearing up with joy.

Hong, who's lived in Boulder his whole life, started young. His parents are Steve Hong and Karin Budding, hard-crack pioneers from the 1980s at Indian Creek, Utah; Steve, now in his 60s, continues to establish 5.14s at Rifle. His parents took Matty to the canyon as a baby, and it wasn't long before he joined in. His older brother, Alex, climbed sometimes, too, but a fear of heights led him to quit.

Hong joined a climbing team in middle school, but things got serious at age 15 during a fateful season at Rifle when he climbed his first 5.13d, *Living in Fear*, and three 5.14a's. He soon dropped out of soccer to focus solely on climbing. "I was getting more accomplished in climbing," he says. "So I was getting more motivated to improve." Hong later turned his sights to the Wicked Cave where he bolted his first route—*La Cucaracha* (5.14c)—a process that was "extremely gratifying and opened the door for me to begin developing more of my own routes."

After finishing his degree in film production, he flew to Spain and broke into 5.15 with *Papichulo* (5.15a) in Oliana in March 2016. In 2017, he ticked *La Rambla* and *Joe Mama*, both 5.15a, in Spain.

Hong often films or shoots his friends, and the footage later feeds into short film projects. *Break On Through*, about Hayes's ascent of *La Rambla*, appears in the 2017 REEL ROCK film tour. Hong plans to keep growing his multimedia career, and adds that he'd like to leave an impact by tailoring his films to represent the sport in a "good way—sending a message about preserving our climbing areas and treating the places and people with respect."

TICKS:

First ascents: *La Cucaracha* (5.14c), *Planet Garbage* (5.14d), *Bad Girls Club* (5.14c), *Stocking Stuffer* (5.14d), Rifle, Colorado. Redpoints: *La Rambla* (5.15a) in Siurana and *Papichulo* (5.15a) in Oliana, Spain. Boulders: *Warrior Up* (V15), Lincoln Lake, Colorado; *Ambrosia* (V11 R), Bishop; multiple V14s in Rocky Mountain National Park.

GOALS:

Redpoint 5.15b, free El Capitan, use film and photography to boost climbers' careers and promote stewardship.

—ULA CHIROBAK

SEAN BAILEY

Age 21 / Seattle, Washington

ABOUT TO COMPETE IN HIS FIFTH international competition of 2017, Sean Bailey, 21, reflects on climbing professionally: “The best part is having the freedom to pursue your passion...I feel privileged,” says Bailey. “The worst part is pursuing your passion.”

Competitive indoor climbing is demanding, he explains. It’s not particularly lucrative, nor is it following the norm for his age—most of his friends went straight to college out of high school. Some are surprised to find he instead chose climbing.

Bailey first climbed around age five with his parents, both climbers. Soon, he joined the youth team at Vertical World and tagged along with the Ruana family on weekend trips to Smith Rock.

At 17, he took first in his category at both the American Bouldering Series and the Sport Climbing Series Youth National Championships. It was a proud moment, and perhaps a predictor of future success. He also got on rock at Pacific Northwest destinations like Leavenworth, Gold Bar, and Little Si. He still travels to these areas when he’s home, most frequently Little Si.

In March 2016, Bailey won the USA Climbing Sport and Speed Open National Championships. While indoor pursuits dominate his schedule, he sent *Realization* (5.15a) in Céüse, France, that August. The aura of the route, which was bolted in 1989 and freed by Chris Sharma in 2001, intimidated Bailey more than the bouldery pocket moves.

Says Bailey, “It’s got so much history that it was hard not to let it get in my head.” After completing it in about a week, he was both psyched and relieved.

In 2016 and 2017, he made it to IFSC World Cup finals three times total—successes

in his mind, since in each case he had a shot at winning. “If you’re in the finals, you can be pretty much as successful as anyone else,” he says. “I like to use that as something to be happy about.”

Bailey competes frequently to get experience at the World Cup level, and to observe his competitors. He’s learned that the best climbers “know themselves really well” and are able to tap into their own unique skillsets. Now, he’s following suit by adapting his own training accordingly. Bailey’s at the gym five to six days a week, up to three hours at a time. His focus is “the grind of just getting stronger.”

Bailey is excited to climb at more international destinations. He’d also love to do more adventure climbing in places like Yosemite. Eventually, he plans to go back to school and possibly pursue engineering—but, for now, he’s giving back by setting routes and coaching the kids’ team at Vertical World. “Once I’m a little more established, I’ll start thinking about how I want to make my impact,” he says.

TICKS:

Realization (5.15a), Céüse, France

COMPETITIONS:

Highest-ranked American male in 2017 IFSC Vail Bouldering World Cup, first place in 2016 USA Climbing Sport and Speed Open National Championships

GOALS:

Improve in World Cup Lead events, more international climbing trips, attend college for engineering.



SEAN BAILEY ON
REALIZATION (5.15A),
CÉÜSE, FRANCE.

PHOTO BY SAVANNAH CUMMINS

—ULA CHROBAK

KARA & CONNOR HERSON

Ages 18 & 14 / Emerald Hills, California

▶ **WHILE THE BIG WALLS OF YOSEMITE** and the realm of indoor competitions might seem diametrically opposed, they both satisfy a similar thirst for adventure for Connor Herson, age 14. “I’m not interested in the results; I’m more interested in making it to finals so I can try all the climbs,” he says of competitions. “The setting at the comps is just really good.”

His parents, longtime climbers Jim and Anne, took him and his sister, Kara, 18, to the climbing gym when they were toddlers. The Bay Area family also made frequent weekend trips to Yosemite. Jim and Anne have been climbing for 30 years, with many proud Valley ascents, like Jim’s free ascent of the *Salathé Wall* (VI 5.13b) on El Capitan. Soon, Kara and Connor were climbing the massive granite walls, too.

Jim took Kara up the Southeast Buttress of Tu-

olumne’s Cathedral Peak, together with another team of parents and kids, when she was 6. She climbed Half Dome’s *Snake Dike* (5.7) at age 9. The father-daughter team made single-day ascents of the *Regular Northwest Face* of Half Dome when Kara was 12 and the *Nose* on El Capitan when she was 14. “She came at it from backpacking, peak-bagging—it was a weird progression,” says Jim.

Soon, Connor joined the family team, climbing *Snake Dike* at 8, the *Regular Northwest Face* at 12, and the *Nose* in a day at 13. Kara and Connor were also on the youth team at the Bay Area gym chain Planet Granite and competed nationally in bouldering and sport climbing.

Most often, it’s Jim taking Kara or Connor, and sometimes both, out on the long, wilderness climbs, but sometimes Anne joins too. Anne most-



KARA HERSON AT USA CLIMBING YOUTH BOULDERING NATIONALS, SLC, FEB 2017.

KARA'S TICKS:

Regular Northwest Face (VI 5.9 C1) in a day, Half Dome, at age 12; the *Nose* (VI 5.8 C2) in a day, El Capitan, at age 14

GOALS:

Lead more routes in the Valley, focus on education at Stanford University.

PHOTOS BY ANDREA LAUE (2)



CONNOR HERSON AT USA CLIMBING YOUTH DIVISIONALS, TOUCHSTONE MISSION CLIFFS, SF, JAN 2017.

CONNOR'S TICKS:

T-Rex (5.14b), *Maple Canyon*; *Galactic Emperor* (5.14a), *Ten Sleep*; *God's Own Stone* (5.14a), *Red River Gorge*; *Regular Northwest Face*, Half Dome, age 12; *Nose in a Day without ascenders*, age 13

COMPETITIONS:

Second place, 2017 USA Climbing Sport and Speed Youth National Championships in Kennesaw, Georgia

GOALS:

Improve onsighting, send fourteen 5.14s total by age 15.

ly takes the siblings on sport and bouldering trips. Climbing together has helped the family bond. “I definitely haven’t gone through some of the parent-teen wars that my classmates have,” says Kara. “Climbing probably contributed to that, because it’s a shared passion.”

Kara and Connor both love the puzzle-solving aspect of climbing. Connor will watch videos of competitions to see how the other participants read cryptic routes. The Herson children have also changed their dad’s opinion of indoor climbing and bouldering. Says Jim, “Some of it seems absurd, driving seven hours to Bishop and working on a 10-foot problem.” Now, he admits, short, steep climbing can be fun. After 25 years of never entering the bouldering area at his gym, he was surprised and horrified when he recently spent three hours attempting a single problem there.

In July, Jim watched Connor take second place in Sport and Speed Youth Nationals in Georgia, which allowed Connor to compete in the Youth World Championships in Innsbruck, Austria. Jim says watching Connor compete at Youth Nationals was “the most thrilling moment in my climbing life.” At the same competition, Kara

won the North Face’s Young Gun Award, which recognizes achievement and sportsmanship in up-and-coming athletes.

After years of chasing their dad up big walls, the two are now chasing their own goals with a similar enthusiasm. Connor now competes independent of a team and works with coach Justen Sjong, who gives him a monthly training plan. Connor’s also practicing his onsights outside—he onsighted ten 5.13s in summer 2017 during family trips to Maple Canyon and Ten Sleep. And he’s adding up the 5.14s, too, hoping to tick 14 total before he turns 15.

For her part, Kara plans to focus on school. She’s currently a freshman at Stanford University, where she’s undeclared but will likely major in math or science. But, she’s certainly not done climbing. In the future, she’d like to lead the routes in Yosemite up which she’d previously followed her dad, like the *Steck-Salathé* (V 5.10b) on Sentinel Rock.

“The Valley is an enormous playground of splitter cracks, flakes, and offwidths,” says Kara. “I love both [sport and trad] climbing, but trad climbing is something really special and a style of climbing where I have made some of my best memories.”



DREW RUANA ON HIS
PROJECT FORBIDDEN
FRUIT (5.14D+),
CHRISTIAN BROTHERS,
SMITH ROCK.

DREW RUANA

Age 18 / Redmond, Washington

DREW RUANA REACHED NEW HEIGHTS in 2017: The 18-year-old hit 5'7"—up from 5'0" at the start of high school. He also nabbed a first-place win at the USA Climbing Sport and Speed Youth National Championships.

Ruana first climbed at age three. His father, Rudy, took him to Smith Rock when he was a baby. Climbing clicked: He tried soccer but didn't like it.

"Soccer's based on a group effort, whereas climbing is up to you—it's 100 percent in your control," he says. "I like that because it's easy to see improvements and measure success."

Drew started leading 5.12s at Smith at age seven. "He's an absolutely beautiful, graceful climber," says Rudy, adding, "That kid can run it out like nobody's business." Around age 11, Drew sent *Rude Boys* (5.13c) in fewer tries than Rudy. In 2014, he started working a link-up in Smith's Aggro Gully of *Repeat Offender* (5.14b), *Villain* (5.14a), and *White Wedding* (5.14a).

On February 13, 2016, at age 16 and on his fiftieth to sixtieth try, *Assassin* (5.14d) went down—becoming Smith's hardest. He came down in dis-

belief: "I felt like there was no way that could've been real, because I'd just been falling for so long."

Although Ruana has been a top youth competitor for years, he still has his ups and downs. At the July 2016 USA Climbing Sport and Speed Youth National Championships in Kennesaw, Georgia, his foot slipped on the finals route. Drew waved at the audience and calmly walked outside. "I still have parents come up and say, 'I will never forget that moment,'" says his mother, Christine.

Ruana soon upped his training, putting in up to 24 hours a week on plastic and lifting weights. Says Ruana, "By constantly analyzing my situation, I can target my strengths and weaknesses." In July 2017, he took first in the Junior Male category at USA Climbing Sport and Speed Youth Nationals.

Now in his senior year in high school, he's applying to the Georgia Institute of Technology, Stanford University, and UCLA. He'll likely study engineering. Before he goes to college, though, he wants to take a year off to travel. "I want to be known as a true all-around climber," he adds. "To be proficient in all areas of climbing."

TICKS:

Assassin (5.14d FA), Smith Rock; *Brave New World* (5.14d FA), Little Si; *Just Do It* (5.14c), Smith Rock; *Direct North* (V14), Bishop

COMPETITIONS:

Youth: first place, 2017 USA Youth Sport National Championships; third place, 2016 USA Youth Speed Nationals. Adult: third place, 2017 US Sport Climbing Nationals, Denver (earned a spot on the 2017 US Men's National Climbing Team).

GOALS:

V15 and 5.15; engineering or other STEM degree.

—ULA CHROBAK

PHOTO BY JASON BAGBY

SHAWN & BROOKE RABOUTOU

Ages 19 & 16 / Boulder, Colorado

THE ERBESFIELD-RABOUTOU FAMILY IS the climbing equivalent of The Incredibles. Shawn and Brooke Raboutou grew up in a family of world-champion climbers with their mother, Robyn Erbesfield-Raboutou (*see Portrait, page 22*), and father, Didier Raboutou, setting a high bar indeed. Climbing was a natural calling for both kids from their toddler years onward. In their vacation house in France, the fami-

ly had a backyard climbing gym where, says Robyn, "As soon as they could walk, we tied them into a rope and let them try to climb." The family would also hit up their favorite local crag, Anglar in Saint-Antonin Noble Val. Both grew up as part of Team ABC Kids in Boulder, Colorado, with their mom as a coach, climbing hard but also goofing around and making friends.

Each sibling has a distinct personality and ap-



SHAWN RABOUTOU ON KHOIKHOI (V15), WEIGHBRIDGE, SOUTH AFRICA.

SHAWN'S TICKS:

Welcome to Tijuana (5.14b), Rodellar, Spain, at age 13 in 2011; *Spray of Light (V15)* and *Monkey Wedding (V15)*, Rocklands, South Africa; *Khoikhoi (V15)* at Weighbridge in Du Toit's kloof, South Africa

GOALS:

"I have no idea"—and "The future is endless."

PHOTO BY ARJAN DE KOCK



BROOKE RABOUTOU AT USA CLIMBING OPEN BOULDERING NATIONALS, SLC, FEB 2017.

BROOKE'S TICKS:

Southern Smoke (5.14c), Red River Gorge, Kentucky, 2016; *Fragile Steps (V13)*, Rocklands, 2014

COMPETITIONS:

Second in female youth B IFSC World Youth Championships Guangzhou (CHN) 2016; ninth in Women's Bouldering IFSC World Cup (B)—Vail (USA) 2017

GOALS:

Keep having fun, travel the world, find outdoor projects.

PHOTO BY ANDREA LAUE

Both Raboutous climb quickly and rhythmically. Shawn has bouldered V15, while Brooke has climbed V13—and both siblings have redpointed 5.14.

Brooke has bouldered V13.

With Shawn, says Robyn, "My son is a completely different card than my daughter. He is on his own path and needs very little help." Whereas Brooke is still a bit more receptive to her mom's guidance—both in climbing and in decisions such as where to go to college. This year, Shawn entered the University of Colorado Boulder studying business. His real passion is climbing outdoors, so he uses the gym and competitions mainly to stay fit for the rock. In August, he ticked his latest V15, *Khoikhoi*, in South Africa. In response to his growing success, Shawn says, "I would always see people like Daniel [Woods] just shitting on my dreams by warming up on my projects. Now I get to call him up and we can sesh it together."

On the other hand, Brooke spends 15 hours a week climbing, with another 9 hours of training, often under her mother's tutelage. She is one year ahead in school, so plans to start college next August (likely out of state). Brooke admits that she "used to get scared while leading," but has since learned to better control this fear, especially with a conscious safety check before each climb. Meanwhile, Shawn deals with his trepidation with humor: He related to me a story about having a quickdraw sever his rope during a 30-meter fall, then belly-flopping into a shallow pool at the base and surviving. He later explained that the story was a joke, but making up these "random worst-case scenarios" helps him stay lighthearted about what can be a dangerous sport.

As siblings, Brooke and Shawn are more supportive of each other than competitive. Says Brooke, "I've never felt competitive with my brother because we are such different climbers." And, as a big brother, Shawn says, "I could never feel anything other than pride when my sister has success. After all, she's my sister and I love seeing her happy." And in classic big-brother fashion, when asked if he ever feels protective of Brooke, Shawn responds, "Yeah—touch her and you die!"

—JOHANNA FLASHMAN



MARGO HAYES AT THE USAC YOUTH BOULDERING NATIONALS, SLC, 2017.

MARGO HAYES

Age 19 / Boulder, Colorado

IN FEBRUARY 2017, Margo Hayes became the first woman to climb a 5.15a with *La Rambla* in Siurana, Spain—this September, she followed up with the first female red-point of *Realization*, Chris Sharma’s benchmark 5.15a in Céüse, France.

Originally a gymnast, Hayes started off climbing with her dad, Tom, who would take Margo and her older sister, Nola, climbing in Boulder Canyon. At 10 years old, Hayes joined ABC Kids Climbing in Boulder, Colorado, where Robyn Erbesfield-Raboutou coached her (see *Portrait*, p.22). At 13, she quit gymnastics to focus on climbing. In July 2017, Hayes competed in her first IFSC lead World Cup in Briançon, France, where she came in sixth. In September, Hayes came in third at the IFSC Youth World Championships Combined in Innsbruck, Austria.

Like any top climber, Hayes has faced setbacks. In 2014, she bottomed out through the pads at the

Pan American Championships in Mexico City. A trip to the doctor revealed that she’d sustained a compression fracture in her vertebrae that landed her in a body brace for two months, with another month of enforced rest after that. Says Hayes, “It was frustrating not being able to climb, let alone be active at all.” Moving on from the injury, Hayes has been careful to strengthen and engage her core to better support her spine.

Since *La Rambla*, Hayes has become a champion for women climbers. Outside of climbing, her curious, playful demeanor leads her into all types of learning. Currently, her interests include independent study in French, digital art, coding, and drawing. (Since graduating from high school, Hayes is on a gap year.) She also hopes to establish routes of her own, to give back to the climbing community. Says Hayes, “To climb a route takes effort, but not even a fraction of what it must take to establish one.”

TICKETS:

First woman to climb a 5.15a with *La Rambla* in Siurana, Spain, February 2017; first female ascent of *Realization* (5.15a), September 2017; first female ascent of *Bad Girls Club* (5.14d), Rifle, Colorado

COMPETITIONS:

2017: Sixth in the Briançon World Cup, third in the IFSC Youth Combined in Innsbruck

GOALS:

Become fluent in French, learn Spanish, take university classes, continue to compete and climb outside.

PHOTO BY ANDREA LAUE

PHOTO BY ANDREA LAUE

—JOHANNA FLASHMAN

KAI LIGHTNER

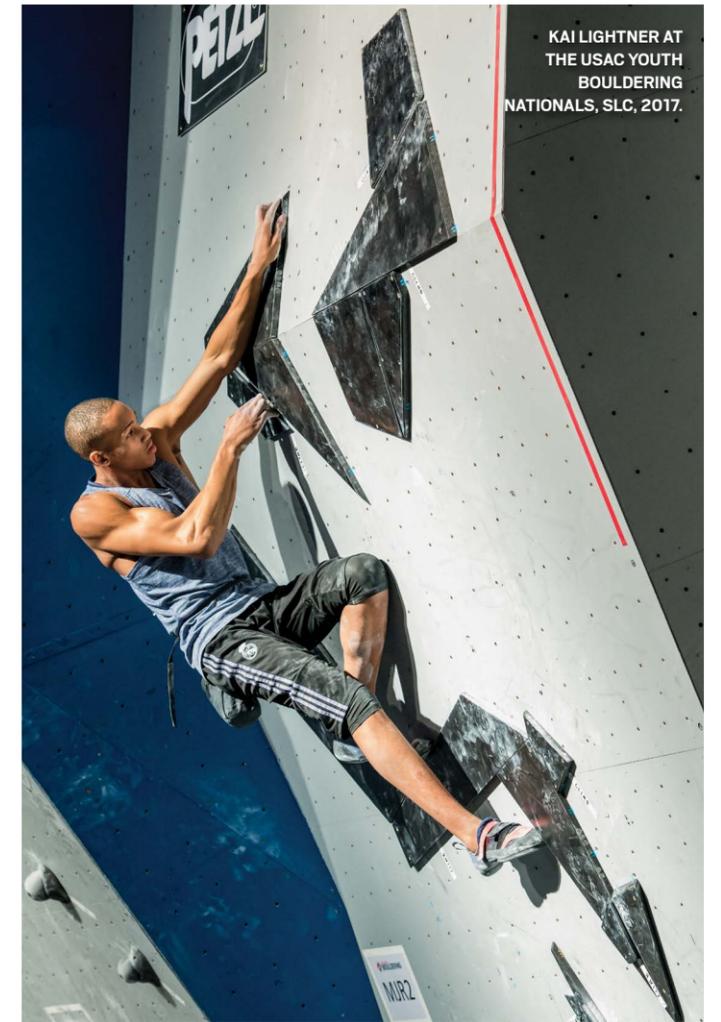
Age 18 / Fayetteville, North Carolina

SINCE BIRTH, Kai Lightner was climbing anything he could—baby gates, brick walls, balconies—and at age six began climbing at The Climbing Place, in Fayetteville, North Carolina. This thanks to his ascent of a flagpole on the Fayetteville State University campus where his mother, Constance, works as an associate professor in the Department of Management and MBA program. Constance yelled at him to come down, and an onlooker gave Constance the gym’s address.

In 2007, at age eight, Lightner attended his first Sport Climbing Series national, and by his mid-teens was winning both in his current bracket (starting at Youth D and moving up as he aged) and in the open/adult nationals. While Lightner spends most of his time indoors, he loves rock: At age 10, he sent his first 5.13s in the Red and New.

In 2016, during a bouldering-circuit session, Lightner’s back went numb. After a series of doctor’s visits, X-rays, and misdiagnoses, Lightner learned he had stress fractures in the T1 and T2 vertebrae. Says Lightner, “For the longest time, I couldn’t lift my arms above my shoulders without it hurting.” During his six-month recovery, Lightner managed the Adaptive Climbing Fundraiser in Fayetteville and hosted clinics through Outward Bound and the YMCA. The November 2016 Youth World Championships were his first comp post-injury, and he won silver in bouldering and lead.

Lightner is one of the few African Americans



KAI LIGHTNER AT THE USAC YOUTH BOULDERING NATIONALS, SLC, 2017.

climbing at his level. He feels like “the embodiment of the lesson to do what you love regardless of the opinions of your peers.” Early in his career, he experienced pushback from people in the black community who told him to play traditional sports, but he’s since gained much more support. This spring, Lightner graduated from Reid Ross Classical High School as valedictorian and will be taking a year off before college to train for the 2020 Olympics. He also has the goal of “establishing my own climbs for the next generation.”

—JOHANNA FLASHMAN

MARC-ANDRE LECLERC

Age 25 / Agassiz, British Columbia

MARC-ANDRE LECLERC, LIKE MANY of today's top climbers, joined a climbing team at a young age. But he soon quit. "I just wanted to climb, and [my coach] wanted us to do 100 push-ups," says Leclerc. After that, he turned to the mountains.

Leclerc, who grew up Agassiz, British Columbia, lived 45 minutes from the gym—the North Cascades were much closer. "We have this huge mountain [Cheam Peak] in front of our house—it looks like something from the Himalayas—so I was like, 'Why don't I just climb here?'" he says.

At 14, Leclerc was making FAs in these mountains—using pitons, a hammer, and a rope ordered online. (*See climbing.com/leclerc*.) He's since tackled tall faces on many peaks in the Canadian Rockies and North Cascades. He frequently returns to Mt. Slesse, where he's claimed many firsts, including the first winter solo of the Northeast Buttress. In March 2016, he dry-tool free soloed the route.

He made his first winter trip to Patagonia in 2015. He started solo up *Tomahawk Exocet* (WI5 5+) on Aguja Standhardt in the dark, and was unsure if the bottom of the route had sufficient ice. Then, as the sun crossed the sky, Leclerc was struck with alpine awe. "Maybe because I had so little expectations beforehand, and then it just unfolded into this awesome climb," he says.

At the time, he still worked construction. After he soloed *The Corkscrew* on Cerro Torre, also in 2015, his sponsorships finally granted him enough money to focus solely on the sport. "But it's still pretty dirtbag-y," he adds.

This summer, he and his girlfriend, Brette Harrington, have been developing a sport-climbing area deep in the front range of

the Canadian Rockies. They've bolted some hard single- and multi-pitch routes, including Leclerc's *Firestarter* (5.13d) and a six-pitch 5.13b, but he sounds more excited about the scenery: "You're hiking through knee-deep grassy meadows, and they're all lit up with wildflowers... with a tornado of butterflies surrounding you—it's magical."

He has bouldering goals too. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they are highballs, like Bishop's *Ambrosia* (V11) and *Too Big to Fail* (V10), each 50 feet tall.

This winter, he's eyeing a new route on Mt. Slesse. It's like El Capitan, he says, but with a massive ice pillar—and a seven-hour ski trip to reach the climb. It's a perfect example of his drive to bring bold, fast, big-wall tactics into the alpine.

TICKS:

All three Torres, Patagonia, solo (2017); *Flying Buttress to East Ridge to summit of Deltaform*, Canadian Rockies, solo (2017); *Titanic* (5.10a A2 W14), Torre Egger, Patagonia, winter solo linkup (2016); *Infinite Patience* (VI M7), Emperor Face, Mt. Robson, solo (2016); *The Corkscrew linkup* (5.10d A1), Cerro Torre, Patagonia, first solo (2015)



MARC-ANDRE LECLERC ON THE ULTIMATE ULTIMATE EVERYTHING, THE FIRST FULL-LENGTH ICE ROUTE UP THE CHIEF, SQUAMISH, BC, JANUARY 2017.

PHOTO BY KIERAN BROWNE

—ULA CHROBAK

YOUNG CRUSHERS GEAR GUIDE



Crimp Chimps Fox Tail or Raccoon Tail chalkbag Kids love dressing up like animals, and these fun, playful chalkbags let them morph into the furry-tailed critter of their choice. As Ivan, 5, said while rocking the easy-open/close raccoon bag, "Rawrrrrrr!" \$60, crimpchimps.com



La Sportiva Gripit Using their No-Edge technology, La Sportiva has created a sticky, soft, sensitive kids' shoe that climbs like a grippy sock. Five-year-old Ivan flew up a 5.7 in them, smearing and standing in sandstone dishes like a champ. \$75, sportiva.com



Evolv Ashima This downturned, aggressive lace-up was designed by Ashima Shiraishi for young climbers with honed footwork. "These allow me to claw up the wall!" said our tester, Zuru, age 11. "They look so cool and look like adult shoes." Size range: 3-10. \$120, evolvsports.com



CAMP Armour Junior Young nogginns are precious. The Armour Junior comes in orange and white/red, and offers a padded chin strap and size-adjustment wheel. It weighs only 11 ounces—perfect for kids who get cranky about accoutrements. \$60, camp-usa.com



Five Ten Moccasym (\$125) and Mini Mocc (\$60) The Moccasym was a favorite of Zuru, who said, "I can wear these all day and they are comfy in the heel." Meanwhile, the Mini Mocc worked great on three-year-old Alexander's feet: easy on, easy off with a side Velcro closure and elastic fit. fiveten.com



Black Diamond Momentum Kid's Full-Body Harness (\$60) and Momentum Harness (\$50; 2018) Getting kids to stay still to get a harness on is tough. Both Momentum offerings were simple, fast, and streamlined, with ample padding for your fussy mini-toproper. blackdiamondequipment.com



8B+ Rocky 8B+ offers a host of fun, playful chalkbags, all with names and backstories. The cute, furry, kid-friendly Rocky "Does around 100 pull-ups a day, but still lives with his parents." Sounds like a future 5.16 climber to us. €27, 8bplus.com



Petzl Tikkid Headlamp Our two brother testers fought over who got to turn on the two-mode flood beam (20 lumens max to protect young eyes) or strobe. The easy-adjust headband was a nice touch, and the battery compartment is protected by a screw. \$25, petzl.com

ASHIMA SHIRAISHI

Age 16 / Queens, New York

TICKS:

Sleepy Rave (V15) Gram-pians, Australia; Horizon (V15), Mt Hiei, Japan; Open Your Mind Direct (5.14d/5.15a), Santa Linya, Spain

COMPETITIONS:

First place in World Youth Climbing Championships in both Lead and Bouldering, 2017, and second in the combined category (2017, Italy) for an uncontested winning streak since 2015

FUTURE GOALS:

Climb V16 and 5.15a/b, compete in the 2020 Olympics.

ASHIMA SHIRAISHI is soft-spoken and smiles often, so it can be difficult to reconcile your first impression of this humble 16-year-old with her beastly ticklist. However, she is likely the most accomplished female climber in history, having climbed two V15s (a grade no other woman has attained) and multiple V14s. And at the 2017 IFSC Youth World Championships in Innsbruck, Austria, Shiraishi won three medals: gold in Bouldering and Sport, and a silver in Combined.

"I have a lot of goals. My biggest one is climbing V16 and climbing a 5.15a or b and then climbing in the Olympics," she told interviewers at The North Face. [Ed. Note: Despite repeated attempts, we were unable to obtain an interview with Shiraishi.] Shiraishi first tried climbing at six years old,

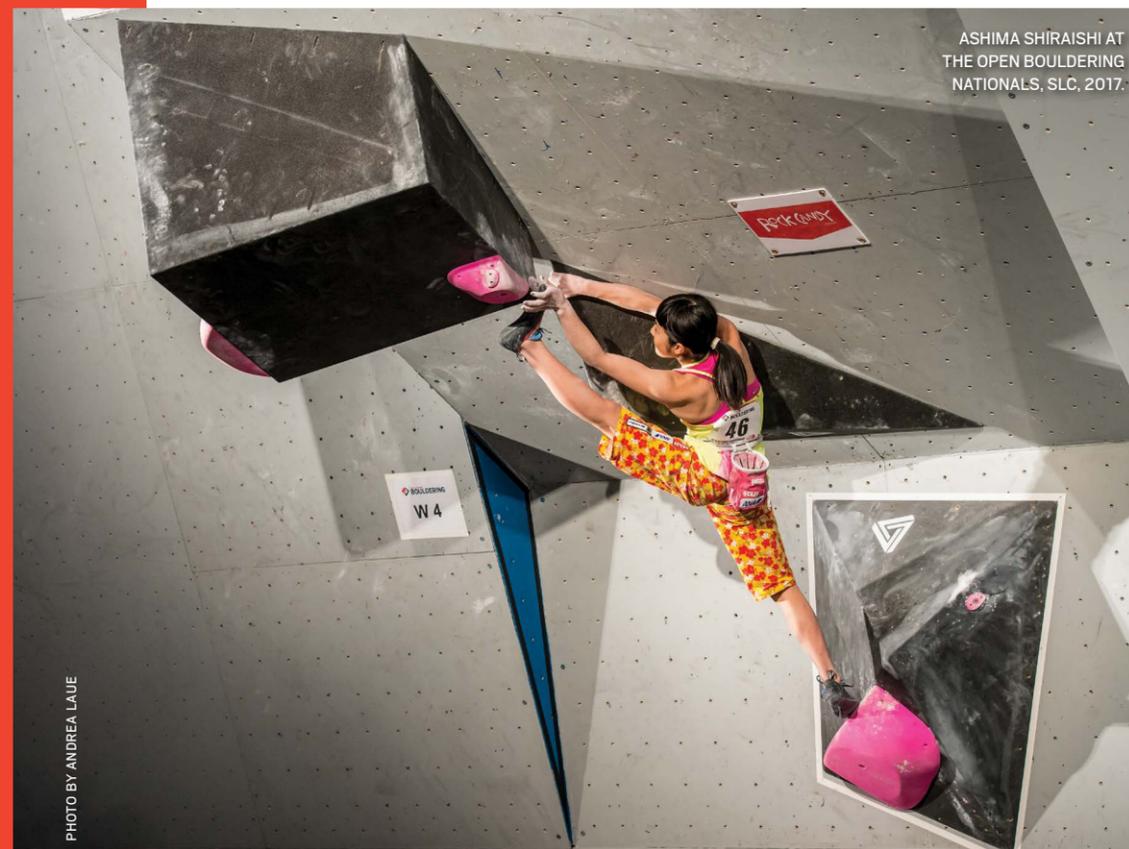
when she was out playing in Central Park with her father, Hisatoshi. She saw climbers on Rat Rock and was immediately enthralled. She has said that she was first attracted by the movement, which was like "dancing on rock." This kinetic, aesthetic appeal may not have been foreign to her since her father is a former modern-style Japanese dancer.

By age seven, she was climbing inside regularly, and, under the encouragement of her father, began competing. At age 8, she sent *Power of Silence (V10)* in Hueco Tanks, Texas. At age 10, she sent *Crown of Aragorn*, making her the youngest to have climbed V13. At the time, only a handful of women in the world had sent confirmed V13.

Her training, while consistent, is not revolutionary. She trains for climbing by climbing. A lot: three to five hours a day, five days a week, she told

Morgan Tilton at gearjunkie.com. Between excelling in school (she is a straight-A student) and climbing, her schedule leaves her with only 5.5 hours to sleep. Formerly coached by Obe Carrion, she now works with Hisatoshi, who, among other things, teaches her to be more graceful.

When asked what she hopes to accomplish on a larger scale, Shiraishi has often stated her desire to break expectations of what women can do, and lead female climbers to one day "dominate" the sport. Alex Honnold summed up her ability to transcend her young age perfectly when he said, in an interview with The North Face, "I don't really think of Ashima as a 14-year-old [now 16]. I think of her as one of the best climbers in the world."



ASHIMA SHIRAISHI AT THE OPEN BOULDERING NATIONALS, SLC, 2017.

FROM LEFT: MATT SAMET; JUSTEN SJONG; MATT SAMET

PHOTO BY ANDREA LAUE

—CALEB SANDERSON