

Michelle wears: Bubble Dress by Colleen Eitzen at The Space R675, Low top trainers by Levis, models own, Necklace and ring, models own



Michelle Leigh

This dazzling Boksburg beauty gives us her slant on matching colours, getting stuck to trees and Winnie the Pooh...

Words: Richard Asher

She likes pepper steak pies, watching rugby and she can do multiple somersaults. The 18-year-old is not only the glamour girl of the local amateur scene, but also has a lovely golf swing. A swing that won her last year's junior Rosebowl and then took her to Scotland to play in the Duke of York trophy.

Just a few months out of school, she's now playing golf full-time and has found her way into the top 40 of the South African amateur rankings. And if she makes it all the way to the LPGA, something tells us she's going to be popular with both the cameramen and fashion labels. But always remember this: Golf Punk found Michelle Leigh first...

So what made you take up golf?

Our family was on holiday at Sabi River Sun in 2003. My whole family plays golf...and I was bored! So I had a go, and my parents said "wow, you've got a fantastic swing!"

What did you shoot in your first round?

Oh, I can't remember! But I was looking at some of the scores from 2004 the other day – I was shooting 120s! So it couldn't have been very good.

But then things picked up quickly, didn't they?

I did start to improve, fortunately! First, I became a member at Royal Oak in Brakpan. *(She pulls a face)* Ja, well, I found that it's not a very challenging course. As my handicap got better I found it too easy.

So you switched to ERPM.

And are you happy there? ERPM has a very good junior section, which is why we chose to move there. It's a challenging, thinking golf course. They've supported me through everything – even the men! I found that they're very sexist at some other clubs.

Sexism? At a golf club?

Whatever do you mean? At some clubs you can even see it on the tee boxes. They've got perfectly manicured men's tees and ladies tees like...pancakes. And when I played in the Junior Club Champs at Royal Oak, and I was the only girl in the field, they said I had to play off the men's tees – quite unfair!

How long was it before you got into playing the big amateur events?

I played my first SA Amateur two years ago. So I've been on the circuit a couple of years, but obviously played a lot more since finishing school last year.

School must have gotten in the way a bit...

Ja, I was a part time student though – I was hardly ever there because of my golf tournaments. But I didn't complain, because I hated school!

Did the others get jealous of your time off for golf?

Man, you have no idea! They'd keep accusing me of going on holiday.

Did you have to stand up in assembly?

No, thank goodness! St Dominic's was an all-girls school, and they supported me to go to tournaments but my golf wasn't especially recognised.

So you got through matric in spite of everything?

Passed it *(giggles)*. It was scary; I actually thought I wouldn't make it. I'd worked hard, though, and once they were written I told myself there was nothing more I could do. I really struggled in Afrikaans.

But you're from Boksburg!

I know *(laughs)*...but I'm just not very good at it!

And now, it's just golf?

I worked on getting a US college scholarship for this year, but we had to turn it down because they couldn't offer a 100 percent bursary. So for now it's just golf and working on my CV, and then I'll try again for a scholarship next year.

Where would you want to study?

I've applied to a whole bunch. But California would be nice. I love the beach...I'm a Jo'burger! I'm thinking of Texas too; it doesn't get too cold there. My dad wants me to go to Arizona – but that sounds like a beach that's a little too big.

Well it's a desert. Could be a bit dull there!

(She looks around and drops to a whisper) Just a bit!

Speaking of America, did you watch the Masters?

I did! I was in bed, but there was no way I could sleep. I was so excited! I just wished I was at Augusta! I really thought Kenny Perry was there. But then he missed those putts...I know the feeling!

Which of the pros do you like?

Adam Scott, for obvious reasons! And Tiger Woods, of course.

You're really well turned-out on the course. You clearly put a lot of thought into your outfits...

Ja, I try to always look good. Hair done, make-up done and matching clothes. I've got a thing about matching clothes. And my Winnie the Pooh socks – they were my lucky socks...though I'm not sure any more after my last putting

display! I've got Pooh driver covers too.

But you haven't met Pooh bear yet, have you?

No...not yet *(laughs)*. But I've liked him since I was little.

Your favourite colour for outfits?

Usually black.

Do you always play with great big earrings?

Yes, they keep my head still when I putt!

Whose style do you admire amongst the pros?

Natalie Gulbis is my favourite. She's stunning.

You're right up there as one of the most gorgeous girls on the local scene. What would you say if people started calling you the Maria Sharapova of golf one day?

That would be nice! Everyone feels good if people say things like that. You want to be recognised for your golf, not your looks...but it's nice if you can get both!

“I'd like to study in California. I love the beach...I'm a Jo'burger!”



Photography: Nick Aldridge. Action shot: Gregory Simpson

Do the other girls get jealous of your looks?

Not that I know of. Although knowing some of them...never mind, I won't even go there!

Eh?

Just, you know...those touchy-feely types of girls. (*shudders*) I rather stick with my mom! She travels everywhere with me.

Do you play golf every day?

Yup, I'm at golf every day of the week from nine to five. Usually two rounds a week and nine holes on a Friday. I usually play with my folks, as they run their own business. The

rest of the time I'm at the range.

But what if there's something on TV?

Not allowed! My dad says I've got to either practice full-time or start working.

Fair enough. But weekends are free, then. What do you get up to?

I just hang around with friends and go to movies. I'm not the clubbing type. I don't drink, don't smoke. No alcohol at all...I'm a goody good-shoes.

Why?

I dunno. You know, a lot of people I know have been in car accidents while under the influence. I just thought, "what's the

MICHELLE LEIGH

DATE OF BIRTH:

28 June 1990

HOME TOWN:

Boksburg

SCHOOL:

St Dominic's Catholic School for Girls

HOME CLUB:

ERPM, WGSA

RANKING:

22

WINS:

2008 U/18 Rosebowl

point?" And smoking's just stupid; my grandfather died from lung cancer.

Tell us some funny tales from the golf course...

Well, I got stuck to a tree at Royal Cape in the SA Amateur Stroke Play last month! I had to lean on this tree to play my ball – and I couldn't get up! I was stuck to the tree! It was covered in that resin stuff...and I had white pants on. My hands were all sticky and I had this mess all down my side for the rest of the round. What a day! Oh, and I've had a dog pick up my ball and take it out of bounds at Royal Durban. I hit a great drive and this German Shepherd just came along, picked up my ball and dropped it on the racecourse!

Good stories...got any more?

I've thrown a club...by accident! It was raining. It was a par three over water. My club slipped out of my hand and in it went. I had to pay a caddie R100 to fetch it.

What will you study when you get to college?

I applied for sports science last time, but I'm also thinking about going for education...I could be a teacher!

Ah, so you're patient?

I am. And I like little people. The older ones are full of crap though. That happens as soon as they get married, basically.

You don't sound keen on marriage.

Well, I've got to get into the dating scene first.

What? No boyfriend?

Nope, I've been single for four years now. I'm becoming a nun! Nobody's interested!

Oh, please. What are you talking about?

I promise, it's true! And guys keep complaining that I have no time. So I have to explain that I'm going to be at golf and I'm going to travel, so if they can't handle that then it's cheers.

We've heard you might have a few gym tricks to show us?

I was actually a provincial gymnast before I started golf. I did that for 10 years. I was training for the Junior Olympics, and represented Gauteng, but missed out on SA colours. Then I realised I was only ever seeing the gym, school and home. So I thought 'that's it' and packed it in.

Hey, so when you win a Major, you can do a back-flip into a lake!

Well, I was also a drummie at school and people say I should do spins and throws as I go down fairways. So ja, maybe I could spice it up by doing a somersault too! 🙌



Michelle wears: T-shirt with waistcoat by Amanda Laird Cherry at The Space R450, Shorts by Vida at YDE R385, Espera Rainbow slip ons by Puma R699, Golfing cap by Puma, Golf Punk's own

Photographer: Nick Aldridge
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Production Advisor: Mandy Meo
Stylist: Caroline Olavarrieta @
One League Creative Management
Hair & make up: Sjani @
One League Creative Management