

A photograph of Ashley Wagner and Adam Rippon standing back-to-back against a plain white background. Adam Rippon, on the left, has short grey hair and is wearing a light purple tank top, blue jeans, and white sneakers. Ashley Wagner, on the right, has long red hair and is wearing a denim vest over a black top, a black skirt, and high-heeled sandals. The title 'Lean on me' is written in large, brown, serif font to the right of the couple.

# Lean on *me*

## Wagner, Rippon navigate life's highs and lows together

Ashley Wagner, wearing a sizzling pink romper and strappy gold heels, snatches up a pair of boxing gloves.

"This is perfect!" she tells the team orchestrating her photo shoot with BFF Adam Rippon. "I'm usually yelling at him."

Ashley and Adam. They can be flip with each other, they can laugh together, and they certainly can cry together. But — they always have each other's back.

SKATING magazine asked reporter Amy Rosewater to sit down with the two training mates during 2015 Champs Camp in Colorado Springs for an interview that bounces from Dippity-do to disappointment to hair crises and, yes, skating.



*“When you  
and bae do  
a cover shoot  
together”  
#fancy  
@Adaripp*

*“I will car dance like crazy  
to ‘Shake it Off’ until the  
end of my days. Just sayin’.”*

*@AshWagner2010*



**S** *KATING: Adam, what makes your relationship with Ashley so different?*  
**Adam:** I think when Ashley and I met, we connected on a level that we didn't really ...  
**Ashley:** ... understand.

**Adam:** We knew we were two awkward kids who had moved around for either skating or because our families were moving. I think when you meet someone and you're already in skating, you bond that way. But Ashley and I had so much in common. We just really connected and connected on a family level, like right away.

**SKATING: How did you meet?**

**Ashley:** It was Saint Paul at the ...

**Adam:** ... exhibition.

**Ashley:** We had to fill out the ...

**Adam:** ... paperwork.

**SKATING: OK. You guys are finishing each other's sentences and we just got started.**

**Ashley:** We met each other during those most awkward years. He was straightening his hair and it was really bad.

**Adam:** And she had a slicked-back ponytail with what, Dippity-do? And ringling curls.

**Ashley:** And (I had) braces so you could see them. White brackets. So we met each other then.

**SKATING: And now you're together in Los Angeles. Did either of you encourage the other to head west?**

**Adam:** I've been in California for three years. Ashley wasn't a catalyst at that moment, but it was a move that I had been wanting to make and tried to make before. But knowing that Ashley was out there ...

**Ashley:** I was with Mr. [John] Nicks at the time. Adam pulled me aside at Champs Camp the year that he was thinking about moving out. Of course my eyes lit up. I was so excited. I think it was more like he was terrified. Big move. Big coaching change. It's not easy. I gave him the



support that he needed. He knew Raf [Arutunian] was the guy for him. But every single coaching change I've made since Priscilla [Hill], I have called Adam or FaceTimed him and been in tears. I'd tell him, 'I don't know what to do,' and we'd be on the phone for hours.

**Adam:** We'd make a list of pros and cons.

**Ashley:** And he helped me figure it out.

**Adam:** We've really been there for each other during the highs and the lows.

**SKATING:** *You experienced highs and lows at the 2014 U.S. Championships in Boston. Adam, you were an Olympic hopeful, but finished eighth. Ashley, you were named to the Olympic Team after finishing fourth. How did you help each other during that difficult and chaotic time?*

**Adam:** Ashley's nationals experience was completely bittersweet. It was everything she wanted but in the complete opposite way she wanted it to happen. And for me, it was a blackout experience of like the worst competition experience of my life. I completely talked myself out of it. I didn't feel trained, even though I was. A lot of that competition, I would see so many of my friends in the hallways and I would look at them and be blank. In my mind I kept thinking, 'This is my Olympic chance.'

Right after the [men's] long program, Ashley found me and said, 'Let's just go.' Everyone else who saw me said, 'Oh, I'm so sorry,' like someone had died. Nobody died. I just didn't skate well. I kept it together. I went to her room and sat on her bed and then just started bawling. I started crying that night and had hours where I stopped crying, but pretty much I was crying for the next two weeks.

**Ashley:** That experience was our worst nightmare — for one of us to make it and the other one not. I think the reason why Adam and I have been such good friends over the years — honestly Adam and I have never really fought — is because we're so frank and open and honest with each other.

Right off the bat, we went back to my room and he started processing it. Adam was in total shock. He didn't even know what to do. I just needed to get him out of the arena. Then after he started dealing with it, I just had to be honest with him. I asked him, 'How should we do this? How should we deal with this? Should we just separate what we talk about?' I don't think our friendship has had to go through all that many challenges, but that was a really weird hurdle for us to get over. We've both been in those shoes where you're not on the Olympic Team and you're trying to figure out what's next. (Wagner finished third in the 2010 Olympic year, but the U.S. only had two ladies spots for the Vancouver Games.)

**Adam:** I think right off the bat I had a conversation with myself. 'This happened because you had a bad skate. You skated poorly.' Of course I was jealous that Ashley gets to go to the Olympics and she gets to have that experience. But I knew I wasn't going for no other reason than I didn't skate well. And it happens. And I had to forgive myself, which I didn't want to do. I would rather punish myself for not doing what I set out to do.

**Ashley:** What's so great about us is that we're not ever in direct competition, but we are at the same level so we understand each other. Adam was incredible because as he was going through all of this, I had become a pariah. People were literally attacking me from every single angle. There was so much noise and I was trying to prepare for the Olympics. Adam was the one who pulled me aside and said, 'You are trying your new long program and that's your job.'

**Adam:** Right away I separated my own disappointment. Ashley's my best friend and I wanted only the best for her.

The best thing for her wouldn't be me coming into the rink and being mopey. I would still try to practice and be supportive. There was a lot going on and the Olympic pressure can be suffocating. I just wanted Ashley to know that she only had one job and people have short-term memory. I reminded her that if she skates well, no one will remember how she got there.

**SKATING:** *How did you communicate during the Olympics?*

**Ashley:** It was tough. I talked to him every few days. I wanted Adam to feel like he was part of the experience but I didn't want to rub it in his face. We had a good balance. When I needed him, he was there for me in a heartbeat. And I would call him and check in on him. We put on the shoes that we needed for each other and made it work.

**SKATING:** *Ashley, did you bring Adam anything from Sochi?*

**Adam:** I wanted nothing to do with the Olympics.

**Ashley:** I sent him Valentine's Day cupcakes.

**SKATING:** *In the media run-up to the Olympics, Ashley was the first American athlete to condemn Russia's strict anti-gay laws. Did your relationship with Adam help solidify your decision to make those kinds of comments?*

**Ashley:** I am surrounded by so many incredible people in my life. I focus on the person and who they are and what they're about. So anytime I see anyone being blatantly defined by one thing or another, you really strip them of their personality. Having a best friend who is gay, having family members who are gay and knowing that being gay is such a small snippet about who they are ... So when we were on that [U.S. Olympic Committee Media Summit] stage and I heard everybody giving those cookie-cutter responses because they're afraid of what people would say, scared of what Russia would do, it just felt wrong. I didn't think my comments were brave or forward-thinking. I just felt like it was being honest and what needed to be said.

**SKATING:** *Adam, what was your reaction to Ashley's public stance?*

**Adam:** My first reaction was, 'Of course.' I know Ashley and she would never give an answer unless it was true to her. I was just so proud of her. When you're in those pressure situations, sometimes the pressure takes over and you're afraid of what people will say. She stuck to her guns and stayed true to herself.

Beyond that, it's the year 2015. So many more athletes are willing to be open and it's part of the culture now to be more open about who you are and what your interests are. Of course people are interested in your sexual orientation. People love rumors.

When athletes come out and say that they're gay, it makes it a little more normal and less of a big deal — especially in the athletic community. You have a lot of respect for your fellow athletes for working hard toward a goal. Their sexual orientation takes a backseat to that.

Being gay is not something that defines me. What defines me is what my mom always taught me: to treat everyone with respect, to always be a hard worker and to be kind. Those are the things that define me.

**SKATING:** *You considered coming out before the Sochi Olympics.*

**Adam:** I did think about it. I feel so overwhelmed that U.S. Figure Skating wants to be a part of me. It's a huge thing to have your sport's governing body be a part of that and to show all their athletes that they accept them for who they are and for their individual personalities. When you go out and compete, you want to represent [the organization] to the best of your ability, and you want to represent your true, authentic self. When you're honest

with yourself, you can do that. I want to be a relatable example.

And I want to say something to the dad out there who might be concerned that his son is a figure skater. I mean look at me; I'm just a normal son from small-town Pennsylvania. Nothing changed.

I'd just like to be a good role model. I've been honest with myself the whole time. I worked hard and loved what I did.

**SKATING: Switching gears. You both train with Rafael Arutunian. How would you describe him as a coach?**

**Ashley:** He's a teddy bear wrapped up in a grizzly bear's clothing. Don't get me wrong, if you're having a bad day and he's in one of those moods, he will tear you to shreds. But he is so passionate about what he does. He's obsessed with the technical side of skating, but he really cares about you as a person. I can have a bad day on the ice and he could be screaming at me, but as soon as I get off the ice, he will ask me, 'It seems like something's wrong.' And I will think, 'OK, where were you the last three hours of my life?' He really cares about his students, and he is obsessed with being the best. He knows what he can do but he's also so humble. This year, winning [PSA] Coach of the Year was so good for him because Raf very rarely takes a step back to see what he does. These last Olympics could have been my last, but Raf gave me four more years of my career and I cannot thank him enough.

**Adam:** Rafael took me from a really bad place and it's definitely been a complete process to get me to the place I am now. Rafael believes that I can do this.

**SKATING: At the 2015 U.S. Championships, Ashley, you reclaimed the U.S. title, your third. Adam, you earned the silver medal and had people on their feet. Describe your experiences.**

**Ashley:** It was about showing up prepared. Raf got us to a place where we could rely on what he had us do all season. Nationals is never easy. I don't think you will ever go out and say, 'I can do this.' I think you will always go out and say, 'I hate skating. Why do I do this? Why is this my job? I'm crazy!'

**Adam:** And you say, 'In 10 minutes it will all be over.'

**Ashley:** We left there and silenced a lot of people. That's what this was more about. We're older for our sport — by no means are we old — but we are late bloomers.

**Adam:** Absolutely. I think at the beginning of last season, people were ready to write me off, and I think with the rivalry Ashley has with Gracie [Gold], people thought Gracie would win again.

**Ashley:** So it was more that we had something to prove and we would not be pushed out. It was more standing our ground. We're here to stay.

**SKATING: How close do you live to each other in Los Angeles?**

**Ashley:** Fifteen minutes. He has a key to my place and I have a key to his. We live at each other's houses. For big events, like the Nickel-

odeon Kids' Choice Awards, Adam came over and we got ready. He's seen me dig through my closet and I just throw things. But the time we coordinate outfits the most is for nationals. Nationals is like our Oscars.

**Adam:** It's our Fashion Week.

**Ashley:** All we want to do, besides winning a national title, is to be named icenetwork's 'Best Dressed' by Sarah [Brannan] and Drew [Meekins].

**SKATING: What about the new hair colors? Did you give each other advice?**

**Adam:** We talked to each other and were like, 'Are you sure you want to do it? Well, I'm going to do it anyway!'

**Ashley:** If Adam says, 'I'm going to dye my hair hot pink,' and I say no, he'll do what he's going to do. So I make a suggestion. If he says, 'I want to get a fire-engine red hairstyle,' I'll say something like, 'How about you go get some hair chalk and get a red streak?'

**Adam:** And that happened. I wanted fire-engine red, and I got hair chalk. Then I was like, 'I don't want to do this anymore.'

**Ashley:** So it's more like I've learned how he works and processes things and I put out fires where I can. It's like with your kids: You need to let them fail to realize that was a bad thing to do, kind of like the 'Hair Incident of 2014.'

**Adam:** Sometimes I throw caution completely to the wind because you know what? A lot of times it doesn't matter. It's just hair.

**Ashley:** But I will say this — because you need to be embarrassed for this — he was blowing out his hair and would say, 'Ugh it's such a process!'

**Adam:** I didn't have time for it.

**Ashley:** So his roommate gets his hair chemically straightened. ...

**Adam:** ... And while he was doing it one day, I said, 'Oh, can you throw some of that on me, too?' I had a weave on top of my hair and if I pulled my hair too hard, it would fall out. I was Beyoncé.

**Ashley:** No, because Beyoncé would have put on a wig. You were Crazy Eyes on 'Orange is the New Black.' The chemicals fried his hair. It was dead.

**Adam:** It had to grow back.

**Ashley:** And every day I reminded him about it.

**SKATING: Any other 'Hair Incidents'?**

**Adam:** After the Olympics, Ashley and I were like, 'Let's go celebrate.' So we decided to go dancing. Ashley and I were dancing and I was doing a lot of head movements, and I did a head roll into her mouth.

**Ashley:** I literally chomped on his head.

**Adam:** I had to go to the hospital the next day. And I'm like, 'Oh, I hit it on a cabinet.' I had to get liquid stitches. I do have a scar, see? Ashley's literally always on my mind.

**Ashley:** So I mean, we're good partners. We're partners in crime.

## Ashley

Age: 24

Hometown: Alexandria, Virginia

### Career highlights

- Three-time U.S. champion (2015, '13, '12)
- 2014 Olympic team bronze medalist
- 2012 Four Continents champion
- Three-time Grand Prix Final medalist

### Training journey

CURRENTLY:

- Los Angeles (Rafael Arutunian)

PREVIOUS:

- 2011-13 – Aliso Viejo, California (John Nicks)
- 2008-11 – Wilmington, Delaware (Priscilla Hill)
- 2002-08 – Alexandria, Virginia (Shirley Hughes)

### Fashion sense

- Academy Awards: Floor-length shimmering gold Mark Bauer gown
- Nickelodeon Kids' Sports Choice Awards: Floral skirt and pink crop top AQ/AQ by Revolve Clothing
- Everyday: Madewell, For Love and Lemons, Aritzia

### Hair color

- Natural: Brown
- Last season: Blonde
- Currently: Auburn

## Adam

Age: 25

Hometown: Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

### Career highlights

- Two-time U.S. silver medalist (2015, '12)
- Two-time World Junior champion (2008-09)
- 2008 U.S. junior champion
- 2007 JGP Final champion

### Training journey

CURRENTLY:

- Los Angeles (Rafael Arutunian)

PREVIOUS:

- 2011-12 – Detroit (Jason Dungjen, Yuka Sato)
- 2008-11 – Toronto (Brian Orser)
- 2007-08 – Hackensack, New Jersey (Nikolai Morozov)

### Fashion sense

- Academy Awards: Classic black tux and bow tie by Vera Wang
- Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Sports Awards: Skinny jeans, favorite yellow T-shirt and sky blue blazer by Topman
- Everyday: on the ice – Lululemon; off the ice – Topman, Uniqlo, Marine Layer

### Hair color

- Natural: Brown
- Last season: Blonde and brown and a few shades in between
- Currently: Silver



# Ashley *and* Adam favorites

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**Dessert:**

Warm apple pie with vanilla ice cream ----->

<----- Vanilla ice cream

**Actress:**

<----- Jennifer Lawrence ----->

**Actor:**

Jake Gyllenhaal ----->

<----- Johnny Depp

**Skater:**

Michelle Kwan ----->

<----- Alexei Yagudin

**Beverage:**

Coffee of any sort ----->  
(milk tea a close second)

<----- Milk tea

**Vacation spot:**

<----- Maui ----->

**Restaurant:**

Nobu Malibu ----->

<----- Fusion Sushi, Manhattan Beach

**Sports team:**

Washington Capitals ----->

<----- Los Angeles Kings

**Place to live:**

Miami ----->

<----- L.A. or Toronto

**Dish made by mom:**

I'm going to totally call out my mom  
right now and say Hamburger Helper ----->

<----- Meatloaf

**Singer:**

Mumford and Sons ----->

<----- Sia

**Season:**

<----- Fall ----->