

'DWTS' Pro Tony Dovolani on His Celebrity Marriage: "My Wife is My Queen"



Interview by

[Whitney Johnson](#). Written by Maria Darbenzio and Liz Kim.

Tony Dovolani has come a long way from the three-year-old learning to folk dance in Prishtina, Kosova. Early on, Dovolani's father discovered that his son had a knack for both dance and music. Dovolani eventually became a professional ballroom dancer and has been on ABC's *Dancing With the Stars* for a whopping 17 seasons now.

Before his career ever took off, Dovolani knew that dancing had its perks. "As I got older, I realized that the dancers got all the girls," he says with a laugh. After coming to the

United States as a teenager, he was introduced to the Fred Astaire Dance Academy. “After the first step I took into the studio, I knew right away that was going to be the rest of my life.”

As time progressed, he choreographed *Shall We Dance* with Jennifer Lopez and Richard Gere and then landed a spot on season two of *DWTS*, where he was paired with Stacy Keibler. Since then, he has developed The Ballroom Dancing Channel with fellow pros Maksim Chmerkovskiy and Elena Grinenko, created the Superstars of the Ballroom Dance Camp, and won the coveted mirror ball trophy with Melissa Rycroft during the All-Stars season of *DWTS*.

Fast forwarding to season 18 of the popular ABC reality show, Dovolani is currently paired with NeNe Leakes, one of the sassy stars of *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*. Although he mentions their great chemistry, they did have a minor issue after switching partners for a week. “She’s great. I mean, we had one little tiff that everybody saw. Other than that, it’s really been a lot of fun,” he candidly shares. “She’s hilarious. She has so much character. She shows up ready to work, which is good.”

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As viewers saw on last week’s episode, the twosome used that bump in the road to strengthen their partnership and ultimately wow the judges with their salsa. “What you guys didn’t see is that routine came about from us working with each other. If we had an attitude the whole week, it wouldn’t have happened.”

When it comes to the rest of the season, the dancing pro has no worries about Leakes and her abilities on the dancer floor. “I think she’s on a good track. We’re going to keep pushing her every single week. I feel like she’s the fun one

in the show, and we want to keep entertaining our fans all the way to the end.” Of tonight’s tango, he says, “I want it to be passionate, hateful, sultry, sexy, and vulgar. I want it to be everything!”

Dovolani works hard both on and off the dance floor, making sure that his wife Lina and their three young children are always his number one priority. “My wife is my queen. I wouldn’t be anywhere without her,” he shares. “Honestly, the saying ‘Behind a great man is an even greater woman’ is absolutely true in my case. She takes care of the kids. She takes care of the house. She takes care of everything while I’m trying to do the show business thing. I think that men in general have to realize how strong women are.”

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When it comes to keeping his marriage strong, he points out that proper communication is key to success. Plus, he knows that great relationships don’t just happen: “You have to constantly work on it. If you do that, there’s always a light at the end of the tunnel.”

Communication is not only important in his relationship with his wife but with his children – Luana, Adrian, and Ariana – as well. Because of his busy schedule on the show, he doesn’t get to see his children as often as he’d like, but he doesn’t let the distance stop him from being there for them. “I literally call five, six, sometimes seven times a day. Every time I’m on a break, I’m on the phone with my family,” he explains. “When they get home from school, they speak to me. Right before they go to bed, they speak to me. When they’re doing their homework, they speak to me.”

Dovolani sweetly adds, “I’m telling you it’s all about communication, and my wife deserves the credit. She’s the one that works on it with me and the kids. She’s really great

about making sure we all communicate and stay on top of things.”

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Luckily for him, his love of dance has been passed down to his children, and the family of five enjoys having dance parties at home. Besides that, they enjoy being outside. “Honestly, in this technology-filled world, as parents, it’s our responsibility to make sure we find reasons to get the kids out of the house and into nature. We go ice-skating. We go skiing. We do any sport that we can do as a family.”

Keeping that thought in mind, they already have some fun summer plans. He’ll be visiting Albania for his niece’s wedding, and once back home he hopes to relax and fish with his kids at a lake near their house. Of course, Dovolani and his wife make sure they have some alone time too. Their date nights are usually at a nice restaurant, enjoying a delicious meal and a few glasses of wine. “My perfect day is playing golf with my kids and ending it with dinner at the clubhouse with Lina.”

Tune in to ABC on Mondays at 8/9c to watch Tony Dovolani and Nene Leakes dance their way to the top on Dancing with the Stars! You can also keep up with Tony on Twitter @TonyDovolani.