

Celebrity Interview: 'American Idol' Mackenzie Bourg Channeled JLO During Love Songs



By [Katie Gray](#)

The 15th and final season of American Idol is coming to an end! Next week is the finale and the 'Final Idol' will be announced. Last night Mackenzie Bourg was sadly eliminated after a great season. The 23-year-old from Lafayette, Louisiana put on quite the performance for his hometown visit before being cut. Bourg who was first seen on season three of The Voice on team CeeLo Green, also plays the guitar and piano. In our celebrity interview with this Idol star, Bourg

opened up about the way in which he channels emotion while singing love songs, who he would like to perform a duet with and his plans to tour in the future.

Former American Idol Contestant Talks Reality TV & Loyal Fans In This Celebrity Interview

The singer discussed how American Idol allowed him to be his true self. “I think American Idol has done me so many favors, just by not trying to change me – by letting me be myself,” he explained. With this platform, he has had the opportunity to expand his audience and reach people on a broader spectrum. “I get on Twitter and Instagram, and all these things, and there’s so many people I don’t even know, sending me nothing but love and support.” He continued, “And those people want me to succeed as much as the people at home.” From his presence on social media, it’s evident that Bourg has a close connection to his fans and followers. Some of them have even started calling themselves the ‘Mac Pack.’

[Celebrity Interview: American Idol Sonika Vaid](#)

Hometown Hallelujah:

During his hometown visit, he did a fantastic rendition of Leonard Cohen’s famed ‘Hallelujah.’ Bourg said, “Hallelujah’s one of the first songs I ever learned.” The television star used to perform it when he was starting out his career years ago, so he says it is a track that is near and dear to his heart. This weighed heavily on Bourg’s decision to perform this song for his hometown visit and ultimately what ended up being his final performance. He explained, “I just wanted to go out with something that left a good taste in people’s mouth about me.”

For Bourg, the song was a metaphor. "To me, the song was more than just the lyrics," he explained. "It's kind of like a reminder of how far I've come." This explains why we were able to see the passion and emotion in his performance. He clearly gave it his all and went out with a riveting performance. "I sang it so passionately, just because I remember five or six years ago when I first learned that song, how bad I was at the song and how I never thought that in my wildest dreams I'd be on the biggest stage in the world – performing it." Every one can take a cue from him, that life is about learning and growing. Nobody is perfect at something in the beginning, but with hard work you can achieve your wildest dreams.

From his time on American Idol and The Voice, it is apparent that Bourg performs love songs very well. Not only does the singer perform them, but he also writes them! This is why his favorite love song to perform is one of his very own. "I like the love song that I wrote, called, 'Roses.' It's a pretty cool love song."

Relationships go hand in hand with love songs. On American Idol we saw that Bourg has found a mentor in Lauren Alaina. Unfortunately for fans who were hoping for a Bourg-Alaina romance, they're not going to be a celebrity couple any time soon because she is already taken. "She's been awesome, I know she has a boyfriend so we're definitely just friendly. But yeah, she's been so supportive of me." Furthermore; "She's been a great mentor, not just musically but in the encourage department too." Bourg let us know that Alaina sends him positive text messages and genuinely congratulates him for his success on the show.

Bourg performed a variety of love ballads on American Idol. He even sang the classic 'I Want You To Want Me' by Cheap Trick for rock week! When asked where he gets his emotion to sing these deep love song he explains, "The easiest way to sing love songs on the show is to kind of stare at JLO in the eyes," said Bourg. "It kind of works sometimes when she

realizes, she commented on it a few times this year. But yeah, that's definitely who I'm channeling when I'm on the show."

[Celebrity Interview: American Idol Contestant Tristan McIntosh](#)

Not only is Bourg open to expressing emotions in his love songs, but he is open to performing a duet. If he had to pick someone to do a duet with, it would be Taylor Swift. "I would probably say, I mean just picking it vocally, I would say Taylor Swift would probably sound really good singing with me. I know she did a song with Ed Sheeran that was really awesome." He added, "That would definitely be a cool song that I think I could do with her."

As for his plans for the future, he will be furthering his career in the music industry and going on tour. "Yeah, there's definitely a chance I'll be touring. I don't think the show will be touring, but that's definitely the plan and to release 'Roses' – a song I wrote and played on the show." 'Roses' is set to be his next single. In fact, he tweeted today that he is recording it tomorrow!

Tune in next week to see who will be the Final Idol!

You can keep up with Mackenzie Bourg by following him on Twitter @mackenziebourg!

'American Idol' Star Joey Cook Opens Up About Her

Celebrity Engagement: “He’s the Love of My Life!”



By [Rebecca White](#)

Joey Cook will not only leave the reality TV show *American Idol* having gained experience and knowledge in the music industry, but she’s also walking away with a [celebrity engagement](#)! Cook’s longtime boyfriend Evan Higgins proposed a few weeks ago, and the now-famous couple shared the news on Twitter on Thursday, Mar. 26. In our celebrity interview, the performer opens up about the special moment, saying, “The proposal was really sweet. He’s the love of my life!”

Behind the Scenes of Joey Cook's Celebrity Engagement

Even though *American Idol* keeps the contestants incredibly busy, Higgins whisked Cook away for ten minutes in between photo shoots to get down on one knee and put a ring on her finger. "There was this garden with a bench in the hotel we were staying at," the performer reveals. "He started out with all of this heartfelt stuff, and I thought he was going to break up with me! I was thinking, 'Wait until the show's done!'" Not only did Higgins find the perfect backdrop for a proposal, but he also made sure that the singer had her support system with her to make it even more special. "Evan called my family and made sure my mom was going to be there. My childhood best friend was there too," Cook adds.

Related Link: ['American Idol' Performer Qaasim Middleton Says, "My Girlfriend Has Been a Huge Impact in My Life!"](#)

The couple has carried out their relationship and love since 2009 and will celebrate their anniversary this summer – just in time for them to tie the knot. "I want to do the wedding soon because we've always wanted a summer wedding," the reality TV star gushes. "And it'll be six years this summer, so it's perfect!" Although we're sad to see her leave the competition, we're excited that she now has time to plan the perfect celebrity wedding with her beau.

American Idol Contestant Talks About What the Reality TV Show Taught Her

Of course, Cook didn't just chat with us about her perfect celebrity engagement story. The eliminated contestant says that *American Idol* has provided her with so many resources for

her future. “They’ve exposed me to millions of people,” she shares. “I’ve never had vocal lessons before, and getting access to all of this information and being able to work with my vocal coach was amazing. I learned more about music in this last few months than I did in my whole life before now!”

The singer says she couldn’t be more grateful for the life-changing experience, which taught her more about herself as well. “I wasn’t confident as a vocalist before, and this show has shown me that, along with playing instruments and writing music, I’m a singer, and that’s what I do,” she explains. “It’s proven to me that I am good enough, and I am capable and deserving.” We couldn’t agree more!

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After saying her goodbyes, Cook has a different vision of who she is as a performer. “Now that I’ve been soaked in the *American Idol* world, I see myself so much differently when it comes to what I can do with a show and a backdrop and little things like that,” the singer says. “It made everything larger than life for me.”

You can keep up with Joey on Twitter @IamJoeyCook!

Eliminated ‘American Idol’ Contestant Maddie Walker

Talks to Her Fans: “I Was In It For Them”



By Jenna Bagcal

From the tender age of three, Maddie Walker has been pursuing her passion for music. The 17-year-old singer from Ankeny, Iowa, first auditioned for *American Idol* in season 13 but was sent home during Hollywood Week. However, this minor setback didn't stop her from auditioning again, and she made it to the Top 11 on season 14 of the [reality TV](#) show. Last week, she sang “Let's Hear It For the Boy” from the film *Footloose*, which earned her a place in the bottom three. Unfortunately, her journey ended on Wednesday when she was sent home in a double elimination along with fellow contestant Adanna Duru.

Aspiring Country Artist Discusses Her Time on *American Idol*

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As the last contestant on *American Idol* this season representing country music, Walker says, “I think that it’s sad that no one is representing country. It breaks my heart a little bit.” The aspiring star was lucky enough to work with mentor Scott Borchetta, who is known for discovering [Taylor Swift](#). “I really loved working with Scott. I couldn’t have asked for a better mentor because country really is in his wheelhouse,” she shares in our celebrity interview.

Last week, Walker suffered from a ruptured appendix, and there were questions as to whether or not she could perform. “They were saying, ‘Do you think you can sing? You have to put your health first. Don’t worry about the competition.’ The thing is, people voted me through, and I wanted to sing for them,” she explains.

She adds that, although she was in pain prior to and during the show, her fans helped her find the strength to perform. “There were people in the crowd with signs that had my name on it, and I was standing there thinking, ‘How can I say that I’m not going to sing for the people that have taken the time to make a sign and cheer for me?,’” she shares. “I wanted to prove to people that, no matter what happened, I was in it for them – not just for the competition itself but because they were supporting me.”

Related Link: [Adanna Duru Says ‘American Idol’ “Is Like Superstar College!”](#)

Despite her elimination, Walker maintains a positive outlook on her journey and time on the show. “I just need to keep working and moving forward because *American Idol* motivated me

and taught me so much that I could've never learned anywhere else."

We haven't heard the last of this talented performer. "I'm definitely going to start writing and hopefully recording country music because that's my goal," she reveals. "That's what I want to do."

Find out what Maddie is up to on Twitter @TheMaddieWalker! Tune in for American Idol on Wednesdays at 8/7c on FOX.

'American Idol' Runner-Up Jena Irene On Prom With Winner Caleb Johnson: "I Still Don't Have a Dress!"





By Liz Kim

American Idol runner-up Jena Irene Asciutto almost didn't make it onto the show. The 17-year-old singer didn't have enough votes to make it to the Top 10, but the judges saved her, and she is the first wild card contestant since Clay Aiken to make it to the finale. Each week, she proved the decision to save her right and was in the bottom only once during her amazing run. She did admit that almost going home shook her up. "My confidence wasn't that high in the beginning because America didn't vote me in, but that lit a fire under me to prove that I could do it."

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Once she made it to the top 10, Asciutto's star quality was undeniable. Although still young, she's a seasoned performer. From the ages of 12 to 16, she was the front woman for the band Infinity Hour. "Being in a band had a huge impact on me," she says. "I played all around the metro Detroit area, and we played with other bands and kind of did different music

depending on which venue we were playing. That definitely influenced me, and to be around all these local artists was fun because I saw what made them unique.” Unfortunately, she had to quit the band a few months before her audition, but her bandmates have continued to support her from the sidelines.

Despite avoiding the bottom all but once, the runner-up says that she didn’t realize just how far she had made it until the top five. “Once there were only five of us left, that’s when it started to sink in that this was real.” Every competitor had a distinct style, and she knew that it was anybody’s game. “I just remember laying in bed one night wondering how I was there. I was just so excited.”

Although she became friends with all of the finalists, Asciutto has become especially close with 23-year-old Caleb Johnson, who was announced the winner last night. She said she was grateful for his support during the show. “It was a positive effect,” she shares of their friendship. “Even the production team who’ve been doing this for 12 years said they haven’t seen as good of a connection as Caleb and I have. The stress was taken down a couple notches, and performing with my best friend made it better. You don’t get to experience this with just anybody, so I’m glad we did it together.”

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In fact, they are taking their BFF-ship to the next level, and Johnson will be Asciutto’s date for prom. Fans got to watch the footage of her “prom-posa1,” and it was just as sweet as they imagined. “It started out as a joke a couple months ago, and as we got closer to the finale, I realized that I actually didn’t have a date to the prom,” she explains. “He was serious about going the whole time, so I decided why not? Our schedules were able to accommodate the prom date, so I’m really excited.”

And while they're not as daunting as singing on national television, Asciutto has the typical concerns of any teenage girl going to prom. "I still don't have a dress – I'm freaking out!"

Despite wowing the judges and America with her powerhouse vocals, the talented singer remains a humble. She still worries about her grades and has plans to go to a performing arts college. As for her future in music? "The fact that I got this far being so young and a wild card gives me hope," she says. "I am a unique artist, and I'm still trying to figure out who I am. My music has been evolving for the past three years, and I can't wait to see where I end up. I can't say for sure what my album will sound like, but that's the fun part!"

American Idol may be over, but you can still catch Jena on the summer tour! Until then, keep up with her on Twitter @JenaAsciutto1. Check back tomorrow for our interview with winner Caleb Johnson!

'American Idol' Contestant Alex Preston Says His Girlfriend Kept Him Going





By Liz Kim

Even before making it to the top three on *American Idol*, 21-year-old Alex Preston had a pretty impressive background in music. He can play up to 12 instruments (none of which he took lessons for) and has opened for Of Monsters and Men, Gavin DeGraw, and the Backstreet Boys. Music must be in his blood because he's also cousins with country music star Jo Dee Messina, who he's even written songs for.

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Week after week, the judges praised him for this artistry, and he managed to avoid being in the bottom up until the end. A common criticism *Idol* contestants hear is about making each performance seem like an original, but this musician never struggled with that. "When I hear a song, I think of how I would do it, and then I usually take an hour or so and run through the song and run through alternative chords and chordal structures," he says of his process. "I had the most fun arranging songs and making them my own."

This week, the singer broke out of his comfort zone, and during his performance of Bastille's "Pompeii," he played both the drums and the guitar. "This competition has really taken me out of my shell, and I've learned a lot of myself as a performer. I've become more confident."

Although covering popular songs can be a fun challenge, Preston truly enjoys performing his own music and believes allowing more original content will improve *American Idol*. "Playing original music on the show was definitely an amazing opportunity because it's in front of millions of people," he shares. "It's your own lyrics and composition, and playing your own music on a show like *Idol* pushes it to the next level because it shows artistry."

Preston was especially excited to show off his talents when he and his fellow competitors were welcomed back to their hometowns. He went home to Mount Vernon, New Hampshire and gave an "incredible" concert for over 6,000 fans. "I got to show people who I really am outside the show, and that was probably the coolest experience for me."

Despite all of his achievements, the rising star remains humble. "I was expecting to be eliminated this week because Jena and Caleb are so good and their performances are so big," he explains. "I knew deep down that it was going to be them in the finale, but I'm proud to have been in the top three." His strategy during the competition was to take it week by week. "But once I hit top three, I did start thinking about the months ahead, where I want to be, and long term goals outside of the show."

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Beyond improving his musical skills, *Idol* is also where Preston met his girlfriend Jillian Jensen, who fans might remember from season two of *The X Factor*. The couple met during Hollywood Week, and while being apart has been

difficult, the couple are making it work. "It's tough because we live on opposite sides of the country, but it works out because we can always talk and Skype. She came to the shows a lot too," he shares. "It sucks because we can't see each other as much as we'd like to, but since we're both musicians, we understand each other's schedules."

Being a reality television veteran herself, Jensen was a great source of advice. "She always kept me positive. She was completely honest with me whether it was good or bad and told me what she thought. She helped me through a lot in that aspect and kept me going."

Preston's time on the *Idol* stage may be up, but he knows that this is just the beginning. "I'm already starting to try to figure out a way to plan my record. I have a couple co-writes lined up that I do want to get on the album as well," he says. "If I could release a single, that would be awesome. I want to release something as soon as I can and kind of take advantage of the wave of publicity that the show has given me."

Want more of Preston? You can catch him on the American Idol summer tour, but until then, follow him on his Twitter [@RealAlexPreston](#)!

'American Idol' Contestant Jessica Meuse Says Show Affected Her Relationship



by Liz Kim

Jessica Meuse, 23, stood out on this season of *American Idol* – and not just because of her trademark pink hair. The singer from Slapout, Alabama, personified cool-rocker-chick, and her honest and easygoing attitude made her a favorite to both fans and judges. Many competitors get pigeonholed into a single genre, but she admits to being influenced by every genre of music. Her singing style is a mix of gritty rock with metal and country notes.

The singer said her ultimate goal was to stay true to herself and bare her soul to the audience – especially when she sang her original song “Blue-Eyed Lie” this week. “I lived it; that happened to me, word for word. It’s like taking my diary and reading it on national television.”

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Relationships

In 2011, she self-released an album called “What’s So Hard About Bein’ a Man.” All of the songs were influenced by her own life experiences, and most of them focus on dark and serious subjects. Meuse has said this is because she wants her music to give hope to others in similar situations. “Writing my own songs about heartbreak and tough situations teaches me how to let go and just not worry about things you can’t control anymore.”

The contestant’s vocals were praised each week, but the judges repeatedly criticized her on her lack of stage presence and connection with the audience. Keith Urban even said she didn’t have enough “release.” Fans complained that she was picked on more than the other singers, but she chalks it up to part of the experience. “At times, I felt picked on, but it’s part of the game. I know I have bigger things ahead of me, and I’m going to make them happen,” she shares.

She does wish she could have sang more original material though. “I didn’t let not singing originals frustrate me because I do know a lot of cover songs from singing three to four hour gigs at home, but I really would’ve liked to do originals – at least one a week just because that’s who I am as an artist.”

Meuse also agrees that stage presence was most difficult for her – but she did improve during her time on stage. “I believe that I have shown emotion, and I’m growing as an artist,” she explains. “There’s always stuff to work on, but I think I’ve grown a lot on the show. It’s definitely different from singing in a bar where you’re kind of just in the corner and only the bartender is looking at you.”

It’s no surprise that the scrutiny can be unnerving. “You’re on national television, and everyone is looking at how your eye twitches. So it’s definitely something you have to get

used to,” she says. “But I feel like I came into my own, and I figured myself out on the stage, so I’m very proud of that.”

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When you’re in an environment like *Idol*, it’s stressful to say the least. And when you’re also in a relationship, being apart for that long can create a rift. Unfortunately, that’s what happened to Meuse and her boyfriend, Steven Atkins. Although he came to support her during a few of the live shows, ultimately, they went their separate ways. “Being on the show did affect my relationship to the point where it didn’t work anymore, and we’ve actually been apart for about a month now,” she shares. “It’s just not the right time, but he’s a good guy. Sometimes, situations just bring out the worst in people.”

But heartache and stress are nothing new for the talented musician, and she’s determined to achieve all of her goals. “The limits that you have are only the ones you put on yourself. If you really want something, you just have to work for it. After all, I went from singing in a smoky bar with pneumonia to singing on national television.”

This isn’t the last you’ll see of Jess! You can catch her on the American Idol summer tour. Until then, keep up with her on Twitter @JessMeuse.

‘American Idol’ Contestant Malaya Watson Says, “I’m Not

Afraid to Be Myself”



By Liz Kim

At only 16 years old, Malaya Watson is the youngest contestant ever to compete on *American Idol*. She dominated the competition from early on, and viewers quickly forgot how young she was after listening to her powerhouse vocals. Her positive attitude, confidence, and jokes garnered a lot of fans, so it was no surprise that the singer's elimination caused controversy with many who stated that the judges use of the save last week was a joke and that Watson deserved it more than Sam Woolf. Some have also said she deserved to win and that the votes were miscounted, while others announced that they would no longer watch the show.

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[Didn't Change Who I Am At All](#)

Throughout it all, Watson remains upbeat. Although she didn't walk away the winner, she still gets a neat consolation prize. "It's weird being the youngest contestant, but it's cool because I can 'be in the books,'" she says. "It's pretty awesome." She admits, though, that being a teenager also has its downfalls. "At the same time, it was hard because I also have to focus on school. Managing time with school and my music and just trying to balance everything evenly and get everything done was tough."

The Southfield, Michigan native cites her father Ronald Watson and her two grandfathers as her musical influences. Her father is a professional guitar player, and the contestant shares, "If he didn't do music, I wouldn't have either because I wouldn't have been around it a lot. Growing up, I was always around music, and having him around always playing music really influenced me." Her childhood explains her love for old school R&B, blues, and soul music, and it makes sense that she can see her first album having a similar sound.

Watson may have an impressive set of pipes, but that's just the beginning. She can also play the tuba, the sousaphone, and the piano. Although she can't divulge all of her secrets, she hinted at a tuba performance during the *Idol* summer tour and even planned on playing it next week had she stayed.

The performer also stood out because of her trademark glasses and braces. Although the music industry is notorious for unrealistic beauty standards, she says the best advice she received on the show was to always focus on the music. "Harry told me that I should focus more on my craft rather than my stardom," she says of judge Harry Connick Jr. "At first, I thought the music business was just all about how you look, but it's honestly all about how you sound."

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About Being a Role Model

With school and music, there's hardly any time to worry about boys and dating, but Watson still knows exactly what she wants. "He has to play football; he has to be taller than me (in heels); and he can't be stupid," she reveals. "He has to have a nice side and be loyal and honest, and he must be busy because my schedule is busy. He also has to understand what I'm going through – no whiners!"

Although she's still young, the singer has a good head on her shoulders. Her advice to teens wanting to audition for *American Idol* and pursue a career in music is to "focus on school but to follow what your heart wants you to do. If I didn't audition for *Idol*, then I wouldn't be here. If you really want to do something, do it while you still have the chance. There will come a time when you want to do something but don't do it, and you'll regret it later."

You can catch Watson on the American Idol tour this summer. In the meantime, keep up with her on www.facebook.com/IdolMalayaWatson

'American Idol' Contestant Majesty Rose: "I Didn't Change Who I Am At All"





By Liz Kim

Twenty-one year old Rochelle York – better known as Majesty Rose – was an early standout on *American Idol*. Her quirkiness charmed fans, and her diverse tastes in music always surprised the judges. “When I picked my songs, I wasn’t really thinking about what America likes; I was thinking about what I like,” she said. “Yes, America was voting for me, but it was really my time to present myself, and so I thought about what made me most happy and most comfortable.”

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The singer credits the support of her family for keeping her strong each week and says it was really hard to be away from them. While she formed close bonds with her fellow contestants, she shared, “It’s just hard to be around people you don’t really know that well, so it felt like I was alone. I really needed a heartfelt hug from my family, but I’d call them a lot, and we would pray together before shows.”

Before *Idol*, Rose was living in Goldsboro, North Carolina and working as a preschool teacher at the Goldsboro Family YMCA. She became the pride of her town, and every week, they held viewing parties to cheer for her.

It's this community that the star is looking forward to most now that's she done on the *Idol* stage. "I'm really excited to go back home and see my friends and family. I'm going to visit my kids, but I don't know if I'm going to be a teacher – hopefully, they saved my spot!"

Rose has big plans for her future – but first, she's ready for some R&R. "I'm glad I'll have a little downtime to just rest. After the tour, I'd like to do so many things, like being a commercial model," she explained. "I want to do a lot more music, and I'd also like to do some acting. People tell me that they could see me on Broadway, and I think that would be really fun." Plus, she wants to continue to be a positive role model for younger girls and spread the message of self-acceptance.

True to her quirky personality, Rose has some unconventional ideas on how her future album will sound. "I think it would be a mix of the acoustic stuff; I really love Coldplay," she explained. "But there will also be happy music like Janelle Monae. I want it to be really inspiring – you'll laugh one minute and cry the next because it'll be a roller coaster."

For now, though, she's focused on the summer tour and is looking forward to reuniting with her *Idol* friends. Rose said, "I'm excited to get back with the contestants because I made a lot of close friendships, and we're going to get even closer on the tour; we're going to be like a family." Of course, she didn't forget her Rosebuddies. "I'm excited for my fans to be able to see me again. I'm just so grateful to have all the support from them, and I hope to make more fans."

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While she may not have won the competition, Rose is very proud of how far she has come. “I learned so much about myself. I learned that I’m a much stronger person than I thought,” she said. “I persevered through so much. It’s easy for somebody from a small town to change, and that’s one thing I can say – I didn’t change who I am at all.”

Although Rose isn’t looking for a romantic relationship right now, she still has a pretty good idea of what she wants. “I would look for somebody who’s like me, somebody who’s level-headed. I’d like to be with somebody who knows where they are going in life.”

You can catch Rose on the American Idol tour this summer. In the meantime, keep up with her on Twitter @PsMajestyRose.

‘American Idol’ Cast-off MK Nobilette Hopes to “Be a Good Role Model” for the LGBT Community





By Louisa Gonzales

MK Nobilette made headlines early on during this season of *American Idol* when she became the first openly gay contestant. Of the attention on her sexual orientation instead of her singing skills, she says, “I was definitely a little taken aback at first, but I get that it plays a role. I’m a singer, and I’m also gay. I felt like it was important to address that. I’m very proud of it and open about it.”

Although her time on the show has ended, she’s hopeful that she can continue to be a source of inspiration for other members of the LGBT community. “I want to be a good role model for other queer people who are afraid to come out or think they can’t do something as big as *American Idol*. I really hope I influence a lot of people.”

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One person who she’s certainly inspired is her girlfriend Casey Ellis, who is also a singer. “It was great to have her on my side for all of this. It was really great,” the

California native said of her partner who she calls “wife” on her Twitter profile.

For same-sex couples struggling to find their place in the world, Nobilette encourages them to talk to their loved ones. “And just be proud of yourself. Remind yourself that, no matter what happens, you still have you, and that’s the most important thing.”

So what’s next for the singer? First, she’ll be going home to San Francisco to spend time with her family and friends before heading out on the *American Idol* summer tour with the other top 10 contestants. There’s no doubt she’ll be taking her newfound gumption with her on the road: “Before *American Idol*, I was still a performer and a singer, but I never thought that being a musician was an achievable goal for myself as a career. I think, through this process, I realized that’s the only thing that I want to do. I’m definitely going to make that happen.”

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For the remaining contestants battling for that number one spot, she has this piece of advice – something that she learned from judge Harry Connick Jr. “Just really sell yourself,” she says. “Live every performance like it’s your last and really make sure that you want to be there, exactly like Harry said. Prove to the judges that you deserve to be on that stage.”

You can catch Nobilette on the American Idol tour this summer. In the meantime, keep up with her on Twitter @Mknobilette.

'American Idol' Contestant Ben Briley Sings to Better His Family's Future



By Liz Kim

Ben Briley quickly became a fan favorite on *American Idol* this season during rush week when the judges couldn't decide between him and Neco Starr to advance to the top 13. They put the decision in America's hands, and Briley was voted to move forward. From his southern drawl to his love for everything Tennessee, he might seem like the token country singer, but one look at the 24-year-old's YouTube channel, and you'll quickly learn that he enjoys music ranging from John Mayer to James Taylor.

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The contestant admitted that he never even intended on auditioning for the show. "The entire reason I tried out was so I could be a supportive father and husband," he shared. "Being on the show and being married is definitely tough. I don't know too many newlyweds that have spent their first year of marriage like this." The bright side of getting eliminated before the top 10, though, is that he won't have to go on the *American Idol* summer tour, which would keep him away from his wife Courtney even longer.

Before each performance on Wednesday, the contestants all did impressions of each other and almost every impression of Briley was about his two loves: Tennessee and Courtney. With a wife as supportive as she is, it isn't surprising that he loves out loud. "The only week she wasn't in Los Angeles was last week, but she's been here every other week supporting me and making sure I stay focused," he said. "She would tell me that she doesn't want to distract me and wants to make sure I get votes. She's definitely my biggest fan and my biggest supporter."

This week, he sang Elton John's "Bennie and the Jets," a song that he picked "to show my diversity and to show that I can do something else beside country music. I also wanted to break out the piano and show that I could play because I hadn't done that yet. It wasn't a permanent change to who I am as an artist; it was more about showing something different."

Related Link: ['American Idol' Contestant Emily Piriz Says "I Couldn't Ask for a Better Boyfriend"](#)

The judges, however, were confused and felt he lacked a connection to it. While Briley didn't like what they had to say after his performance, he tried not to take it personally. "Their words did sting," he admitted. "For one contestant, they'll say, 'You're consistent, but you need to change it

up.' To another person, they'll say, 'You need to stay in your lane and not venture out,' but when someone finally does take a risk and a step forward and tries to be different, it gets shot down on national television."

Briley is looking forward to returning home to his friends and family, eating some Tennessee pizza, and continuing to work on music career. "This is the definitely not the last you'll see of me, and nobody works harder than me. I'm not in it for the money or the fame. I'm in it to be a good father and provide for my family."

You can keep up with Ben on his www.facebook.com/ben.briley and on Twitter @BenBriley. American Idol is on Wednesdays and Thursdays on FOX.

'American Idol' Contestant Emily Piriz Says, "I Couldn't Ask for a Better Boyfriend"





By Liz Kim.

Emily Piriz may be done on the *American Idol* stage, but she believes this is only the beginning of her music career. The 18-year-old is no stranger to reality television, having auditioned for *The X-Factor*, *America's Got Talent*, and *The Voice* before finally making it through on *Idol*. She made the brave decision to sing Jennifer Lopez's "Let's Get Loud" this week, a song that she used "to sing along to, hairbrush in hand." Of her final performance, she says, "I don't regret doing it. That song is home to me."

Related Link: [Kristin O'Connor from 'American Idol': "My Boyfriend Never Held Me Back From Pursuing My Dreams"](#)

While Lopez and Keith Urban applauded her energy, Harry Connick Jr. felt her vocals were overpowered by the band and that she lost a little bit of control. Although harsh, she appreciates the criticism. "I like when people tell me what I need to work on. You don't improve if you only get positive feedback." The judges also told her to be confident and this piece of advice, the singer believes, is what will stay with

her long after the show ends.

Piriz and her fans were moved by a surprise video message from her boyfriend Matthew Walesch of the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines Fox Company. She admits she was a little shaken. "I had no idea they were going to show that video," she shares. "It was kind of hard to sing afterwards. It was hard to see him because I missed him and hadn't seen him in a long time. But I sucked it up and tried to use that emotion in my performance."

When asked about her relationship, the contestant thanked Walesch for always standing by her side. "Before *American Idol*, he would go to shows and open mics with me. And likewise, I supported him joining the Marines. He's been with me since day one, and I couldn't ask for a better boyfriend."

Their relationship may be long-distance, but she believes that love is possible even if you aren't physically near each other. Her advice for other couples in similar situations is "just trust each other and keep it free. Don't suffocate each other." She adds, "Matt and I have a great relationship because we love each other and trust each other and don't constantly keep up on the other person. We support each other. You just have to be happy with each other, no matter what you're doing."

Related Link: [7 Secrets to Make a Long Distance Relationship Smokin' Hot](#)

Moving forward, the performer plans on finishing high school and then moving to California to continue her music career. She already has plans for her first album too: "I definitely see a pop/rock kind of vibe; I want some funky songs on there that have a little edge to them. I also want to be behind the piano and do some softer songs."

For others hoping to make it the music industry, Piriz thinks that dedication is the key to pursuing your dreams. She's been

auditioning since the age of 13 and dealt with years of rejection. "Don't take no for an answer," she says. "I was told no a lot, but I never gave up, and look at me now! It's going to be hard at first, but you have to keep practicing and keep going and just believe in yourself."

Keep up with Piriz on www.facebook.com/emilypirizmusic. American Idol is on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 8/7 c on FOX.

'American Idol' Contestant Kristen O'Connor: My Boyfriend "Never Held Me Back from Pursuing My Dream"





Interview by [Whitney Johnson](#). Written by Liz Kim.

This week, *American Idol* decided to let the audience get a better sense of the thirteen finalists by giving the singers free rein in terms of song choice. Kristen O'Connor, a 24-year old nurse tech, chose Kelly Clarkson's "Beautiful Disaster." On Wednesday night's show, she explained, "This song is typically about a boy, but I interpreted this song to be about me." Judges Jennifer Lopez, Keith Urban, and Harry Connick Jr. gave generally positive – but slightly underwhelmed – feedback.

Related Link: [For 'American Idol' Winner Candice Glover, Third Time's a Charm](#)

O'Connor, along with M.K. Nobilette and Malaya Watson, was in the bottom three, and she admits that, while she was disappointed to be eliminated, she wasn't shocked. Competing against highly talented singers requires that each and every performance be the best that it can be. "It's unpredictable at this point – who America loves will change from week to week. It was important for me to go out with my head held high and

on a good note. I wanted to leave in a way that I could be proud of.”

Although she may not have gotten rave reviews for her last performance, O’Connor remains upbeat and confident. “One of my strengths, I think, is that I have a really strong voice. Chris Daughtry said my voice was his favorite, and Randy Jackson said I gave him chills. I’ve gotten a lot of really awesome compliments.”

It’s this confidence that has driven the Florida native to sing ever since she was a child. “My experiences growing up definitely prepared me for the competition. I learned everything I know about music from singing in church. I was a music major during my first year of college too.”

She’s also lucky enough to have unwavering love from her family, friends, and longtime boyfriend Renny Whidden. Speaking about Whidden, she thanked him for supporting her throughout her journey. “He never held me back from pursuing my dreams. He is so understanding and gets how important this is to me.” She credits trust with being the major quality that helps them maintain a long distance relationship.

Related Link: [4 Ways to Make a Long Distance Relationship Work](#)

She may not have won the competition, but O’Connor is leaving *American Idol* with new friends. “Before the show even started, Malaya and I were talking, and we thought it would be the two of us in the bottom. We both struggled with the song choices we made. We were just kind of holding on to each other, saying, ‘No matter what happens, we’re going to stay friends’.”

The aspiring singer has no plans to give up her dreams of having a career in music – but she does have a practical backup plan for her future. She recently graduated from the University of Central Florida with a degree in nursing. “I’m very self-sufficient and have worked very hard for everything

I have. I knew that I had to get a degree in something that would give me security," she shared.

She also said that one of the perks of nursing, besides helping others, is that it gives her enough time to keep singing. As for what sort of album she hopes to make, "I see myself as an R&B/pop/soulful singer. I love sultry music."

You can follow O'Connor on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. American Idol is on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 8/7 c on FOX.

For 'American Idol' Winner Candice Glover, Third Time's A Charm





By [Whitney Baker Johnson](#)

Soul singer Candice Glover has been a frontrunner since the start of season 12 of *American Idol*, so it wasn't surprising when she took home the crown on last night's finale. Glover, though, was sure to take things slow. "My goal was to make it to the top 20. If I got that far, I knew I'd have a fan base that would keep voting for me," she shares. "Then, I made it to the top ten, the top five, and finally the top two. That's when I knew I could win this whole thing."

Of course, the 23-year-old had judges Nicki Minaj and Mariah Carey in her corner from the beginning. "Nicki told me at my original audition that if I didn't make it to the finale, something was wrong with the competition. That really stuck with me. And Mariah asked for a mix-tape."

Related Link: [Janelle Arthur Talks About Her "Incredible Journey" on 'American Idol'](#)

Glover's journey wasn't always such smooth sailing though. This year was her third-time to audition; the best she'd done previously was end up in the top 60. So what did she do

differently this time around? “I definitely increased my musical knowledge – I listened to every genre of music,” she explains. “I was more confident too. I really focused on being myself and being different.”

“I was hurt and broken-hearted when I got cut. I kept saying that I wasn’t going to come back, but I always thought it may work next time,” the songstress adds. “I’m so glad I was right this year!”

When Ryan Seacrest announced her name, Glover immediately thought of her upcoming album, out on July 16th, and the *American Idol* summer tour, which begins on June 29th. She says that she “really connects” to the lyrics of her first single “I Am Beautiful” and even likes “the touch of pop.” In fact, she wants to keep that unexpectedness going when it comes to her entire album.

As for her career, she hopes to model it after the likes of Minaj, Carey and Jennifer Hudson, who she sang with on last night’s show. “I was so nervous to do a duet with Jennifer – I didn’t think I was good enough to be up there,” she shares of the experience. “She’s so phenomenal, and I look up to her.”

Related Link: [‘American Idol’ Runner-Up Kree Harrison Has “The World in Her Hands”](#)

Glover is walking away from the *Idol* stage with more than just a title; she made lifelong friends too, including runner-up Kree Harrison. They may have been competing for the coveted crown, but that doesn’t mean there’s any animosity between the two talents. “Kree’s amazing!” the winner exclaims. “While we were waiting for the results to be called, we were both saying, ‘You won!’ and ‘No, you won!’”

Given her unique path to the top, the commanding singer is in the perfect position to offer advice to future contestants and says, “Just pace yourself and take it one day at a time. Always be yourself.” It’s important that Glovers keeps these

words of wisdom in mind as she takes her own next steps as well.

Be sure to catch Glover on the American Idol [tour](#) this summer! You can also follow her on [Twitter](#).

‘American Idol’ Runner-Up Kree Harrison Has “The World in Her Hands”



By Kerri Sheehan

After a long season of strained vocal cords and sad goodbyes,

we finally have a new *American Idol*, Candice Glover. But she's not the only one headed for stardom: runner-up Kree Harrison has a bright future ahead of her as well. Viewers first became acquainted with the songstress when she performed with three other country crooners during Hollywood week. During the *Idol* segment, "Kree Harrison Comes Home," fans learned that the 22-year-old singer lost both parents, her mother to an accident at age 19 and her father to a plane crash at age 12. Many found it refreshing to see the stunning brunette return to her roots in Texas.

It makes sense, then, that judge Keith Urban is a fan of Harrison. His critiques on her performances weren't always positive; even so, she took the criticism with stride. "I respect the four judges so much, especially Keith because we're both country singers. Whenever he gave me feedback, I took it as constructive criticism. At the end of the day, you can't really grow if you're not listening and learning from your peers."

Related Link: [Angie Miller's "Amazing Journey" on 'American Idol'](#)

She believes that being on *Idol* helped her in other ways as well. "I always had a problem at the beginning of my career with letting the wall down and being able to connect emotionally," she explains. "It's a hard thing to do, but I feel like through this process, it's really happened for me. I feel so good about it."

Although she didn't win the competition, Harrison's excited for what comes next. "I think that we were all in it to win it, but at the end of the day, I still was able to create a following." She's already released her first single too: "All Cried Out" is currently on iTunes. Plus, she'll be making her debut on the Grand Ole Opry stage on Tuesday, June 4th. As for the very near future, she says she is looking forward to some

well-earned rest. “We’ve been working our butts off!”

Related Link: [Amber Holcomb Bids a Sad Farewell to the ‘American Idol’ Stage](#)

She’s not really sure where she’s going from here, but she’s not worried. As she shares, “I feel like I have the world in my hands right now. As soon as I can, I’m going to start writing and collaborating with other singer-songwriters, and we’ll see what happens. I will definitely let y’all know because I can’t wait to share it.”

As for her feelings about winner Glover, Harrison says that she could not be prouder of the soul singer. “Go get both of our singles!”

Be sure to catch Harrison on the American Idol [tour](#) this summer! You can also follow her on [Twitter](#).

Angie Miller’s “Amazing Journey” on ‘American Idol’





By [Kerri Sheehan](#)

The [American Idol](#) road ended last night for 19-year-old Massachusetts native Angie Miller. Known for winning over the judges during her first audition by performing an original song and playing the piano during many of the live shows, fans were surprised to see her go. She sobbed throughout her goodbye song “Never Gone,” originally sung by *Idol* alum Colton Dixon, as Mariah Carey encouraged her from the judges’ table.

Miller admits that she was surprised to be voted off this week, as she had high hopes of making it to next week’s finale. “Every Thursday night is shocking. It’s always an emotional and crazy night, but I did feel confident in my performances and everything. I honestly did. I was hoping and dreaming of being a part of that finale, and I really wanted it, so of course, it was disappointing.”

Related Link: [Amber Holcomb Bids a Sad Farewell to the ‘American Idol’ Stage](#)

However, there were no bitter feelings towards fellow contestants Kree Harrison and Candice Glover. “ I love both of

those girls, and they deserve to be there,” says the songstress. “Kree never thinks about herself – she’s so selfless. And Candice is just the most fun person to be around.”

Staying positive, Miller is looking forward to performing in the finale show. “I’m not going anywhere; I’m still here. I’m going to start rehearsing and practicing for the finale this week. I don’t know 100 percent what’s going on yet, but I’m so excited to sing again.”

Overall, the songwriter says she’s very grateful for her *Idol* experience and believes it’s really jump started her career. “I learned so much, and I’ve grown so much in this competition. I definitely know so much more about who I am musically and as an artist.” She’s not sure what specific genre of music she wants to fall under, but she does know this: “I want to have music that has meaning and is real. I don’t want to have dance party music, but at the same time, I don’t want to put people to sleep. I definitely want to incorporate the soulful piano sound with a lot of edge.”

Related Link: [Janelle Arthur Talks About Her “Incredible Journey” on ‘American Idol’](#)

As for the future, there are a lot of things Miller sees on her horizon. “There’s the tour, and then I hope to get signed and record an album. First, I want to pursue my music, and then eventually, I want to act. I just want to do so much; I’m excited! Even though it’s the end of *American Idol*, it’s just the start of this journey.”

You can see Angie Miller on the American Idol [tour](#) or follow her on [Twitter](#) for updates.

Amber Holcomb Bids a Sad Farewell to the 'American Idol' Stage



By Kerri Sheehan

[American Idol](#) viewers were disappointed to say goodbye to 19-year-old Texas native Amber Holcomb last night. After her elimination from the competition was announced, Holcomb broke down in tears as she belted out her last song "I Believe In You and Me," originally sung by Whitney Houston. "Before the performance, we watched the video of memorable clips, and that always gets to me every single week. It was just a lot. It was really overwhelming."

While her impromptu waterworks may lead some to think that the

elimination blindsided the singer, Holcomb says otherwise. "They always say an Idol can feel it when it's time, and I'm not going to lie; I honestly did feel like I was the next to go." However, she realizes that even though the competition has reached an end for her, it's not the end of the experience. She gets to join the other contestants for the tour this summer. "I was really sad, but at the same time, I told myself that I still get to go on tour. I'll see them all again, so I was happy. Tickets are on sale today, by the way!"

Related Link: [Burnell Taylor of 'American Idol': I "Really Like" Amber Holcomb](#)

Speaking of the connections she made during her time on *American Idol*, it seems the relationship between Holcomb and former cast-off Burnell Taylor is still brewing. Holcomb played it coy when asked about the New Orleans crooner, only saying, "We text a little bit, but we're just really excited to go on tour together and see each other then."

In addition to the tour, Holcomb has big plans for her future. The southern songstress believes that there is room in the industry for someone with her prowess, and she plans to keep the onstage persona she developed on the show, something that judge Nicki Minaj often praised. "My style, personally, it changes depending on my mood. I feel like, right now, there's nobody like me, so why fix something that isn't broken?"

The sky is the limit when it comes to her career. "I see myself in magazines, on every television channel, on Billboards, on the Grammys – all that good stuff." She also hopes to dabble in acting and thinks *Glee* is "really relatable right now" for her. When it comes to singing, Holcomb names Minaj, Lil Wayne, Rihanna and Frank Ocean as artists she hopes to collaborate with someday.

Related Link: [Janelle Arthur Talks About Her "Incredible](#)

[Journey](#) on 'American Idol'

As a shout-out to her fans, she exclaims, "I want to say thank you to everyone who supported me. Expect great things from me!"

To keep up with Holcomb, you can follow her [Twitter](#) or catch her on the American Idol [tour](#) this summer.

'American Idol' Contestant Lazaro Arbos Says, "I've Always Been the Kind of Guy Who Wanted to Do Something Big With Myself"





By [Whitney Baker Johnson](#)

Lazaro Arbos was a fan favorite on this season of *American Idol* from his first audition, capturing our hearts with his rendition of “Bridge Over Troubled Water.” He struggles with stuttering when he speaks, but when he sings, it’s not an issue. Ultimately, his talent carried him to a sixth-place finish, outlasting the other male contestants and leaving an all-female top five for the first time in the show’s history.

During his time on the show, the Cuban-born singer says he got to meet a lot of amazing people who he’ll be friends with for life. Plus, it helped improve both his confidence *and* his speech impediment. “It definitely gave me a stronger mindset,” he explains. “My stuttering has subsided a bit, and I think it has a lot to do with me learning to control my nerves better.”

Related Link: [Burnell Taylor of ‘American Idol’: I “Really Like” Amber Holcomb](#)

Arbos wasn’t surprised that it was time to go, and he’s excited for what the future holds. “I’m so far from sad. Winning the competition wasn’t my main goal,” he shares. “My

goal was to become known and become a better performer, and I think I achieved that.”

Still, saying goodbye is never easy. “The part that was the hardest was that I made such good friends with all of the remaining girls. So the thought that I wasn’t going to be with them anymore on the show really got to me.”

As for what comes next, Arbos says that he loves love songs and wants to record a pop album. Until the tour kicks off this summer, he’s excited to return home to Naples, Florida. “The first thing I’ll probably do is go to the park with my family. I miss them a lot,” he says. “Plus, my old high school has a pep rally planned for me, so I’m looking forward to that.”

Related Link: [‘American Idol’ Performer Paul Jolley Talks About His Future Plans](#)

He has no plans to step out of the spotlight either: “I would love to be on *Glee* – that’s one of my goals after the tour. I’d love to be on *Modern Family* too.”

The contestant also shares that he’s hoping to sing with icon Cher on the *American Idol* finale. “I met her at the start of the show, and we’ve been talking back-and-forth since then. She follows me on Twitter, too.”

Despite some criticism from the judges and mentor Jimmy Iovine, Arbos has no regrets. “I believe that everything happens for a reason,” he says with optimism.

“My love for performing and for music motivated me to audition for the show,” he adds. “I’ve always been the kind of guy who wanted to do something big with myself.”

You can keep up with Arbos on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). You can also catch him on this summer’s *American Idol* tour.

Burnell Taylor of 'American Idol': I "Really Like" Amber Holcomb



By [Whitney Baker Johnson](#)

American Idol viewers were surprised to see New Orleans native Burnell Taylor sent home last night. Even mentor Jimmy Iovine predicted that he would be the last guy standing, saying at the start of the elimination show that Lazaro Arbos should be voted off. Taylor, though, says he "had a feeling it was going to be me this week. I was prepared – it's always a possibility."

Still, he's proud of himself for his performance of Bon Jovi's "You Give Love a Bad Name" on Wednesday night. "I can't believe I performed a rock song on live television," he says with a laugh. "If somebody would've told me I was going to do that, I never would've believed them." He adds that he "learned to roll with the punches" during the competition.

Related Link: ['American Idol' Performer Paul Jolley Talks About His Future Plans](#)

Of his save song, the singer says that it wasn't about him being saved by the judges. Instead, he wanted to leave his mark. He certainly did that, ending the song by kissing fellow contestant Amber Holcomb on the cheek. Of his relationship with the singing beauty, he says, "We're still learning about each other. We're not moving too fast. We're both young, but we really like each other."

Taylor also had a big effect on judge Mariah Carey and contestant Candice Glover, who were both in tears over his departure. "I never knew how much they cared about me. To see that they were so genuine really touched me. I broke down too." As for Carey's advice, Taylor says, "She told me that this wasn't the end, that I should run with it. And that's what I'm going to do. I feel like it's about what you do after the show."

So what does the crooner want to do now? "I want to be a storyteller and get as personal as I can with my album. I want to be honest. That's what I feel is missing from the industry." When asked about comparisons to John Legend, he shares that the Grammy winner is definitely of his inspirations. "As far as my music, though, I want to be as original as I can and do something that nobody's ever done before."

He graciously thanks his fans – who he calls family – for their support and adds, "We shall meet again – and it's won't

be too long.”

You can follow Taylor on [Twitter](#). Be sure to check him out on the American Idol summer tour too!

‘American Idol’ Performer Paul Jolley Talks About His Future Plans



By [Whitney Baker Johnson](#)

Many viewers were disappointed to see Paul Jolley eliminated on last Thursday's *American Idol* episode. The sweet Southern

boy from Palmersville, Tennessee, knew that it would be his final week though. "I was just so ready for it," the performer said of leaving the show. "I talked about it throughout the day. Everybody could see that I was going to be okay no matter what."

As for his future plans, Jolley hopes to record a pop country album. "I don't want to change what I feel in my heart. That's what my calling is, and that's what I need to be doing," he shares. Of course, his dreams aren't limited to music: "I want to have my own clothing line. That was a custom shirt that we had made during my 'Eleanor Rigby' performance. I also want to act. I want to dabble in a lot of different areas, put my Paul Jolley stamp on everything."

To his fans – affectionately known as Troopers – Jolley wants to say a "huge thank you. It's a true blessing to have such loyal people that are there for me no matter what." If you want to see more of him, don't miss the *American Idol* tour this summer!

To keep up with Jolley, follow him on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

Erin Andrews Says Potential Partners Have to 'Compete' With Her Dad





If you ask Erin Andrews about her place in the pantheon of women's sportscasters, she will graciously credit the ladies who came before her. However, there's no doubt that she is a trail blazer in sports broadcasting. She has gained notoriety and admiration for her work ethic, knowledge, and natural on-camera abilities. All of this, she says, is part of being an "unapologetically strong woman." Recently, [Lori Bizzoco](#) had the chance to chat with Erin about her new career path, touting her father's influence as a main proponent of pushing her as far as she's come. Further, she says, her father stands as a standard for when she's dating. "He [her father] is a strong man by my side, and I think that's why I can't find anyone on the other side yet because they have to compete with my old man!"

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