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American Idol Finals: David Wins It All!

Posted May 21, 2008 | 07:21 AM (EST)



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That's the safest headline I'll ever write. The show's producers may have told us it's been a lot closer than we believed (with only one million votes separating the Davids two weeks ago), but this is what I think: a tie goes to Archuleta. Archuleta needs to stumble or Cook needs to be unbelievable if Cook wants to win.

SHOW OPENER -- The "Let's get ready to rumble" guy introduces the two Davids, who come out in full boxing gear. This sets a boxing

theme for the night, which is amusing. It certainly wouldn't have worked for Ruben Studdard and Clay Aiken but it works here. Besides, this means they get to nickname Archuleta "Babyface." In talking about past winners, they flashed Daughtry's face even though he didn't even make the finals. Simon gives them one bit of typical advice: "You've got to have a desire to win. And you've got to hate your opponent."

DAVID COOK -- Clive Davis, legendary label head, chooses U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," which makes Cook visibly pleased. It's a great choice -- yearning, rocking but not with the typical Cook formula of building up to a big finale. He looks very confident and his voice sounds great. Cook stays right with the song, not revamping it or trying to mutate it into something but just delivering it straight until the last note when he soars up a bit very effectively. Very, very good start. Randy offers a tiny caveat and gets the year wrong (it's 2008, dawg), but praises him. Paula takes us to church, saying, "David Cook has arrived. Amen. Amen." Simon calls it "phenomenal."

DAVID ARCHULETA -- Clive Davis chooses Elton John's "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me," another very good choice. Archuleta -- who Ryan Seacrest will call "little David" and "Archie," among other nicknames -- begins by sitting on some steps, which means the fans will get to squeal

when he stands up. Even sitting down, Archuleta gives lots of hand gestures, but with coaching by Andrew Lloyd Webber, Archuleta was chided to keep his eyes open and does a much better job. His voice sounds great, too, and he's very soulful here. It's pretty close to the George Michael version but doesn't sound like an imitation. To me, it's very strong and the first round is a tie. Randy raves, Paula says "The sun is never going to go down on you" and Simon insists it was the best performance by Archuleta for the entire season. "Oh my gosh," says Archuleta, who seems on the verge of tears and/or nervous exhaustion the entire night (but in a cute, puppy-ish way). Simon gives round one to Archuleta.

**DAVID COOK** -- In a twist, the contestants are allowed to choose among the top songs submitted for the show's season-ending tune. (However, they apparently don't get to choose the actual winner, which will be unveiled Wednesday night.) Cook chooses a pop-ish rocker called "Dream Big," which has the usual inspirational lyrics ("But if you don't dream big, what's the use of dreaming?") but a pretty solid melodic hook. It's certainly the most rockin' original *Idol* tune (relatively speaking). The bar is pretty low, but I'd say it's the best *Idol* tune and a not-bad single. It also shows off a poppier side to Cook and again avoids his standard formula all season, which I assume he's saving for the final song.

**DAVID ARCHULETA** -- He chooses a far more typical *Idol* original, "In This Moment," an inspirational ballad with some truly goofy lyrics about looking at your own image in a mirror and wondering how the mirror can reflect perfection. Andrew Lloyd Webber actually mocks the lyrics. But it's in Archuleta's wheelhouse -- this was always the round that should have been easier for him -- and he gets to end on a big note. Again, both guys are in great voice. Randy, Paula and Simon all rave, with Simon saying round two goes to Archuleta, just like round one. This time, I agree with him.

**DAVID COOK** -- The contestants can choose any song they want as their last number. Instead of picking a greatest hit, Cook boldly decides to do a new tune, Collective Soul's "The World I Know." On the plus side, you won't be compared to your best performance of the season. And you get to create a new memory. Cook plays an acoustic guitar and I'm expecting a build-up to a big emo finale. Instead, it's a soft, quiet tune and ends on a gentle note. On its own, this was a good performance. But Cook went the entire night without ever delivering the emo rocker rave-up style that got him to the finals in the first place. Big mistake. When it's over, Cook wells up with emotion and cries for a moment. Randy praises him; Paula, who has been in full-on blurb mode the entire night, says "You're standing in your truth;" and Simon compliments Cook by saying he's "one of the nicest and most sincere" contestants they've ever had and says it was a good performance of the tune but absolutely the wrong song choice. Simon says Cook should have performed "Billie Jean" or "Hello" and he's right. Unless Archuleta implodes, the night is his.

**DAVID ARCHULETA** -- He knows what it takes to win: big notes at the end of the songs and play to your strength. So no surprise that Archuleta chooses John Lennon's "Imagine," easily his most praised performance of the season. On the downside, you'll be compared to your peak on the show. But assuming he doesn't go dreadfully wrong, he'll win it all. Archuleta again begins in the middle of the tune -- I'll bet you during his entire career that he NEVER sings the lines "Imagine no religion, it's easy if you try/ No hell below us, above us only sky." He goes for a little more soul this time out and doesn't match his first shot at it, which was simpler and more effective. But it's good and gets the job done. Randy anoints him the winner, Paula praises him too, and Simon says "Tonight we've witnessed one of the great finales" and awards Archuleta a knock-out, to keep with the boxing theme.

As usual, Simon is right. It was a very solid finale, with both performers in great voice and neither one really stumbling. Best of all, it was only one hour long, so the show wasn't needlessly padded. [Go here to watch their performances.](#) But a tie goes to Archuleta and it wasn't even a tie. Surprisingly, after going again and again to the formula of starting off quietly and building to a big rocking finale all season long, Cook had three songs tonight and didn't do it once. Why avoid the schtick that got you to the finals? But he shouldn't have any regrets. Archuleta would have won anyway with the performances he gave and Cook made a good case for himself as a real performer (a better one, to me, than he'd made since breaking out with "Hello"). So they both win. But the new *American Idol* winner is David Archuleta. Do you agree?

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Hey fellas, was the crow tasty?

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I told you Dave would win.

Now Can we get back to real things for you to share with us. Because I LOVE your take on movies and entertainers.

Still trying to remember the name of that Japanese movie (they cancelled my last huffpost name before I could order it) where the Samurai warrior avenges his sons death.

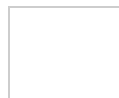
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Cook should win, but won't (actually, Michael Johns should win, but...). The difference that will put Archuleta over the top is the emotional lift he got from a few forced and sloppy flourishes. Cook didn't reach the same intensity, but was more consistent and polished. Archuleta deserves points for the degree of difficulty, but if you don't stick the move, you're not supposed to end up with a net gain over the guy who knows his limits. It's only professional to take chances when you succeed. Cook's final song was the best vocal performance of the night.

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♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 09:10 PM on 05/21/2008

LightUpAmerica See Profile I'm a Fan of LightUpAmerica permalink

David Archuleta is the superior singer. I don't think most people know what goes into being able to do what he does. It seems effortless but I can tell you, as a professional singer for twenty years, that what he does is extremely difficult. He has been singing since a very young age which explains how he can pull off those licks, but it also takes God given talent and commitment. If he's too sweet for your cynics that's a problem for you I guess. David Cook is a great musician, and a great singer. But he's not that much if any better than most of the guys I played with. I like him. But Archuleta is a true discovery. I hope his career is long, rewarding and he continues to take care of his sweet self.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 08:47 PM on 05/21/2008

GeorgiaOrwell See Profile I'm a Fan of GeorgiaOrwell permalink

David Archuleta acts like a Stepford kid - dosed on something or maybe he's had a lobotomy. I agree with those who hated his singing Imagine and substituting and omitting lyrics. It totally made me sick! I actually got to the point when he was singing when I couldn't even look at him at all. My prediction is that he won't even sell as well as Reuben and his only career will be singing for Disney movies. I know he has talent, but in my book, he's utterly forgettable.

David Cook has a bright future and can only soar. Of all the contestants this season, he could be a star and really be successful. I wish him great success, and I'm just sorry he didn't choose different songs for the finale - that being said, he will have much greater artistic freedom - not as AI. Best of luck, DC.

I'm also hoping to see good things for Michael Johns, Carly Smithson, and Jason Castro.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 05:22 PM on 05/21/2008

bakersdozen See Profile I'm a Fan of bakersdozen permalink

Archuleta has a very pure and mature voice for someone so young. He'll have to work hard to develop some personality to back up the pyrotechnics, though. And he constantly looks like he's in a state of terror, which is very unappealing and unnerving to observe. Regardless of what one thinks of Idol, getting through the process to this point must be an exercise in sheer endurance, so bravo to both of them.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 03:24 PM on 05/21/2008

kellygrrrl See Profile I'm a Fan of kellygrrrl permalink

you're probably right, Arch will win.  
... but I can't help but feel that in a few years we're going to witness a Britneyesque Breakdown.

Cook will have a great career. I think he's going to be a great songwriter and performer.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 03:19 PM on 05/21/2008

mellene See Profile I'm a Fan of mellene permalink

It's too bad that David Cook's songs weren't so good last night as I believe he'd be the better "idol". However, saying that, Archuleta's first song by Bernie Taupin was incredibly good but I think the praise for the other two songs that he sang weren't warranted.

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Mohaski See Profile I'm a Fan of Mohaski permalink

I don't even think Archuleta should have been in the final 4, and last night just re-inforced my personal opinion that while the kid has a technically good voice, he doesn't have a very distinguished or soulful voice. Plus, he doesn't have much of a personality when all is said and done. I think the only thing that might help him have a career that makes it into the next decade is his dad. Otherwise, what is there to keep the tween girls who will crown him tonight from following him into adulthood?

He's this year's flavor, and a rather vanilla flavor at that.

Posted 02:12 PM on 05/21/2008



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ElitistWhitePerson [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of ElitistWhitePerson](#) [permalink](#)

Archie is not worthy of John Lennon. Never has been. Never will be. I think I threw up in my mouth a little bit when he sang last night.

Even so, he is so perfectly ready-made for the Idol mold, that he could win and I will not lose sleep. I also will not ever buy a record of his.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive *Posted 02:10 PM on 05/21/2008*

SharonB [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of SharonB](#) [permalink](#)

"I threw up in my mouth "

I will be so glad when this goes to the cliché grave yard and lies down beside of "groovy" and "twenty three skidoo"!

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DCDan [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of DCDan](#) [permalink](#)

PS Re last week's rant, Michael, my issues with HuffPost have nothing to do with aesthetic of site; I've always been a huge fan. My problems are purely technical in nature, with extreme difficulty navigating the bloated, ad-filled, links-linked site. Maybe it's a Mac thing. Maybe it's my browser. I don't know. But it's damn frustrating and I never had this problem in the past. It takes two or three times longer to access blogs and the text seems to be constantly shifting around as other links pop up. Major drag.

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LRM216 [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of LRM216](#) [permalink](#)

Young David is talented, no doubt, I just can't stand his sappy, giggling/crying personality.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive *Posted 12:31 PM on 05/21/2008*

tdeg [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of tdeg](#) [permalink](#)

dialidol has Cook crushing Archuleta and quite frankly the EW coverage said it best. How many people were going to change their minds on who they were going to vote for based on last night's performance?

I don't think the fact that Archuleta technically had a better night will make a lick of difference.

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kristineIA [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of kristineIA](#) [permalink](#)

I agree, unfortunately. Though I don't think it would have mattered if David Cook had done his thing; eleven- and twelve-year-olds generally text faster than normal human beings, so Archuleta was always going to win it. Blah.

I was so hoping that Cook would rock his face off.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive *Posted 10:51 AM on 05/21/2008*

Buffy57 [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of Buffy57](#) [permalink](#)

I absolutely agree.

Though I had a visceral visual of John Lennon rolling over in his grave, then reaching out to smack the little rat bastard

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive *Posted 07:59 AM on 05/21/2008*

DCDan [See Profile](#) [I'm a Fan of DCDan](#) [permalink](#)

Seriously!! ... What's with Simon's unbridled outrage directed at stoner Jason for having the audacity to attempt an uber-ersatz version of a Bob Marley tune (he practically accused Jason of sacrilege) but nary a whiff of complaint from Simon or any one else for young David's deliberate mangling of the lyrics to "Imagine."

It's one thing to dispose of the whole inconvenient "no religion" verse, which is bad enough. It's entirely another to rewrite the line "I hope someday you'll join us" with "TAKE MY HAND and join us." (There was at least one other less egregious rewrite that escapes my memory now.) Personally, I would much rather hear David A. slur his way through forgotten lyrics to "We Can Work It Out" (everyone performer forgets words now and then during performance)

than listen to a 17-year-old (or his dad) redo them to suit a particular occasion or a religious doctrine.

There were many similar "mistakes" in the Beatle-themed shows several weeks back. There's no excuse for botching the lyrics -- either out of laziness or, especially, deliberately -- of such ubiquitous, iconic, and universally heralded material.

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