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American Idol Week Four: Atlanta



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A satisfying edition of *Idol*, with the usual mix -- just the thing for people trying not to overdose on ten hours of election coverage. 19 people in Atlanta got a golden ticket to Hollywood -- we saw only six of them (with another six sent packing for home).

Really *Idol*, why not post the audition footage of every winner so we can form an opinion on the ones we missed? You've got the footage and the website and there's no way to ever include all the people who get the nod. It seems a no-lose

situation that can only build interest in the Hollywood episodes because every year someone we haven't heard of before pops into our consciousness. Who's this person, we wonder? Show us their audition and at least we'll have an idea.

Joshua Jones -- the guy who works with glass, boasted an open shirt and a medallion and sang Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now." He kept bugging out his eyes on certain lines until Simon literally had him turn around while singing. Paula was intrigued right away but it seemed pretty karaoke, the very term Simon used. He got through but it'll be a surprise if we see him get out of Hollywood. (Hey, that's usually a safe bet since about 140 people get there but only 12 move on. But still.)

J.P. Tjelmeland -- a repeat auditioner, JP's claim to fame was sitting two seats in front of Carrie Underwood, claiming they became audition buddies and he's been kicking himself ever since that they didn't stay in touch. He has sort of a speech defect and doesn't boast movie star looks and yet insists that "People tell me all the time that I'm going to be famous and that I have that star quality." Needless to say, he can't sing a lick. It's one of those intriguing cases where you have no idea if the guy is deluded or his entire circle of family and friends as well.

This is followed by a Paula montage set to the tune of the *Oklahoma* musical classic "I Cain't Say No," a cute play on her unwillingness to be blunt with weak, vulnerable contestants.

Asia'h Epperson -- a very cute girl who describes calling her daddy while driving to the audition

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(clearly she lives in another city) only to get a phone call half an hour later from her brother saying he had just died in a car accident. The timing is a little unclear -- in her actual audition, she says her dad died a few days ago. Did she already go to the funeral? Did she skip it to make the audition? All three judges seemed moved by her story; I couldn't help thinking, 'Why are you there? Why aren't you home?' She dedicated LeAnn Rimes' "How Do I Live" to her dad and I thought she had an odd timbre and was taking a lot of awkward breaths (I kept hearing her breathing more than her singing). But they praised her singing and sent her through. She's certainly appealing but I don't know. The whole story left me feeling icky. "How could you do that?" said Simon before Paula broke down in tears. "Why would you do that?" was all I kept thinking.

Brooke Helvie -- a Miss South Florida beauty pageant contestant and student at my alma mater the University of Florida (which makes me LESS likely to support her). Simon found her insufferable and I certainly could have done without her invoking God -- twice -- in her taped interview. Uh, God doesn't care who wins *American Idol* (or the Super Bowl or the lottery, etc.), sweetie. She sang a Jackson Five song and frankly I thought she had a really appealing voice, to my surprise. Maybe a little too similar to Carrie Underwood in the looks but at least she's pop and not country so that shouldn't matter too much.

Eva Miller -- a camera hogger who couldn't sing to save her life. The judges were convinced it was all an act, especially when she fell down, got up and kept singing. After challenging her repeatedly, Simon gave her a hug to take the sting out of the rejection, but she was ticked off when walking out. That brings up one frightening stat: the judges heard more than 100,000 auditions this season. We've seen about 100 of them, or .1 percent of what they endured. Keep that in mind the next time you think they're curt or rude.

Alexandrea Lushinton -- a sweet 16 year old who tackled "My Funny Valentine." (Hey, I love that you're singing a jazz standard. Does it have to be one of the four jazz standards that have already been performed on *Idol* instead of the approximately 100,000 jazz standards we haven't heard yet?) They raved, but I noticed she didn't stick to the melody for more than one line at a time. That may be relentless improvisation (thanks, Mariah Carey) or just lack of control -- neither is a good sign. You have to sing the song straight before your departures can have any impact. But she did have a good tone.

Nathan Hite -- Three "no's in a row in an extended montage led to Nathan Hite, a 16 year old who failed 9th grade (and brings it up on national TV) and has so much attitude and laid-back "I'm too cool for this" that I hoped he could actually sing. He couldn't. His listing of typical Simon put-downs might have been better if it were more extensive.

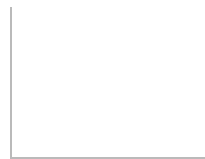
Amanda Overmyer -- a nurse and biker chick who wants to rock out. Amanda sang Janis Joplin's "Mean Woman" in pure, lip synch imitation. They immediately asked for another song and she did a credible "Travelin' Band" by Creedence Clearwater Revival. A sleeper. I especially liked how she strolled casually out of the audition room, brimming with confidence in a way that wasn't annoying. This chick believes in herself and that's half the battle.

Josiah Leming -- an 18 year old high school dropout who travels the country playing his guitar and living out of his guitar. His family thinks he's living with friends and he breaks down in tears about how lonely it gets. Then he announces he's going to sing an original and I just knew he was gonna be brilliant. Nope. In fact, he's got an odd sort of trill in his voice and I didn't notice it at first, but this Tennessee kid sings with a British accent. They ask him to sing a Snow Patrol song and he does an okay job, but again with that strange sort of trill. Very appealing kid but I can't help thinking he does belong in a band more than as a pop act. Actually, he really belongs at home. Still, one to keep an eye on.

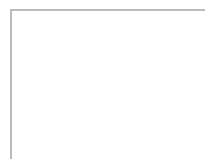
The hour slipped by but the last two are dark horses worth remembering. What did you think? Any favorites yet?

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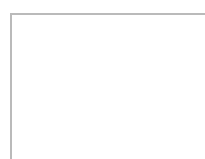
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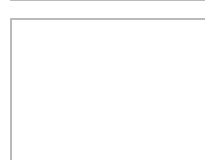
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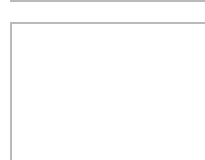
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hey, i'm still pissed tamara gray lost.

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They don't care. And that hurts me, really. American Idol was a guilty pleasure. Then boom -- the contestant with arguably the most talent of any season (Melinda Doolittle) -- got dropped, boom, for an okay singer who slips each day ever closer to inevitable obscurity. It isn't that I didn't vote, faithfully and even frantically -- it's that, even though I could afford to buy the Mustangs advertised on Idol, I was no match for the 'tweens who could only afford the soda pop. I resented that. And a resented the injustice to Doolittle. So I swore never to watch again. And they don't care -- though I still maintain Ford really should. Withdrawal is hell, but I'm at peace with my decision.

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