

AMERICA IDOLIZES QUEEN KELLY

By MICHAEL GILTZ in L.A., and
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Torrid Texan Kelly Clarkson beat Pennsylvania's bubbly Brillo-top Jason Guarini last night to become the first "American Idol," after more than 100 million votes put the crown squarely on the head of TV's newest singing star.

The 23-year-old former cocktail waitress from the town of Burleson missed a few notes before a live audience at Los Angeles' Kodak Theater.

But that didn't bother the show's huge audience, which gave her a 58-42 percent victory over Guarini, the big-haired, 20-year-old fan favorite from Doylestown, Pa.

Clarkson's win capped off the enormously popular first season of Fox's interactive TV competition.

Her booty includes a recording contract with RCA, which will release a CD single and an album later this year.

"How am I going to sing this next song while I'm crying?" a teary Clarkson asked after her win.

She said she'd been unaware of her victory until Guarini broke the news.

"He hugged me and said, 'Congratulations.'"

Guarini, a former door-to-door salesman, had been the

5-to-6 favorite to win until late Tuesday, when Clarkson pulled ahead, Las Vegas oddsmakers said.

Verizon said 107.3 million votes had been phoned in, and The Washington Post reported the winner of the competition would sing the national anthem at the Lincoln Memorial on Sept. 11.

Celebrities appearing on the telecast included rappers Ice-T and LL Cool J. T said he favored Clarkson while J preferred Guarini.

Clarkson — who stands to make millions from record sales, personal appearances and endorsements — and Guarini say they're good friends.

Dressed in leather and suede outfits, the rivals sang a cheerful version of "It Takes Two," a hit for Marvin Gaye and Kim Weston.

The three judges said they were unanimous in their choice of Clarkson. British judge Simon Cowell said her voice "can make grown men cry and young boys wish they were grown men."

Clarkson said Hollywood held little fascination for her and that she would be returning to her hometown.

"I'm not moving from Texas," she said.