

■ TV review

# 'American Idol' and 'Apprentice' jump into another reality TV round

Show changes include older 'Idol' contestants and alternative team assignments in 'Apprentice'

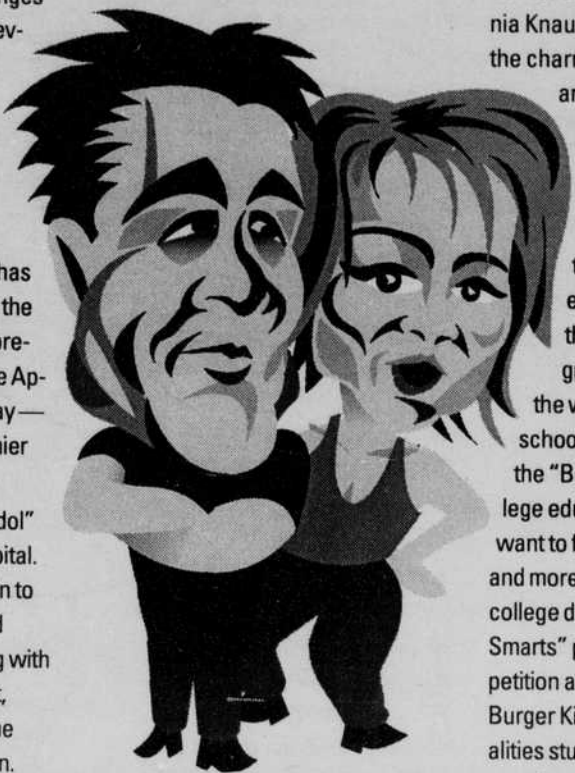
BY AMY LICHTY  
PULSE REPORTER

Reality TV is a surprisingly controversial topic today. Some people can't live without the bug-eating challenges on "Survivor" or the drama that never fails to surround "The Real World." Others can't stand the sight of Jessica Simpson and "Newlyweds" or the incredibly and obviously fake "The Simple Life" with Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie. But like it or not, reality TV has been dominating the airwaves for the past few years and with the new premieres of "American Idol" and "The Apprentice" last week, it's here to stay — at least until something even trashier and more addictive comes along.

The fourth season "American Idol" debuted Jan. 18 in the nation's capital. A whopping 54 million fans tuned in to watch the horrendous singing and dancing of this year's "Idol." Along with terrible voices and sporadic talent, "American Idol" also brought some changes in the way the show is run. The age limit has been raised this season, from 24 to 28, which opened doors for people with a little more experience to jump on board the "A.I." train.

There are also guest judges to help with the difficult decisions Simon Cowell, Randy Jackson and Paula Abdul have to make. Mark McGrath, lead singer of '90s band Sugar Ray and current correspondent for the

gossip TV show "Extra," was the first of five guests, who will also include Gene Simmons from KISS, LL Cool J, Brandy and Kenny Loggins.



BRET FUERTWANGLER | GRAPHIC ARTIST

This time around there will also be some gender separation because of women dominating last season in the final weeks before Fantasia Barrino was announced the winner. There will be separate male and female groups in the early rounds of the competition, and as a consequence, there will be an increased number of weekly episodes.

Throughout the semifinals, there will be three weekly episodes instead of the usual two — one for the gentlemen, one for ladies and one for the results.

"The Apprentice" also launched its third season last week, ironically just two days before "the Donald" said "I do" for the third time to model Melania Knauss. Perhaps the third time is the charm for Trump as a husband and for "The Apprentice," his baby with reality-TV King Midas, Mark Burnett.

This season, the most evident change is that the two teams are no longer separated by gender, but rather by those who have a college degree and those who entered the work force straight out of high school. Obviously, I was rooting for the "Book Smarts" (those with college educations) because I didn't want to feel like I'm wasting my time, and more importantly my money, on a college degree. But alas, the "Street Smarts" proved to outsmart the competition and won the first episode's Burger King Challenge. A few personalities stuck out like sore thumbs, such as polyester-suit-sporting Danny and Viking-hat-wearing Brian, who liked to use the f-word while eating dinner with the cast, including Trump. Ultimately, however, it was "Book Smarts" project manager Todd who got the first "You're fired" from Trump this season. "The Apprentice" can be seen on NBC Thursday nights.

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