

# Entertainment WEEKLY

## ***So You Think You Can Dance* recap: 'The Next Generation: Academy 1'**

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Say goodbye to the feel-good audition rounds: We're not grading on class participation anymore, kids. This is the Academy, where graduation is based solely on merit. It's about to get brutal. On day 1 alone, 100 participants are slashed to 50, as the 10 All-Stars select five dancers per team. (Math is a class at the Academy.) Whatever else this season gives us, at least it promises more All-Stars than ever before; they've even replaced the judges this week. Could the real stars of *The Next Generation* be The Last Generation? Think about it.

Maddie Ziegler is backstage and ready to mingle. Let's meet the teams and compare class schedules.

**Team Kathryn (Contemporary):** The dancers start their Academy experience by performing solos for a panel of All-Stars, who whittle down their favorites to a list of five dancers and two alternates. At least three members of the All-Star's team have to be in their style of dance. In

a *Voice*-style twist, if two or more All-Stars both want the same dancer, the All-Stars plead their case to the contestant, who makes the final call.

The best part of waking up is going to battle over a dancer who's half your age and will one day push you out of a company. Kathryn and Sasha start the day by trying to win over Tate, our Canadian contemporary dynamo, whose solo has all of the All-Stars on their feet. Robert is "WOWED." Can you even imagine wowing Robert? Sasha makes a polite case for Tate, but Kathryn goes big: "I'm, like, shaking inside with how inspired I am by you." Tate is putty in her perfectly poised hands.

Brooklin, Brightyn, Quinn, and Avery round out Kathryn's team.

**Team Robert (Contemporary):** Robert is here, and everything's going to be okay. He picks up Sage, a 13-year-old contemporary dancer, along with Gavin, Enoch, Joziah, and J.T., who continues to be the human embodiment of his polka-dot bowtie. But J.T. falls short on day 2. He forgets the choreography to Warren Carlyle's Broadway routine, and he doesn't even try to fill the space with jazz hands. Robert gives him a stern "I'm not mad; I'm disappointed" speech but lets him stay, cutting Enoch instead. Was Enoch really that much worse, or is J.T. just sticking around because he's cute? Robert says he sees something in him. Robert, be honest: Is that something *cuteness*?

As impressive as some of these auditions and solos have been, these kids are not as adaptable as older dancers when it comes to styles outside their own. Can we all admit that Sage and Ruby's Broadway performance is only great by comparison?

**Team Sasha (Contemporary):** Sasha may not have won the Tate Battle, but she's doing just fine, thank you. Sasha picks up a powerful dancer named Jordan, who walks to her dance classes and sleeps in her living room while her family tries to make ends meet. She keeps practicing on her own when they can't afford classes. She says this like it's nothing — like anyone could teach herself to be that good. Anyone could not.

Diana, Jade, Ashley, and Bostyn round out Sasha's team, but Diana is cut in the Broadway round.

**Team Jenna (Ballroom):** Jenna's first pick has something to prove: Jake made it to the Academy on Paula and Jason's votes alone, so you have to assume he sees Nigel's disapproving face when he closes his eyes. Jake goes AFTER IT in his solo. He goes so hard that he falls down the stairs as he's leaving the stage, but Jenna loves him. I'm not sold yet. His dancing is solid, but he's always "on." When Jenna invites him to her team, he asks if she has a boyfriend. Take it down like 15 notches, kid. I'm going to see this exchange when I close my eyes.

Lev, Joshua, Parker, and Dougie complete Jenna's team.

**Team Paul (Ballroom):** Paul and Jonathan go to battle over Ruby with the Good Ponytail. Ruby savors this moment. "I might want Jonathan," she teases, hands clasped. "But I might want Paul." Spoiler: She wants Paul, and Paul also wants Shelly, Lara, Sophia, and Lennox. Lara, a small

nugget whose audition must have been dynamite to get her this far (let us see it!), is cut the next day in the Broadway round.

**Team Jonathan (Ballroom):** Jonathan rebounds from his Ruby loss by picking Daniela, Pallany, Victoria, Rylee, and Camila. Pallany can't make it through Broadway; to be fair, traffic is bad.

**Team Gaby (Tap):** Shuffle out a welcome to our most recent winner! What a way to feel old before your time. Emma, this season's Paula Abdul Strategist, wins over Gaby with a dizzying audition, and Jazzy, Ryan, Ava, and Lucas round out her team. Ava doesn't make it through the Broadway round. I liked her! So does Gaby, obviously; she cries as she tells her to come back next year. Gaby is one of the good ones.

**Team Joshua (Hip-Hop):** MAY I JUST SAY that I'm excited to spend this season with human teddy-bear Joshua? Merrick, Romeo, Tre, Kai, and Sheaden make his team, but Kai is cut in the Broadway round.

**Team Comfort (Hip-Hop):** Comfort is already giving her team solid advice: "When I used to mess up: Boom, smile!" This also applies to life, kids. The lucky recipients of her pearls of wisdom are Tahani, Aniyah, Fiona, Logan, and Phoenix — the same Phoenix who danced with Cyrus in last year's finale and prompted Nigel to dream up this whole Next Generation scenario in the first place. "You were almost the inspiration for the show," Nigel tells her at her audition. Does he say "almost" because he knows if he put this all on her, people would vote against her out of spite? Don't blame Phoenix for being good!

**Team Fik-Shun (Hip-Hop):** Fik-Shun is also one of the good ones. He and Joshua go to battle over Kida from the L.A. auditions; Joshua promises a "more broad spectrum of dance" than what Fik-Shun can offer, but Kida IS Fik-Shun. They belong together. Fik-Shun rounds out his team with Jaryan, JJ, Lior, and Alex.

Jaryan has never done Broadway before, and he gets inside his own head before even hitting the stage. He loses track of the choreography and bolts as soon as the music is done, leaving Fik-Shun to shout words of encouragement at the stairs. They can't keep dancers around out of the goodness of their hearts anymore — he has to let him go — but as Jaryan cries about being bullied, Fik-Shun does what he can to lessen the blow. "Do you feel like when you dance, that's your getaway?" he asks. He tells the boy to believe that dance is here for him, and all of the dancers gather around him to offer comfort and chant his name.

It's not a bad way to go out.