

When Pussycat Doll skates to victory, Naperville fans mourn

By Mary Rakoczy



Dr. Robert Weil addresses the crowd.

Triblocal.com photo by Mary Rakoczy



"Dancing with the Stars" fan Cassandra Sakellariou of Naperville crosses her fingers before the winner of season 10 is announced. Triblocal.com photo by Mary Rakoczy

Cassandra Sakellariou of Naperville sat holding her breath, gritting her teeth and crossing her fingers, anxiously watching to see who would take home the mirror ball trophy.

"I'm even crossing my toes," she said to the crowd of fellow "Dancing with the Stars" fans who were sending good-luck vibes to Olympic gold medalist and Naperville native Evan Lysacek Tuesday night at Raffi's on 5th in Naperville.

From the second voting began at 7 p.m. Monday, Sakellariou and her Twitter followers were online casting their votes for Lysacek, who was one of three finalists on the show.

"I voted 945 times," the super fan said. "I've been up for 12 hours voting."

"I took a break for a nap at midnight, then I started again from 3 to 7 a.m. I set my alarm clock," she said, laughing.

Despite her efforts, Pussycat Doll Nicole Scherzinger won the trophy — just as Sakellariou predicted.

"I know what's going to happen," Sakellariou said before the winner was announced. "Nicole (Scherzinger) is driven. Nicole has some kind of fire in her soul. This is the way it's been since 2005. The freestyle dancer that blows the judges away is going to be the winner. They're going to pick the best dancer, and unfortunately, Nicole is the best dancer."

Some fans said the competition was skewed by Scherzinger's dancing background.

"None of us think it's fair because Nicole (Scherzinger) has so much experience," said Nettie McFarlan Badgley of Naperville. "I voted by phone, text and every single day on the Internet for Evan (Lysacek)."

McFarlan Badgley watched the show with her mom, Darleen McFarlan, who brought other mother and daughter pairs to see the finale.

During the event at Raffi's, professional dancers taught fans dance moves. The event also featured raffles, and fans ate dinner and sipped martinis while watching the finale on a big screen.

When judge Len Goodman told Scherzinger she was the best dancer, the crowd grumbled, and Dr. Robert Weil, Lysacek's sports doctor, yelled in disdain, "Lenny."

"I feel like it's my son competing," said Weil, who has known Lysacek for 10 years.

Weil said he warned the skater about the physical demands of doing both the TV show and touring in Smucker's Stars on Ice. Lysacek was determined, Weil said, even after breaking two toes and getting dropped on his head while dancing.

"The fact that he is able to persevere physically at the top is incredible from a sports medicine point of view. Evan is a competitor. Evan's skating persona is a matador," Weil said.

Within minutes of calling Lysacek a matador, judge Bruno Tonioli called him the same.

"Matador!" Weil yelled at the TV screen.

Weil and friend Denise Provenzano, owner of Zano Salons in Naperville, sponsored the event at Raffi's, which was the third viewing this season to honor Lysacek.

"It's not often that somebody from your hometown wins a gold medal and is on national TV competing for the mirror ball," Provenzano said. "I'm really looking forward to seeing what (Lysacek) does next."

Provenzano predicted Lysacek, who she describes as fashion forward and a fashion icon, will begin work in the fashion industry.

Naperville Mayor A. George Pradel also watched the finale.

"I followed him around for three days," Pradel said of Lysacek's March visit to his hometown. "He's got a lot of energy, but I kept up with him."

The also ever-energetic Sakellariou, who has not missed one episode of the popular ABC show since season one, said watching Lysacek compete on "Dancing with the Stars" was more suspenseful than watching him skate in the Olympics.

"(My husband) knows when 'Dancing with the Stars' is on — don't talk to me," she said.

In March, Sakellariou's love for Lysacek shined when she became the top auction bidder and donated \$1,000 to the Stephanie Joseph Memorial Fund, which honors Lysacek's friend and fellow skater who died from a rare form of cancer.

Sakellariou won a trip to California where she met the stars of the show, watched Lysacek and his partner Anna Trebunskaya dance the Argentine tango and earn their first perfect score.

"I was VIP status," she said. "They put the camera on me. I'm sitting watching the dance from the front row. I was mesmerized. I was taken away."

So, when Lysacek didn't win, Sakellariou's shoulders dropped. But then she went into action. She had launched Lysacek fan pages using Facebook, Myspace and Twitter, and needed to check her phone.

"I know my Twitter is blowing up," she said scrolling through her tweets.