Miss Universe

Miss Columbia's moment of glory

by Christie D'Zurilla

The 63rd Miss Universe title has gone to Miss Colombia, but not without a bit of audience upset along the way about the fate of Miss Jamaica.

Pageant fans aren't exactly known for booing the other teams, but the crankiness overwhelmed the claps Sunday night in Doral, Fla., as Kaci Fennell was named fourth runner-up.

As in, 'only' fourth runner-up. Fifth out of the top five. The 5-foot-9 Fennell, 22, had won people over as she sported a Halle Berry-style pixie cut rather than the industry-standard flowing hair and name-checked Bob Marley and Usain Bolt in answering a Facebook fan question about Jamaica's greatest contribution to the world.

"I don't have long tresses like everyone else," Fennell said during the pageant.

"I'm just representing myself, and that's what beauty pageants are all about. You don't have to look a certain way ... and I feel like I represent that."

Even with the dissent, when the next name was called, the noise turned into light applause that grew louder as the stakes went higher.Moments later, Colombia's Paulina Vega, 22, was the one who took those few steps forward -- no long ramp walk into the crowd like Miss America has to tackle in her moment of glory -- after being given the crown and bouquet.

Vega represents the 2014 crop of Miss Universe finalists, despite the pageant being held in 2015.

Miss USA, 24-year-old Nia Sanchez, was first runner-up in the field of 88 contestants from around the globe. She was followed by 20-year-old Miss Ukraine, Diana Harkusha, who was second runner-up; 20-year-old Miss Netherlands, Yasmin Verheijen, third runner-up; and Fennell.

The final five sounded fairly human as they each answered that question gleaned from Facebook: What is the greatest contribution of your country to the entire world?

Miss USA cited helpfulness to countries in need; Miss Netherlands noted the tolerance, art and history of her hometown, Amsterdam; and Miss Colombia nodded to her nation's persevering people, holding them up as an example for Western nations to follow.

Said Miss Jamaica: "As we all know, we have the home to the legendary Usain Bolt and Bob Marley, who have contributed such great music to this world and we have the fastest man on Earth, who has been trailblazing the Jamaican flag."

Miss Ukraine even got a bit political. "We have a very difficult situation in our country and right now," she said through a translator. "The very most important contribution is to direct all of our energies to support our army and our people. We have to restore schools, we have to restore kindergartens and orphanages."

The judges' individual questions for the ladies had evoked answers more in the style of "Miss Congeniality." Yup, world peace and all that - something Miss USA said almost verbatim.

"I would just say that, I know as Miss USA I can always spread a message of hope and love and peace," Sanchez said in answer to boxer Manny Pacquiao's query about what she'd tell global terrorists if she had 30 seconds to chat them up. "So I would do my very best to spread that message to them and everyone else in the world."

Miss Ukraine told "Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" star Lisa Vanderpump through an interpreter that, if given the choice, she would keep the pageant's swimsuit competition - "If it's going to be nice, why not? I feel comfortable in anything" - while Miss Jamaica said that crime was a global problem, not a national one, when asked by music's Emilio Estefan what could be done to reduce violence against women.

Perhaps the best answer of the night came from Miss Colombia, however, who was asked by pro skateboarder Rob Dyrdek to state what women could learn from men.

"That's quite a tough question," she said through an interpreter. "I believe there's still men who believe in equality, and I believe that is what women should learn from men."

Vega was crowned by the outgoing Miss Universe, Gabriela Isler, who took the title in November 2013 when the pageant was held in Russia.

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