

Forbes

(4.6.18) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brittanyhodak/2018/04/06/prediction-bobby-bones-will-give-american-idol-the-ratings-boost-it-needs/#70de7313258d>

Prediction: Bobby Bones Will Give 'American Idol' The Ratings Boost It Needs



Ratings for ABC's reboot of American Idol have been lackluster all season. Although more than 10 million fans tuned in for the debut last month, viewership has steadily fallen and is now hovering between 7 and 7.5 million fans per episode.

That could very well change this weekend with popular radio personality Bobby Bones joins the show as this season's mentor. In perhaps the reboot's smartest casting move, Bones will work with the Top 24 contestants in episodes airing Sunday, April 8, and Sunday, April 15.

Interscope honcho Jimmy Iovine and Big Machines Records boss Scott Borchetta held the mentor roles in previous seasons of the show, but Bones brings a different level of notoriety to the role. While Iovine and Borchetta's roles were rooted in a business gain (their labels would go on to distribute their respective seasons' winners), Bones is an impartial third party. He's also more well-known to non-industry viewers than Iovine and Borchetta when they assumed the role. And, although Idol's judging panel packs a superstar punch, Bones is arguably a bigger draw when it comes to tune-in: the judges sell out arenas when the tour every few years, but Bones draws millions of listeners — tens of thousands per market — every weekday morning. In more than 100 DMAs, fans are conditioned to tune in to iHeart's top-syndicated country host.

My prediction: viewership will spike sharply for Bones' episodes and, if Idol is renewed for another season, he'll be given an enhanced role in subsequent seasons — assuming his schedule allows for it. While it's unclear what Bones' role will be beyond the two announced episodes, Borchetta and Iovine appeared in several episodes during these seasons.

Here are five reasons Bones as Idol Mentor is the best casting choice producers made this season.

1. He'll bring his fans with him to the show.

Bones' fanbase follows wherever he goes. His original platform was radio, but he's parlayed it into several other lanes. His debut memoir hit No. 1 on the New York Times, USA Today and Wall Street Journal Bestsellers Lists. He sells out venues across the country when he tours as a standup comic... and when he tours with his comedy band, The Raging Idiots. The albums he's released with the latter have topped both Comedy and Kids albums charts, and his popular BobbyCast podcast has been downloaded millions of times. Safe to say, Bones knows how to promote himself and the things he cares about... and you can bet plenty of his loyal fans (who call themselves B-Team members) will be tuning in to watch him in primetime.

2. He's got credibility for breaking artists.

When it comes to breaking new artists, Bones' track record is more impressive than all of the judges combined. A single spin on his show reaches millions of listeners and can help catapult new artists to country-radio success. He's widely credited with nearly-singlehandedly helping Chris Janson and Cam score their first No. 1 singles (the former didn't even have a record deal at the time), and he's given a platform to dozens of other artists on the rise.

3. He has a well-known "rags to riches" story.

The original allure of American Idol was its ability to pluck a "regular person" from obscurity and turn him or her into a superstar. That's, essentially, the story of Bones' life. Although his platform was radio instead of reality TV, his went from a trailer park, welfare kid in Arkansas to the youngest-ever inductee into the National Radio Hall of Fame. He intrinsically understands what's on the line for these contestants and is well-placed to bring out the best in each of them. Which brings us to...

4. He's been where the contestants are...and where they want to be.

While Lovine and Borchetta were great mentors in their own rights, they were executives advising artists. Bones is both an artist and an executive. He's the CEO of his brand, but he's got first-hand experience touring, building a following, songwriting, managing his social accounts, and virtually every other tool the Idol contestants are hoping to master. He's got credibility, but he's also approachable. He's not too polished, so his presence shouldn't be intimidating to the contestants. To the extent a perfect mentor can exist, Bones is it.

"My career has turned me down so many paths: from radio, TV, stand-up comedy, music, books, etc.," he told me. "For once, I felt like the right guy for a job [when asked to fill the mentor role]. I was able to use elements of all of my creative outlets and share advice with the contestants. I was nervous going in that I was going to screw the show up, but hopefully that didn't happen!"

5. He makes a convenient heir apparent to Seacrest.

Early in his career, Bones drew many comparisons to Seacrest (perhaps because of his reputation for taking on several jobs simultaneously). Now, Bones is a household name in his own right. While it's hard to imagine Seacrest being extricated from Idol, if such a scenario does come to pass, Bones' mentor role serves as a convenient introduction to step into a larger role.

Bones makes his Idol debut Sunday, April 8, at 8:00PM ET.

