

The 'American Idol' Winner Is ... Laine Hardy

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Country singer [Laine Hardy](#) won “[American Idol](#)” on Sunday — quite an improvement over his early elimination from last year’s show.

“It goes to show you, you just don’t give up,” Hardy told “Entertainment Tonight” (see the segment above) after he beat Alejandro Aranda in somewhat of an upset.

Aranda, a quiet singer-songwriter with strong guitar and piano skills, had topped some online polls as the favorite for weeks leading up to the finale, [USA Today noted](#). And the judges’ praise of him in previous episodes had been over the top.

Madison VanDenburg was eliminated earlier in the finale to finish third.

Hardy earned a recording contract and encouragement from judge Katy Perry.

“If you apply yourself ... you’re gonna be one of the biggest pop stars on the planet,” she said.

The 18-year-old Louisiana native has come a long way. He made it to Hollywood Week last season and showed up at an audition this time around just to provide musical backup for a friend. But the [judges asked him to try out again](#) and Hardy impressed enough to be given another go.

Here are some highlights from Hardy’s big night.



