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Emmitt Smith Wins ABC's 'Dancing' Title

By ERIN CARLSON
The Associated Press
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NEW YORK -- Emmitt Smith danced off with the mirror ball. The three-time Super Bowl champion, who proved to be as nimble on his feet in the ballroom as on the football field, was named the winner of ABC's "Dancing with the Stars" Wednesday night. With the victory came the glittering trophy. The NFL's all-time leading rusher beat out actor Mario Lopez.

The hunky, dimpled Lopez was generally regarded as the series most dynamic celebrity dancer, but the public's vote, the deciding factor after the contestants had tied in the judges' tally at Tuesday's final dance-off, brought Smith the victory.

"It is awesome! It is awesome!" declared Smith, after hugging his professional dance partner Cheryl Burke. "We came a long way, we really have."

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Burke won last season, too, on the arm of singer Drew Lachey.

Smith had kind words for Lopez, who was gracious in his defeat. He called the former "Saved by the Bell" star a "true gentleman" and said he and partner Karina Smirnoff "raised the bar" during the competition.

"This whole journey was unbelievable ... And Karina, most unbelievable person," Lopez gushed. "It's something I'll never forget."

Smith and Burke wowed judges on Tuesday with a spirited samba, to the tune of Stevie Wonder's "Sir Duke."

"What's so great about you is you are the everyday man who became a dancer in our eyes in the past 10 weeks," judge Carrie Anna Inaba told Smith, who's been dubbed "The Big Easy" for his laid-back elegance and charm.

In the closing segment of Wednesday's decision show, Burke, in a video clip, praised Smith's work ethic.

"From the beginning, he just wanted to be the best possible dancer he can be," she said.



In this handout photo made available by ABC, Emmitt Smith and Cheryl Burke, celebrate their win and display the mirrorball trophy on "Dancing with the Stars the Results Show," in Los Angeles on Wednesday Nov. 15, 2006. (AP Photo/Adam Larkey-ABC,HO) (Adam Larkey - AP)

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Smith, ever the competitor, was determined to win, just as he had done so many times with the Dallas Cowboys. "You don't get into a competition unless you think you can win," he told AP Radio after Tuesday's dance finale.

During Wednesday's program, all nine of the previously rejected celebrities _ Vivica A. Fox, Harry Hamlin, Joey Lawrence, Sara Evans, Willa Ford, Monique Coleman, Jerry Springer, Tucker Carlson and former beauty queen Shanna Moakler _ returned for a last dance with their partners.

"Dancing with the Stars" was a surprise hit when it debuted in the summer of 2005. Now in its third edition, the show was a ratings juggernaut week after week and, last week, the dance-off show was No. 2 to ABC's "Desperate Housewives" with 22 million viewers, according to Nielsen. And the results show was No. 4, with 20.7 million viewers.

Cowboys owner Jerry Jones issued a statement soon after the show ended, saying how proud he was of Smith. "Although we are all thrilled," Jones said, "we should not be surprised. ... "If Emmitt Smith is on your team, there is a good chance you are going to win."

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