

Miss Nevada crowned Miss USA

By Stacey Plaisance, AP

BATON ROUGE, La. – Miss Nevada Nia Sanchez, a fourth-degree black belt in the Korean martial art of taekwondo, was crowned Miss USA 2014 on Sunday night.

She beat out 50 other contestants from all the states and the District of Columbia for the title of 63rd Miss USA. First runner-up was Miss North Dakota Audra Mari. Erin Brady, of South Glastonbury, Connecticut, the 2013 winner, gave up her crown to Sanchez after a three-hour telecast from the Baton Rouge Civic Center in Louisiana.



Miss Nevada Nia Sanchez is crowned Miss USA on June 8.
Photo/Jonathan Bachman/AP

Other runner-ups, judged on interviews, evening gowns and swimsuits were: home state beauty queen, Miss Louisiana Brittany Guidry; Miss Georgia Tiana Griggs, Miss Florida Brittany Oldehoff and Miss Iowa Carly Bradarich.

Bradarich got a second chance when the viewing audience gave her the most votes on Twitter in the pageant's first-ever "Save the Queen" option.

Sanchez will go on to represent the U.S. at the Miss Universe competition later this year.

In a vibrant red floor-length fishtail gown, Miss Nevada talked about the importance of women being able to defend themselves when asked a question about the high rate of sexual assaults on college campuses. Judge Rumer Willis, the 25-year-old daughter of Bruce Willis and Demi Moore, said 19 percent of U.S. undergraduate women are victims of sexual assault and asked Sanchez why she thinks this is being swept under the rug and what should be done about it.

Sanchez said bringing awareness to the issue was important, as well as women taking it upon themselves to learn how to defend themselves.

The subject of sexual assault was also on the mind of Miss Pennsylvania Valerie Gatto. She made headlines this week when she said she was the product of rape. During a taped segment that aired when her name was called, Gatto said her mother was 19 when she was attacked leaving work in Pittsburgh and became pregnant.

Gatto said she is living proof "that your circumstances do not define your life."

First runner-up Mari said she overcame being bullied in high school by competing in ice hockey. The Fargo, N.D., native wore a green floor-length evening gown and in her final interview talked about the importance of getting an education and going to college.