



STEPPING UP: After Brittany and the entire field of contestants demonstrate their up-tempo energy in a production number (left), the tension rises as the Top 5 of Miss Teen America await the judges' decision. They are (below left, l-r) 4th Alt. Sarah Dale Simpkins, Miss Teen America '06 Brittany Monico, 3rd Alt. Lindsay Hanson, 2nd Alt. Alexis Wagner, and 1st Alt. Ilsa Levine.



stage Interview before the final five were announced. With one more question to go before the scepter was passed, the tension in the Bell-South Acuff Theatre mounted. Each girl answered the same question, giving the judges the opportunity to see how well each contestant could think on her feet. After deliberating, the judges had delivered a cohesive conclusion. Fourth Alternate went to Mississippi, Third Alternate to Ohio, and Second Alternate to Arizona. The top two spots belonged to Texas and Rhode Island — appropriately, since they had become inseparable during the course of the week, with each wanting victory for her new friend as much as she wanted it for herself. When the First Al-

ternate position was announced, no one was happier for Brittany than Ilsa Levine.

It hadn't been all smooth sailing for Brittany, however. During rehearsal on the day of the final preliminary competition, Brittany injured her hand at the base of her thumb while tumbling. Undaunted, she made the decision to perform her routine unaltered that evening, which was successful, and she was all smiles — or so it seemed. At the end of competition that evening, Brittany was taken to Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, where x-rays showed she had fractured her hand.

The following evening was the final competition, and Brittany had to decide whether to play it safe and withdraw from

the competition or attempt to rework her routine with only a few hours left before the show began. She opted to go for it. She converted many of her walkover maneuvers to one-handed stunts — not easy because it meant she was going to be supporting her weight on her non-dominant hand — and threw in some aerials to replace other stunts. After her impressive performance, the finals judges awarded her the first-place spot in the Talent competition.

The Talent win for the week, however, belonged to Sarah DeBruhl, who also performed a superior gymnastics routine peppered with an array of difficult strength moves. The nonfinalist Talent award went to Shirley Zheng of District of Columbia for her elegant performance on piano. Sarah Dale Simpkins took home the Interview award as well as the Miss Congeniality title, Swimsuit went to Arizona Teen Alexis Wagner, while Lindsay Hanson took home the Evening Wear award.

The mood at the send-off breakfast was a mixture of glee and gloom, as the young woman prepared to say good-bye to the new friends that they knew they would not see for a while. For Brittany Monico, the garden of dreams that she had been carefully cultivating is just beginning to blossom. She would emcee the Jr. Teen America Pageant a few weeks later and help usher in the new Ms. America next spring. She has already had more than 5,000 photos taken of her in the first three weeks of her reign, and will spend the year traveling throughout the country promoting her platform, "HOPE," and speaking to school children on the importance of community involvement. □

Top 5

Miss Teen America 2006	Brittany Monico (FL)
1st Alternate	Ilsa Levine (TX)
2nd Alternate	Alexis Wagner (AZ)
3rd Alternate	Lindsay Hanson (OH)
4th Alternate	Sarah Dale Simpkins (MS)