

# America's Got Talent: The Champions Returns After Julianne Hough and Gabrielle Union's AGT Exits

*America's Got Talent: Champions* made no mention of the drama during the season 2 premiere

By **Jodi Guglielmi** January 06, 2020 10:00 PM



The *America's Got Talent* franchise is back on air amid the drama surrounding **Gabrielle Union** and **Julianne Hough's** exits from the show.

*America's Got Talent: The Champions*, a spin-off of the original hit NBC talent competition series, returned Monday night. While *Champions* features a different set of judges than on the original series, **Heidi Klum** joined the spin-off for season 2 after she and Mel B were replaced by Hough and Union for season 14 of *America's Got Talent*.

The show went on business as usual, with no mention of the scandal on the flagship series.

News broke on Nov. 22 that Union, 47, and Hough, 31, would not be returning for AGT's 15th season. The announcement stirred up a controversy over Union's reported allegations of racial insensitivities on set.

A Nov. 26 report by *Variety* claimed that while working on the show, Union expressed concerns over a joke allegedly made by guest judge **Jay Leno** that was later edited out of the episode.



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The report also claimed both Union and Hough said they were subjected to “excessive notes” on their physical appearance, sources alleged in *Variety's* report. In one instance, Union reportedly said she was told her ever-changing hairstyles were “too black” for AGT's audience, while Hough reportedly said she received constant criticism on her hair, makeup and wardrobe.

In a statement to the publication at the time, Hough denied that she had a negative experience on the show and said she was “happy to continue my working relationship with NBC.”

Hough later spoke out in support of Union.

Union revealed on Dec. 4 that she sat down with NBC and *America's Got Talent* production company following reports that she expressed concerns over racially insensitivity and a toxic culture at the show, which is produced by Fremantle and Syco Entertainment, show creator **Simon Cowell's** company. In a joint statement, Syco Entertainment, Fremantle and NBC said: “We remain committed to ensuring a respectful workplace for all employees and take very seriously any questions about workplace culture. We are working with Ms. Union through her representatives to hear more about her concerns, following which we will take whatever next steps may be appropriate.”

Union also tweeted about the talk, writing, “We had a lengthy 5-hour, and what I thought to be, productive meeting yesterday. I was able to again, express my unfiltered truth. I led with transparency and my desire and hope for real change.”



PHOTO: TRAE PATTON/NBC (2)

Show creator and judge Cowell has reportedly enlisted tenacious longtime Hollywood litigator Larry Stein as his legal representation. (Union is working with Megyn Kelly's former attorney Bryan Freedman.)

Still, many involved are hopeful for a positive outcome.

“The initial conversation was candid and productive,” an NBC spokesperson said in a statement to PEOPLE about their sit-down with Union. “While there will be a further investigation to get a deeper understanding of the facts, we are working with Gabrielle to come to a positive resolution.”



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