

IDOL BACK FOR 9TH ROUND

JACKSON EXPECTS DEGENERES TO SHINE

By SANDY CAETANO

Thousands have tried out, but only eight have won the record contract.

Gearing up for a ninth season, American Idol judge Randy Jackson expects nothing less than the finest singers to enter the audition room.

But as usual, that won't be how it will happen. Merely looking for their 15 minutes of fame, tonight's two-hour premiere of the singing competition brings back the shriekers, the tone-deaf and the biggest crop of untalented hopefuls.

"I am growing a little impatient with that. Look, you've watched the show, you know what the show is, you see every year somebody great wins the show," Jackson said. "You just wonder, 'What are they seeing that I'm not seeing?' It's like we're not on the same page here."

Talk show host Ellen DeGeneres will make her debut as Paula Abdul's replacement at the start of the Hol-

lywood round.

"She'll give her expertise about being a fellow entertainer. And I think she'll give the home viewer a real voice to be on the judges' panel," Jackson said.

During this season's auditions, a series of celebrity guest judges sit next to Jackson, Simon Cowell and Kara DioGuardi, including Canadian songstress Shania Twain and punk princess Avril Lavigne. Singers Mary J. Blige, Joe Jonas, Katy Perry and Victoria Beckham will also appear.

With two guys having previously won the Idol title, Jackson is rooting for the ladies this time around.

"I sat there this last season scratching my head going, 'Dude, where are the girls?'" he said. "I think there are some really talented girls that showed up this time. We've got a very interesting, unique cast that's really only unique to this season."

American Idol airs tonight at 8 p.m.



From left: American Idol judges Randy Jackson, Ellen DeGeneres, Simon Cowell, host Ryan Seacrest, and Kara DioGuardi.

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