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Na'Riyah Penn Crowned St. Thomas Carnival Princess 2023 in Spectacular Pageant Revival

Crime / **Published On April 09, 2023 06:41 PM /**

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In First Pageant Since Pandemic, Na'Riyah Penn is St. Thomas Carnival Princess 2023, With Kriston Ward Crowned Prince, and Jahniya Williams is Jr. Miss

Hundreds of Virgin Islanders descended on the University of the Virgin Islands Sports & Fitness Center on Saturday afternoon for the official kick off of Carnival on St. Thomas – the 2023 Prince and Princess USVI show, where Na'Riyah Penn was crowned princess.

The first since the onset of the pandemic, the Prince & Princess pageant was combined with the Junior Miss competition.

With only one entrant each in the Prince and Junior Miss competitions, Kriston Ward and Jahniya Williams were acclaimed in those categories.

Meanwhile the four Carnival Princess contestants – Na'llah Hicks, Sariah Somme, Na'Riyah Penn, and Starr Richards – captivated the audience in a six-plus hour extravaganza, featuring tourism-flavored introductions, creative costumes, and exuberant energy punctuated by captivating side performances.



Each of the contestants brought forward their best effort, showcasing their bubbly personalities and shimmering talents. For example, in the Red White and Blue segment – a new one for the pageant – Na'llah appeared as a patriotic drum major, while Sariah's team opted to present her as an homage to the Fireburn Queens. Na'Riyah staged her red, white, and blue appearance as a multi-outfit tour around the Caribbean, visiting Spanish, French and English-speaking islands with those colors in their flags, while Starr's several outfit changes honored national sporting heroes born in the USVI.

Other new fashion-focused segments included a mashup of Western, Madras, and futuristic flair, as well as an evening gown segment, featuring the male relatives of the contestants escorting them across the stage.

Following the evening wear competition, all four contestants sat with one of the two MC's of the evening, Kyza Callwood, for an interview round that lasted for several questions. Mr. Callwood asked the girls about their favorite songs and what they thought could be done about bullying in schools (having more meetings, speaking more to their children, educating on kindness, and having more activities for young people were some of the ideas).

Violence in schools could be tackled by having entertainers weave anti-violence messages into in-school performances, said Na'llah , while Na'Riyah said that if she were principal at her school, she would show videos that educated students about the effects of gun violence, and empower teachers to incorporate the subject into their classes.

At the end of the night, Na'Riyah was crowned St. Thomas Carnival Princess 2023, and also swept up several individual awards: Miss Intellect, Best Talent, and Best All-American Wear. First runner up Sariah Somme collected the Best Evening Wear Award, and was also judged Miss Congeniality. Na'llah Hicks was judged Miss Photogenic, and also won the Viya People's Choice Award.

In a fitting twist, all four Carnival Princess contestants were jointly awarded the Miss Cooperative Award, proving that at the end of the day, such pageants are just as much about camaraderie as they are competition.