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Season 45 Winner Dee Valladares: 'Survivor Changed My Life!'

Posted By: John Powell | December 21, 2023



Dee Valladares. Photo: CBS.

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John Powell – GlobalTV.com

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She won the Survivor game and a million dollars but what she didn't expect was to find love on the island.

Dee Valladares, the Sole Survivor of season 45, was as well-rounded player as you will ever see. With a tremendous social, strategic and physical game as a foundation Dee also was able to make that distinction between the game of Survivor and the bonds she made with the people she spent 24 hours a day with. Being able to make that separation and therefore make those cutthroat moves, even behind her beau's back, paved the way for her convincing victory at the final tribal council last night.

John Powell: Congratulations Dee on winning Survivor 45! How are you feeling?

Dee Valladares: I'm ecstatic! I'm happy! I'm still in shock and overwhelmed with so many different emotions but all good things, obviously. All good things! I am very proud of myself! My family's proud of me! So, I'm feeling I'm feeling great! I'm feeling very good!

John Powell: I know you've had a little bit of time to think about it and you mentioned that you wanted to make sure that you took care of your parents and they're provided for but are any other thoughts on what you're going to spend the money on?

Dee Valladares: Oh, I wish I had a fun answer! (laughs) I'm going to invest the money. I'll probably get a jeep or something but not even buy it. I'm going to lease it. (laughs) I'm not trying to spend money because I have this deep fear of losing it because of how I grew up and all of it coming in at once. I'm definitely gonna invest it. I'm gonna buy a property for sure. Those will be my investments. Anything I buy will be investments. I'm not trying to buy purses and stuff. I'm trying to spend this wisely.

John Powell: I come from the same kind of background too so I can understand how this is such a big surprise and a big change in your life. I spoke to Austin about this and he was a little tight lipped. Now, of course fans are going wonder what's going on with you two? Do you have any updates for us?



Dee Valladares and Austin Li Coon at Tribal Council. Photo: Chuck Snyder/CBS.

Dee Valladares: (laughs) I think my update is the same one that he may have. (laughs) We are keeping this private for now. It is so emotional and it will continue to be because all of this. It is absolutely insane! So, I'm sorry but my lips are shut. (laughs)

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John Powell: Looking looking back on your time on the island what drew you guys together in the first place? What made you gravitate towards Austin?

Dee Valladares: Well, I always thought he was attractive physically. I obviously want to be attracted to someone. I actually said it in one of my confessionals that didn't make it. When they first asked me about him I said the more bruises and scrapes that he gets, the hotter he gets! It's so masculine to see like a man all dirty with scrapes and he's muscular and all of that and being such a bad ass too!

I think it was just natural. Our core values are the same. We come from good families. He's a hard worker. We view the game the same. We view life the same. We were able to have very emotionally mature conversations. I think aside from him being attractive that's what really drew me in. The fact that he was so emotionally mature and also funny. We would make fun of ourselves all the time!

John Powell: Another thing you shared was the ability to separate the game from personal relationships. How was it for you making that separation?

Dee Valladares: I can't tell you because I still don't know. I just knew that it would be my winning game. If I didn't separate those things I'm going to lose the game...I said in my confessionals that I knew my weakness would be my emotions because I can feel for people. I get close to people. Reba? I love them so deeply, so deeply. It transcends Survivor.

I knew that it (us turning on each other) was going to happen. We even had a conversation, the four of us. It wasn't shown but we were like: 'Hey, guys. Let's stick together. Let's come at each other eventually but we're still going to be friends after this.' I think that the fact that we had that conversation early on, the four of us, we were able to just say: 'Hey, we'll respect whatever happens.' We're good. We're still good now.

John Powell: Obviously when you went on the island to play the game you weren't intending upon meeting someone like Austin or having the feelings that you had there. How did that complicate your game?

Dee Valladares: To be honest, I wasn't worried because first of all it didn't happen until later on in the game. Both our heads were in the game, which I respect a ton, and I'm very glad that we did that. The moment for me where I started to get worried was with Kendra. This wasn't shown but we didn't get asked (about our relationship) until Day 20. Why didn't we get asked until Day 20? Because there was nothing to ask about. All they had were hugs and we'd be next to each other. There was no showmance. You can't ask about something that's not a reality, right?



Austin Li Coon, Dee Valladares and Katurah Topps. Photo: CBS.

The moment that wasn't shown was when Drew came up to me and that was when I first found out that Kendra was talking about Austin and I. She told Drew that I had a crush on Austin.

I was like: 'Oh my God! This girl has to go! She's very perceptive. How did she catch on to this?'. Then Julie said the same thing and now it's two people that are saying that. This is not good. We've got to hide it even better.

She (Kendra) has to go because I can't tell people I'm in a showmance and I also can't tell production because I wasn't in a showmance. It was developing but Austin and I hadn't really solidified it. We hadn't really talked about it until we had the majority. That's when we were able to hold hands and not care.

John Powell: Did you ever think about sending Austin to fire?

Dee Valladares: Hell no! First of all, I would not add that to his resume and that's when you see our scene. We're just laughing about it because like he knew that I wouldn't do that. It was playful banter because he knew I was not stupid enough to put him in fire and beat somebody, whether it's me or somebody else to add that onto his resume. No, no, no, no.

John Powell: Despite your close relationship with Austin you fiercely fought for your game and the prize at tribal council. Did your relationship with Austin even play into the back of your mind?

Dee Valladares: Oh, no, no, no. Something that wasn't shown was in the fight the last immunity I told Jeff (Probst) and looked at everyone and said: 'I want you guys to come for me! This is going to be war! If you need to s-t on my mother, well, s-t on my mother!'. I literally said they were never going to see that side of me again. So, I opened that up for them.



Dee Valladares, Julie Alley, Katurah Topps, Jake O'Kane and Austin Li Coon. Photo: CBS.

I looked at Austin and I was like: 'We're going at it! I don't want you to take it easy on me! Because whatever happens this needs to be earned not given!'. That was the conversation I had with Austin. I knew that he would respect me like that. I feel like that's something that he likes about me. The fact that I am willing to risk it all and go at it like that. I still respect that about him. I knew that he would respect me. It's gameplay. It's not personal and he knows that. I know that too. If it had been vice versa, yeah, it would have hurt but I would have understood that it's the game with a million dollars on the line.

John Powell: Despite being a great overall player what do you think your weakness was in the game?

Dee Valladares: That's a great question! Puzzles! Oh, my God! (laughs) I am still trying to figure one of them out! (laughs) I have Austin and I'm like: 'Thank you for putting me out of my misery!'. I have got to work on that.

I would also say it's very easy for winners to say they wouldn't change anything. I think I would change how I approached people sometimes. For example, the whole Julie thing when she was the option. I went up to her. I was like: 'This is what you're going to do!'. That ended up 15 minutes before tribal and she was about to write Austin. Maybe not that one because it ended up being the way I wanted but it hurt to watch me talk to her like that, knowing her and I love her so much! I would never talk to anyone like that which again was gameplay, right?

It's very normal for me to be very open. I am transparent with 'my' people. I know how to talk to 'my' people. If you want the truth I'll tell you the truth whether you like it or not! If you're my person, you're my person! I'll be honest and open but it's still Survivor.

Julie and Austin were my blind spots. I feel like I could have done better. When I told Julie that Austin was my number one too? There is no perfect game on Survivor.



Dee Valladares. Photo: CBS.

John Powell: Is there anything that you wish fans saw about your Survivor journey that they didn't?

Dee Valladares: I'm very grateful in the way that I was edited. So grateful! They showed my funny side. They showed my strategic side. They showed my cutthroat side...I'm so grateful!

The only thing I wish was shown a little bit more were my relationships with other people on the outside. That's the only thing. Maybe it would be too obvious if they would have shown that? You know what I mean? Maybe even though I think they made it PRETTY OBVIOUS (I was going to win) though. Oh, my God! The people talking. I'm dodging bullets from people asking me about how I did... They're (the producers) are making it hard for me to keep my mouth shut. (laughs)

John Powell: This may be too soon to ask but if they asked you to play again, would you?

Dee Valladares: Survivor changed my life! I love this game! To me, this is fun! It was fun being out there. Yeah, the first two weeks not eating? That was not fun. But even then I'm like: 'Whatever. At least I'm starving on Survivor and I'm playing the damn game and do you know how many people would give the world to play Survivor?'

It would be such an honour to be asked for a second time. I would be honoured, honoured, honoured. I think it would be even more fun to go back a second time because you know what to expect...I would go back tomorrow. Even if Jeff (Probst) calls me tomorrow and says to come there in a week? Done. I'll start training right now.



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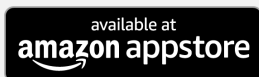
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