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Andy Details One-Of-A-Kind Survivor Journey

Posted By: John Powell | December 12, 2024



Andy Rueda. Photo: CBS.

By John Powell – GlobalTV.com



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His was a Survivor journey unlike any other we have ever seen. Stripped of his support system Andy had a difficult time at first adjusting to the social and strategic aspects of the game. He had a breakdown and it looked like his journey would be ending almost as soon as it began. Once Andy became emotionally grounded once again and regained his confidence, he quickly rose to become one of the most important power players and masterminds of this season.

John Powell: Andy, it's great to be talking today. How are you feeling?

Andy Rueda: I'm doing great! I've had such a fun ride this entire season. I had a blast watching it last night surrounded by people supporting me. So, it's been really, really cool.

John Powell: Now, yours is one of the most interesting and fascinating Survivor stories we've seen in some time. Let us know when you first stepped foot on the island what was your mindset and how were you feeling? You did have that public breakdown.

Andy Rueda: It's funny. I felt really good and positive going into the game. I felt like I had built my life up to be so in such a good place back home and this is just going to be such a freeing and additive thing for me to do, to fulfill my dream. That's how I was feeling at the start.

I do feel like on Day One I was doing pretty well. I felt good about my tribe. It wasn't until just the middle of Day Two things were just taking the dip. It was very, sort of startling how quickly things were sort of descending. It just felt like every second was getting worse.

I have anxiety and stress in the real world but I have coping mechanisms. I bring someone aside, someone I love and trust, and just talk it through. I bounce back really quickly. That's what I tried to do with Rachel but it's just the game is so complicated. It was kind of botched and it made thing three times worse.



Andy Rueda and Jeff Probst. Photo: CBS.

It was a 24 hour period of panic I would say a panic attack culminating in the most difficult thing I've ever done, physically, in that first immunity challenge, which resulted in heat exhaustion. That resulted in a kind of a delirium from the heat exhaustion. It was a kind of a perfect storm to go from feeling how I did on Day One to a sort of rock bottom moment.

I will say, as soon as I got back from that challenge and back at camp I did just snap out of it: I'm like: Oh, my god! I can't believe I did that! How do I move forward? I'm proud of how I regain my composure after bottoming out. Regain my composure and conducted myself in a way I was proud of for the rest of the game.

John Powell: Well, the way you resurrected and brought your game back was quite amazing. When did that switch flip in you that brought about that change? That was quite incredible too.

Andy Rueda: It started when I woke up in the morning of Day Four. I had survived that first tribal council, I was in the water and I was like: This has gone as poorly as I could have possibly imagined but I'm still in the game. This is what I've been dying to do and this is a game I love. So let me just re-frame my perspective, treat this a lot differently going forward. Let me just embrace each day and have fun and learn here.

Then, in terms of my strategy, I was like: Right now, I'm highly aware of how everyone perceives me. My threat level is in the dirt, my perception of me as a player is in the dirt. Let me play into that. It became a macro strategy that I really kept to for a really long time in the game. I took every opportunity to downplay myself and lean into the things that were naturally downplaying myself like struggling in the challenges and everything. I would always note that it was fuelling this perception that I had, which is has its downsides, of course, and that's not all the way throughout the game but put me in a very sneakily, really good position, in my opinion, towards the middle of the merge.

John Powell: One of your closest allies was Sam for a while. Explain your relationship with him because you must have been stunned when you realized that Sam wasn't exactly truthful to you on the number of occasions.

Andy Rueda: Yeah, that's a great question. He was one of my most important relationships out there. It started off when I was really down and out and really scrambling during the first tribal council. It was going to be between me and John. That became pretty clear. John took me and Sam aside and said: Hey, we're going to tie this vote up so we can threaten Sierra with going to rocks, immediately.

It didn't really resonate as a good idea because from my perspective Sam and Sierra were quite clearly close. So the conversation with Sam was like: How do you feel about that? I said: Well, why don't we just sacrifice John tonight and going forward I will work with you and Sierra? Sam liked that idea a lot better than John's idea so he became an advocate for me. He was my first lifeline and from the women's perspective it was like he was babysitting me but Sam had other ideas very early on that he could use me and bring me further into the game, into the merge.

We had a lot of time to talk strategy and I think we had a lot of strategic chemistry. I just feel like we do get along and we are friends. That changed though right before the time where we all go on the same beach after the vote. I was feeling really good about our relationship but immediately I caught him in very little lies. For example, he lied to me about Anika losing her vote on the journey and knowing about it. To me that's benign information. She's gone at that point but he was actively lying to me about that and it really eroded my trust in him as we go to that next phase of the game.

Once the Rome vote happened, I got two votes and Sol came to me and said: Actually, it's the Gatas who threw you under the bus.

I was very compelled to believe that, based off of how I've been feeling and so at that point I thought it's going to be better for my game to flip on them. That started our the complications and the ebbs and flows of our of our relationship.



Andy Rueda and Rachel LaMont. Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

John Powell: We don't hear from the jury very often but we saw on the show Sol made a comment about you: Andy's flipped again. How do you take that perception?

Andy Rueda: Such an interesting discussion because I think one of the main themes of my game is perception and the perception and a lot of that was an intentional part of my game but it comes with its pros and cons of being perceived in a particular way.

What is a 'flip' in Survivor? In my opinion, just looking at the semantics, it's like a 'flip' is when someone you don't respect makes a move. If someone you respect makes a move you wouldn't call it a 'flip'. I don't think anyone said that Genevieve 'flipped' on Sol, right? But, I'm a 'flipper' and I'm guilty of that because I was like using that language as well.

However, I knew that this was the perception of me but what flipping does, at the very least, it shows this person is making a move in their self-interest. I knew I was battling these perceptions that first of all, were just true about me, but also that I was leaning into, but I knew that I needed to develop from there. At that last leverage point I could. The impetus of Operation Italy was the last opportunity to exert my agency and start kick off an end game where I was placing big bets but also making moves on my terms.

If that all worked out I would sit at the end with so many things I could say that I did for me and just own it. I'm the biggest snake of the season but I got myself here because I made moves at the right time and if whether or not you perceive it as a 'flip', you can't take that away from me. That was sort of my end game strategy.



Andy Rueda. Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

John Powell: If Rachel went home what would have been your strategy going forward?

Andy Rueda: If Genevieve had not won immunity I would have highly considered swinging back with Rachel and Sue and vote out Genevieve. That was off the table. She won immunity. We wanted to get rid of Rachel because she was a very big threat in winning immunity, in fire-making and in terms of jury stock.

If I played all of my cards right from six to three, I was feeling good sitting next to Sue, next to Teeny if I'm having a strong end game. I felt good sitting next to Sam as well.

John Powell: Obviously you can't tell us who you voted for but you're on the jury now and you've got a very big, important decision to make when you were deciding who you want to cast your vote for. What were some of the things that were going through your mind?

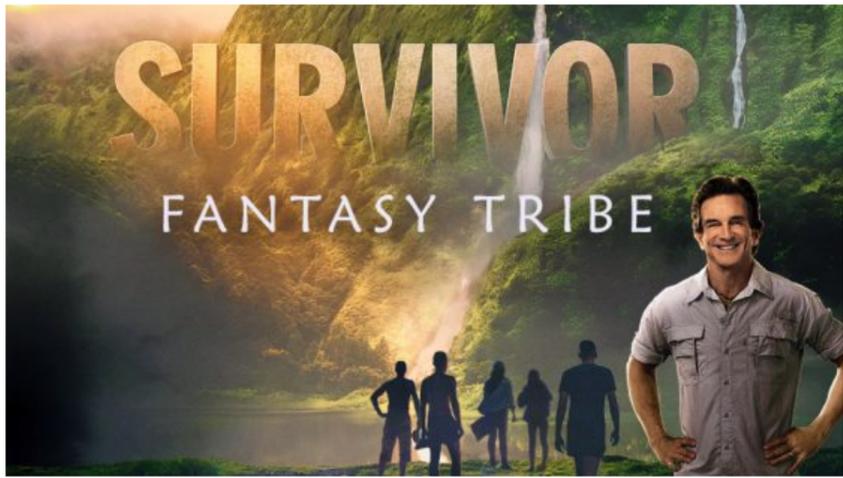
Andy Rueda: Well, I'm a super fan, right? I thought a lot about this since before I played the game. What my mentality would be as a jury member? On a base level, of course, I wanted to give my vote to the person I perceive to play the best game. These are nuanced thoughts about that because often these discussions become pretty reductive and it comes down to resumes. Did you make this move? Did you do this? Blah, blah, blah.

I didn't look at it on a resume level but I needed someone to build a strong case, even if it's very unique to them and very particular to their strengths and their weaknesses and their awareness of either. I was just looking for the best case. When you're on the jury you're kind of like a job interviewer. When you're interviewing for jobs you kind of barely look at the resume. You scan the resume, and you want to hear their story in totality and based off of all that I wanted to take all that information in and just award the best player the win.

John Powell: You're a super fan. You've been watching Survivor forever. It's one thing to think about the game at home and it's another thing to have you and your experience being exposed to everyone. Everybody saw your highs and everybody saw your lows. Was it the experience you hoped it would be and how is it like seeing yourself so vulnerable on television?

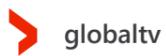
Andy Rueda: That's a great question. I think one of the first things I told the producers when I was like in the process was that I fell in love with Survivor. I fell in love with the strategy but then I also fell in love with the adventure of it.

Everyone goes through the journey that they can't write ahead of time. You never know what your journey is going to be. You just have to put yourself out there, go all out, not be afraid to be vulnerable and what will be will be. I did have a mentality going in but that being said there's just no way I could have predicted what my journey was going to be. This is just how it goes in life. You just have to find gratitude in the situation. I have so much to be grateful for because I had such a big and wild adventure. I can use it to learn and grow.



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