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Survivor's Sam: 'I Played The Game Like I Was On Top'

Posted By: John Powell | December 19, 2024



Sam Phalen. Courtesy: CBS.

By John Powell – GlobalTV.com



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He was the underdog fighting from the underground for more than half the season. Sam Phalen, the journalist and sports reporter from Nashville, scratched and clawed his way to an impressive second place on Survivor's 47th season.

John Powell: Sam, how you doing this morning? Congratulations on making the Survivor finale.

Sam Phalen: I'm great! John, thank you so much! I appreciate it!

John Powell: We saw the reaction to your tribal council, your strong performance. What was your mindset going in?

Sam Phalen: You know, my mindset going into final tribal was just to pull no punches. I told Rachel: 'Hey, I'm coming for your neck. I'm going to be aggressive, I'm going to take some shots.' She was like: 'Bring it on, man! I'm going to throw it right back.' So I knew I was going to try and really command the room, really sort of control WHAT was being discussed and talked about and HOW it was being talked about in order to be pretty intentional about how I framed my game compared to Rachel's game at the end.



Sam Phalen, Rachel LaMont and Andy Rueda. Photo: CBS.

John Powell: Many of the jurors said that you did had made a strong argument. The one person who did stick by you when it came to the vote though was Kyle. How did you feel about that, knowing that he was true to your friendship and alliance with you?

Sam Phalen: I mean, incredible! I cannot say enough good things about Kyle. The same way that he he felt about me out there I feel like is totally reciprocated. He is a dude that I admire so much of his drive and the person that he is for his family. It meant a lot to me! I feel like he was somebody that I had a really good connection with in the game and it's certainly nice when those connections are backed up by action and a vote at the end.

John Powell: Were you surprised at the final vote? Because again, like we saw that Sierra was a solid ally throughout the game with you but she didn't come through for you as far as the vote is concerned.

Sam Phalen: I was very surprised. Sierra was somebody who I definitely thought I could rely on. I thought I was going to get Gabe's vote as well. Those were two people that I felt pretty confident about. There's everybody else that was sort of either I was not feeling good about or on the fence about, really. Andy and Teeny felt like the swing votes to me. The way I perceived it in the moment was Caroline, Sol and Genevieve were going to be firmly in the Rachel camp. They were going to be voting for Rachel. I thought I was gonna be able to get Sierra, Kyle and Gabe. I was really trying to swing Andy and Teeny to be a five three, because I knew in a four scenario Sue would have voted for Rachel. So, I was trying to find five somehow. Definitely expected it to be closer than it ended up coming out. So that was a bit of a surprise for sure.

John Powell: You started out the game very strong because you had a core alliance around you and then, as we saw, those allies started disappearing. You were playing from the bottom for quite a large portion of the game. How was it to play that way? Were you surprised at that, because, again, most people don't go in putting themselves in that scenario.



Andy Rueda, Rachel LaMont, Sierra Wright and Sam Phalen. — Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

Sam Phalen: Yeah, definitely not a scenario that I envisioned for my game but kind of fun, you know. It sucks to be on the outs. It sucks to have your name written down and brought up at every single tribal council and constantly have a target on your back but there is something about being on the bottom that's very liberating. You can just play the game and just go for broke! You know you can make big, flashy moves and have fun playing Survivor and know that: Hey, I got nothing to lose anyway if I don't do this I'm going to end up at Ponderosa (Survivor's camp for those who are voted out). So if this cost me the game and I end up at Ponderosa at least I went down swinging. I think being able to adapt that aggressive mentality was unique for somebody on the bottom. I played the game like I was on top when I was not on top. I really just wanted to take control of things and have fun. It was not what I envisioned but I certainly feel like I had a good time because of it.

John Powell: What prompted you to turn on Genevieve and reveal that her idol was phony?

Sam Phalen: It did work out exactly how I wanted it too. Genevieve goes home. I give myself a chance to make four which then gets me into the end of the game and gives me a chance to win a million dollars. It was executed like I thought it would be.

Genevieve beats anybody in the game at final tribal and I think she does that unanimously. Actually, I think she was THAT well-respected, and she's somebody who doesn't see that in herself. She is self-deprecating and doesn't realize how good she is or how much people love her, right? I saw it having the pleasure of being an ally and a friend to her in the game. I knew that I had no shot against Genevieve. I knew that that was my biggest competition left in the game so I was working with Genevieve as a means of furthering myself to a point where I could get to the end. It never would have made sense for me to sit next to Genevieve at final three.

John Powell: We saw you towards the end of the game have a very good attitude about things. 'If I win, I win. If I lose, I lose.' What that from playing from the bottom? How did that mindset click in because again, it seemed to be a little bit of a different mindset from when you started with the game but then again, you were in a far different position at that time.

Sam Phalen: I do think it's playing from the bottom. It's, you know, escaping death multiple times. I had three different votes throughout the game that I was one vote away from going home...It felt like I kept narrowly avoiding death and I had made this run that I didn't expect to keep making and keep surviving. It definitely became this moment where I was able to make peace with whatever was going to be. I knew that I had done all that I could do every step of the way and that I was going to keep doing absolutely everything. If I hit the end of my rope at any point I could smile on the way out and know that I had no regrets. I ultimately feel like that is what you desire as a Survivor player. It is very rare to get to go on the show and play this awesome game and come away not having any significant regret for one big mistake or move that you made. I felt very blessed to be in that position.

John Powell: One of your more rocky relationships was with Teeny. We saw how she reacted going into fire, how she reacted to you, just as a person as well. What is your response to all of that because, again it seemed on the side of personal, which you know, you try to separate that in the game of Survivor but sometimes it just comes to the forefront.



Kyle Ostwald and Sam Phalen. Courtesy: CBS.

Sam Phalen: I think what you said is, right. It is personal in a way but not necessarily between Teeny and I but really I think it's a personal thing for Teeny. I think that's one aspect of this game that you can't account for going in is that these are very different people and we all see the world differently and we've all interacted with the world differently. We have our own battles with identity, our place in the world and privilege. We're all different somewhere on that spectrum.

I never took it personally from Teeny. I never had any ill will towards Teeny for it. I'm not Teeny. I don't interact with the world the same way Teeny does. I haven't had those sort of feelings and so who am I to tell Teeny how they can or can't feel about me or those moments? Survivor is a raw, vulnerable game and I will never be upset for somebody being raw and vulnerable about how they feel. I think Teeny is such a special person for being willing to be vulnerable, willing to be self-aware, willing to be all versions of themselves, unapologetically and I have such admiration for that.

From my perspective, it was control the 'controllables'. You be yourself, control how you treat people, control how you represent yourself and let everybody else interact with the world how they interact with the world. That's not your place to tell them how to how to do that.

John Powell: I there anything you wished viewers and fans got to see about your journey?

Sam Phalen: I think for me it would have been the intention of Operation: Italy. Everything I did was on purpose right from bringing Andy on the reward to the way that I spoke about it publicly with Jeff (Probst) on the mat. All of that was sort of part of the plan.

I had talked to Genevieve a day before Operation: Italy about trying to do this, 3-2-2 vote with an elaborate ruse of a fake idol and hope for the best. She kind of got on board and we were trying to weigh options for what we felt like was our best option. Genevieve was really drawn to Teeny as somebody that we could bring in and have be our third. I was really drawn to Andy and I felt like Andy and I had the best relationship of anybody in that underdog five at the time. I felt like Andy was incredibly capable of playing his parts and pulling this thing off. I had done a similar move, a similar ruse before with Andy at Gata, where we had to play our parts for a week. Everything from the way that we approach that challenge, the way that we approach the reward, was all very intentional about trying to set this plan in place. I do think it was a strategic move that I'm very proud of and I wish maybe would have gotten shown a little bit more of it.

John Powell: Obviously you have come home with your bank of bank account doing a lot better than it was a few months ago. Do you have any plans for the for the money and what does the future hold for Sam?

Sam Phalen: You know, be as responsible as possible, try and do some investments, try and maybe pay off some student loans and get that stuff taken care of. It definitely helps and goes a long way.

What's next for Sam? We'll see. I've still got lot of big dreams, a lot of things that I would like to pursue. So, who knows?

John Powell: Would you ever play Survivor again?

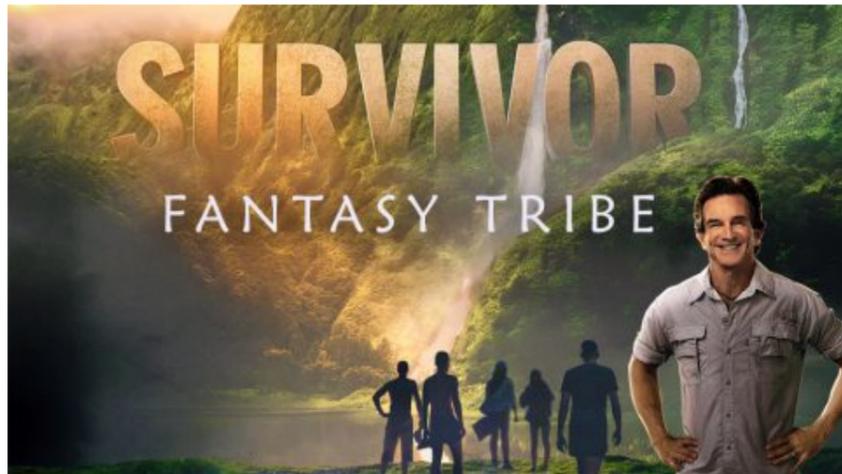
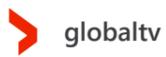
Sam Phalen: Absolutely, I would! Of course!

Season 48 of Survivor debuts on February 26th, 2025, on Global TV.



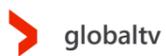
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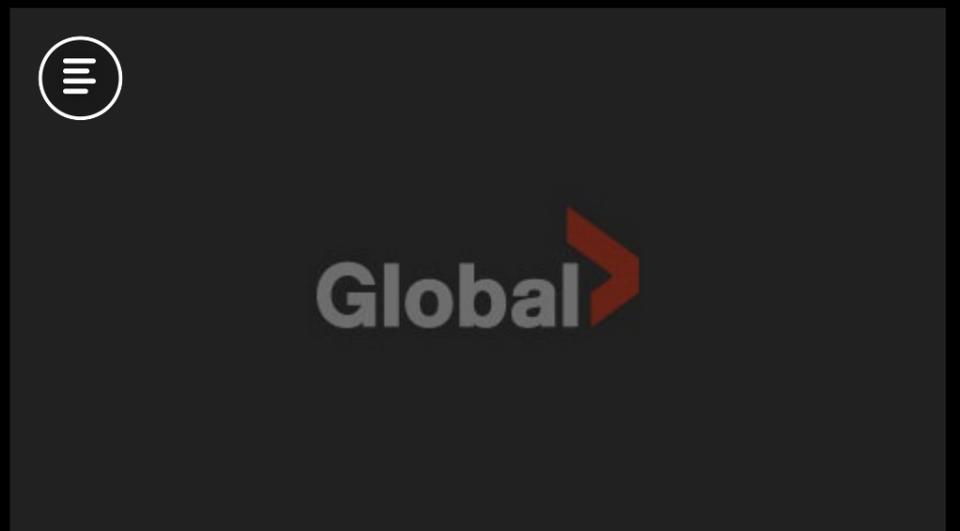
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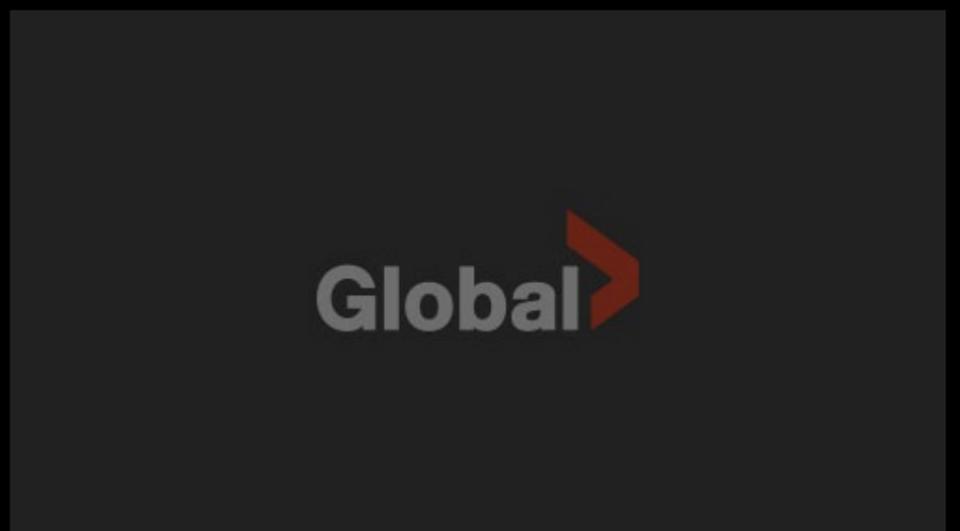
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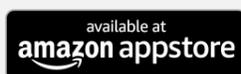


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