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Mitch: 'I Don't Think I've Been Given Enough Credit'

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Mitch Guerra. Photo: CBS.

By John Powell – GlobalTV.com



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On *Survivor*, one of the most important skills you can bring to the table is communication. Having clear communication is hard enough in a setting where lying and deceiving people is the norm. For someone like Mitch Guerra, the gym teacher from Texas, the game had an extra layer of difficulty as he stutters. Mitch wears his speech disability as a badge of honor though in the sense that he doesn't prevent him from being the person he is or achieving the things he has.

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

Mitch Guerra: I'm doing great, John. Thanks for asking.

John Powell: Mitch, I've had people in my life who stutter and I think the most important lesson people can learn is patience. So, please take your time. Don't feel rushed to express yourself.

How did you find it out on the island dealing with your stutter while playing the game? You had a whole other layer to navigate that most players don't.

Mitch Guerra: I felt like going out on the island, I was able to genuinely be myself. I'm someone who is incredibly social and I'm able to build strong relationships with people. So, I knew that if I could just survive the first vote I'd be able to create genuine connections. I don't feel like my stutter hurt me at all. Honestly, I'm so outgoing and confident. I'm very open about having a stutter. It's not a huge deal. So everyone else just kind of accepted it as normal too.



Mitch Guerra. Photo: CBS.

John Powell: What did it mean for you to go out there and represent that? Were we nervous about going on the show?

Mitch Guerra: Oh, my gosh! Before I headed out to L.A., I ugly cried so hard! I kept thinking, “Am I really about to do this? Am I really about to go and stutter on national TV for the world to see?” But, you know what? You can’t let what other people might think about you hold you back. I’ve been incredibly successful in my everyday life. I’m an elementary school gym coach and I’ve done so many things most people would never do, especially as someone who stutters.

I’m incredibly honored that I got the opportunity to play Survivor. I wasn’t chosen because I stutter. I was chosen because of who I am as a whole person and part of me is that I stutter. I’m so thankful I got to represent people who stutter and I hope it shows that we’re totally capable of doing anything anyone else can do – even playing the hardest social game in the world.

John Powell: One thing you must take as a point of pride is that everyone I’ve spoken to who was voted out said you were the one who kept their spirits up. Mitch was the one who kind of kept everybody together. That must mean a lot to you. And again, it’s hard out there—and you had another level of challenge. How did you keep such a positive spirit?

Mitch Guerra: That’s a great question! Honestly, every day is hard as someone who stutters, to be completely honest. Over time, I’ve just become emotionally and mentally tough. That challenge helped me. I try to live every day as joyfully as possible. Playing Survivor is incredibly hard. It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done and probably ever will do. It’s easy to get super negative out there and I definitely had some incredibly low moments but I was

living my dream. I wanted people to know how thankful I was to be out there. I wanted people to feel like, “Man, I enjoy being around Mitch.” Sometimes just being someone others want to be around is enough to keep you in the game and apparently I did a pretty good job at that.



Mitch Guerra and Saiounia “Sai” Hughley. Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

John Powell: One of the really nice moments of the season was when Cedrek shared his personal experience with you, he felt comfortable enough to open up. What did that moment mean to you?

Mitch Guerra: Wow, it was so special! Honestly, it made me feel like I was at home. It was a reminder that, yes, I’m playing Survivor but I was also building a genuine connection on a human level. He understood every emotion and thought process I was going through. He knew how hard it is for me to speak up at challenges or at Tribal Council.

And honestly, if I had been sitting in the final three and Cedrek was on the jury, I know he would’ve openly advocated for me because he truly understood. I don’t think people fully grasped the social game I played and the depth of my relationships. Sure, I wasn’t the biggest strategic threat. I didn’t make any huge moves. I didn’t win an immunity necklace but sometimes good players don’t need to. You don’t need big moves to win Survivor. You don’t need to win challenges. If I had been at the end I believe people on the jury would’ve recognized the game I played.

John Powell: Another part of your journey was you were basically losing your allies one by one. How tough was it to navigate that?

Mitch Guerra: I don't think I've been given enough credit for the game I played just to stay in the game. So many players were in a great spot and blew it up themselves by doing something dumb, getting emotional or just saying the wrong thing. That alone can get you sent home. I wasn't in the majority for a long time. I was playing from the bottom. I was seen as the biggest physical threat coming into the merge. Sure, people looked at David and Joe for their size but I was the one who carried my tribe to four out of five immunity wins.

I'm not saying this to downplay my teammates – Cedric, Sai, Chrissy, Bianca – they're amazing people. But early on, Cedric and Sai couldn't win a challenge. I don't think people give me enough credit for what I did to stay in the game.

John Powell: I ask this of every Survivor: We only get to see so much of your journey on the show. Is there anything you wish fans had gotten to see? Maybe a gameplay moment, a conversation, or a relationship?

Mitch Guerra: If I had been sitting in the final three I think the edit would've looked very different. I had so many meaningful conversations with Joe and Shauhin. I felt like I was aligned with Kyle from day one, though it didn't really show until maybe episode three.



Mitch Guerra, Mary Zheng and Thomas Krottinger. — Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

I want people to know that I was playing an incredibly social game the entire time. Unfortunately, it didn't come through in the edit but in any other season, someone playing a strong social game would be considered a huge threat. Just because I wasn't making flashy moves against the majority doesn't mean I wasn't playing hard. Some of the best players ever played that kind of social game. And I believe, if I had made it to the end my relationships would have given me a real shot at winning.

John Powell: One of the big questions fans had came during a key crossroads late in the game, near the finale. You had the option to go against Joe and side with others or stay loyal. Why did you stick with Joe and that alliance?

Mitch Guerra: At the final eight, Kamilla, Star, Mary and I were clearly on the outs. But I knew Kamilla, Kyle, and I had a strong bond. We were tight. Even if it didn't look that way at that moment we were already in the six.

I even told Star, "I want to sit with you at the final Tribal Council." I offered her a final three deal—me, Kyle, Kamilla and her. I told her, "If I win immunity, I'll give it up so you and Kamilla can be safe, and I'll take out Kyle in fire." Literally ten minutes after that, I go up to the beach and Eva looks me in the face and repeats everything I just told Star.

That's when I knew I couldn't play with Star. She was still playing with Eva, Joe and Shauhin. She was telling them everything. Why would I blow up my game for someone who was already leaking all our plans?

And honestly, Star didn't even play her Shot in the Dark. That shows she truly believed she was safe with them. If she really felt like she was on the outs, she would've used it. So I'm tired of people saying, "Mitch, you should've made that move." I tried. She gave everything away. So no, I made the right call.

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