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Dee Completes The Survivor Circle: 'I Had Nothing To Prove'

Posted By: John Powell | April 9, 2026



Jeff Probst and Dee Valladares. Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.



If there is one word you can use to describe Dee Valladares as a Survivor player it is “fearless”. The Survivor 45 winner has no regrets about bringing her all gas, no brakes style of gameplay to the fiftieth season. A target from the moment she stepped on the island Dee wishes she didn’t whisper the wrong thing in the wrong ear though.

Dee Valladares: What’s up, John!

John Powell: Hey, D! It’s great to be talking to you. Thanks for taking the time with us today. It sucked to see you go last night but I think you can take some solace in the fact that this season is all firsts for you: first time you’ve been voted out, first time you’re on the jury. So basically, you’ve had the whole Survivor experience now.

Dee Valladares: I did, I did! The way I see it, and I talked to my family a lot about this, I completed the Survivor circle. I come from privilege because I won but I’m at peace knowing that I completed the circle and I get to experience something that I hadn’t experienced before. That’s being part of the jury. Seeing Jeff (Probst) snuff my torch? That was iconic!



Dee Valladares. Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

I get to sit in the front-row and watch the game and not care about me or what I'm thinking. I'm just truly seeing the game unfold. We love Survivor so much but it's so special to see it unfold in person. It is really freaking cool! I get to wear 'jury cute'. I get to shower and put on my outfits and get a little bit of screen time at the end of the episode.

John Powell: As a former winner was there any thought in your mind like, "This might affect my legacy? I've proven all I need to prove. I won my season." Was there any of that kind of thought before going into the series?

Dee Valladares: To be fair, I did not worry about my legacy because if I worry about my perception, reputation, legacy or how others are perceiving me, I would have lost the game already. I wouldn't have had fun. I knew going into 50 that it would be tough but even if I would have been the first boot, nothing that would have happened on season 50 was going to take away from what I did on season 45, so I had peace in that.

I remember being at Ponderosa before we started the game. I was journaling. I said, "Dude, I feel so at peace now." I didn't know if that was because I'm overlooking the Fiji waters but I don't have anything to prove. I really don't. I didn't come back to be a better player. If anything, I thought I was truly even more myself this time around because I won and because I was free.



Charlie Davis and Dee Valladares. Photo: Gail Schulman/CBS.

Jeff (Probst) always tells the players, "Play your first time as if you're playing the second." I never understood what that meant until 50 and what it really means is you're going in there and you have to let go. Let go of people's perception about you. Let go of caring what someone's going to say about you in confessionals. Just let go, have fun, and play hard.

I think I did that on this season so I'm very grateful. At the end of the day, I'm on the jury, so now I get to vote for someone to win a million dollars. To me, that means so much. I already made peace in the game with the fact that my story for season 50 is I am going to impact somebody else's life, and that's what I took from it.

John Powell: You fought hard, even to the very end. Did you think at any time that your targeting of Coach was resonating with anyone?

Dee Valladares: No, it wasn't, dude. (laughs) It was not resonating at all. I thought I whispered it and Coach heard me! He's like: "I heard you say my name." I'm like, "My bad." So funny! (laughs)

No, I had absolutely zero power in there and at the end of the day, you can never say never on Survivor, because Survivor's crazy and anything can change. I'm like, "You know what? I'm gonna try to do what I could," because I knew I was going home but there was no way I was just gonna sit at Tribal and stay quiet and go home. I'm going to fight because that's just what I do.

John Powell: One of the things you did mention at Tribal was the "floaters". Who were the "floaters"?

Dee Valladares: From my perspective, in that moment, the floaters were absolutely Rizo, Ciri, Ozzy but more Christian, Rick, and Emily, right? Because from the other side, you know they're going to stick together. Stephanie, Chrissy, Joe and Coach, they're going to stick together. The people in the middle can go either way, right? So those are the people that are dangerous because you don't know which way they'll go.

John Powell: Which hurt your game most? Revealing Rizo's idol or that argument with Jonathan?

Dee Valladares: It was a mixture of everything, I'd say. The blow-up? I was already going home at that point, right? I already knew it was me going home. I think it affected me more so with Rizo because I completely shattered trust and an alliance that I had and Cirie as well, by association.



Dee Valladares and Ozzy Lusth. Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

On Survivor, when you find your people and you give your word and then you break it, it's broken forever. If I'm loyal and you break your word, I don't know if I can trust you, right? Stephanie, Chrissy, Coach, Jonathan, they wanted me out so why would they go against them right now and blow up their game for me?

It was a mix of a lot of things...The New Era is so fast-paced. I didn't have a lot of time to really build deep relationships after the merge. Maybe I could have tried harder but I didn't want to be aligned with certain people. It is what it is. Maybe it's because I won and I knew that I had an expiration date and I was just okay with it. The didn't put this in the episode, but at tribal I was like, "I'm going to go drink, and you guys are not". (laughs)

John Powell: There is a lot of talk about pre-gaming and how it affected this season, for good and bad. What are your thoughts?

Dee Valladares: I think both things can be true. Pre-game can absolutely hurt or help and that always depends on who you pre-game with because everyone talks. Every single person talks. Some people do it more than others. Some do it in different ways, in group settings and other people just do it one-on-one. There is no right way.

You don't know what Jeff's going to throw at you. Look at the Blood Moon twist. I think the less people you pre-game with, the better. At least for future seasons, nobody freaking talk to me! Don't call me! I won't call you! (laughs) You can't promise someone something and then you're in the game and now you have to screw them over. Now, you just lost a friend for life. That's my take on pre-gaming alliances and talking. I think it hurts your game for some and then helps for other people but you will never know until you're in the game.

John Powell: He is one of the biggest players and characters this season. What do you think of Rizo?

Dee Valladares: I love Rizo! I am a Rizo fan! I'm R-I-Z-G-O-D! I don't think that's the case for some people on our cast but I'm telling you right now, and you're hearing this first, Rizo is extremely self-aware. He's very funny. He knows how to laugh at himself, which is major. He doesn't have an ego and we love that. He's really one of the girls.



Benjamin "Coach" Wade and Dee Valladares. Photo: Robert Voets/CBS.

You didn't see this but after everything blew up and Rizo told me that Emily told him that I spilled the beans, we had another conversation. I sat him down and I said, "Rizo, I know you know I'm lying. You know I know you know I'm lying. I just want to apologize." I was crying because I see him like a little brother. I'm like, I just screwed up this kid's game, who just came to play after 49. It really hurt.

He was just so understanding. You look at him and you feel like you could tell him anything because you feel so safe in his presence...He is so mature and he's a lot more mature than a lot of people on this cast.

John Powell: The one person who had your back was Tiffany. She couldn't put her game on the line for you and that broke her heart.

Dee Valladares: That's my girl, dude! She was even like, "I'm sorry, sis." When Survivor brings you people like that you keep them close because there's people that ride for you and vice versa. That was my girl through and through and Kamilla too!

John Powell: Some of the women have spoken about their edit this season. What do you think of the controversy?

Dee Valladares: For me, it doesn't hurt me because I come from a place of privilege where I could have gotten one confessional and been happy. You cannot take away what I did on 45, not the players, not the editors. Let me tell you something though. I am I sad to see some of the women under-edited. It hurts more when it's a friend. Look how funny Tiff was this episode. Trust me, she was providing!...I think they'll do a good job in taking feedback and seeing what they'll do for 51 or 52.

John Powell: Is there anything you wish people saw about your journey this time around?

Dee Valladares: In OG Kalo, I did a fashion show that was never aired and it was like the most I've ever laughed in my life! I wore Jonathan's clothes, he wore mine, Mike wore Kamilla's, Kamilla wore Mike's and Coach and Chrissy were each other!

I felt like everyone was paranoid and we were all just being annoying. Even sitting around camp, and I'm like, "Dude, let's have some fun. Like, we're on season 50. This does not feel like a celebration right now." So we rolled out the tarp that we won in episode two and it was so funny! It was the most I've ever laughed!

John Powell: Obviously, you cannot tell us who you voted for in the end but what are some of the aspects that you were looking for in picking a winner this season?

Dee Valladares: I think for me when you get to the end, it turns to the jury. The jury now gets to decide who do we want to represent this season. For me, that played a big role. Who can represent the season the best? Who played hard but also had their full-circle moments...You might be able to be a good representative but then you shut down at Tribal and that's very possible.

To me, something that really mattered was: Who can represent 50 seasons of Survivor? I think everyone was worthy of being there but I don't know if everyone could represent. If that makes sense.

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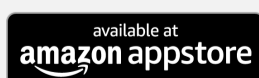


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