

Survivor

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Survivor Winner: 'I Was Okay With People Underestimating Me'

Posted By: John Powell | December 15, 2022



Mike Gabler. Photo Courtesy: CBS.

By John Powell – GlobalTV.com

Survivor 43 winner Mike Gabler made Survivor history twice last night. At 52-years-old, Gabler became the second oldest person to ever win the game and is now the first Survivor to donate their entire winnings to charity.

As Gabler describes it giving the money to those in need was his plan before he ever stepped on the island.

"Before the game even started I was talking with one of my buddies (he was in the military) and my wife and we were almost tongue-in-cheek just saying if I win, why don't I do something big with the money?...I'm far enough along in my career where I love my job. I love being on the heart team. I love what we do for patients every day. So I'm going to keep doing that regardless...It was was a pretty easy decision but I did have that decision made with my wife before I went on the show. I came back and I said: 'Hey, darlin'. I did win and I did give it all away.' She was cool. She was awesome," the heart valve specialist told GlobalTV.com.



Jeff Probst and Mike Gabler. Photo Courtesy: Robert Voets/CBS.

In an update on his philanthropic efforts Gabler says he has already reached out to several veterans' charities and has even established one himself. His winnings have been transferred into a fund that can only be used for charitable donations.

"I can't even buy a potato chip with it," he laughed.

Some of that money is earmarked for VETS ([Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions](#)) which is a charity that is coincidentally close to the heart of Heroes vs. Healers vs. Hustlers winner, Ben Driebergen.

Gabler's road to victory was a rocky one with the Baka tribe imploding and Gabler having to drift out of sight as he approached the finish line. Gabler insisted that he face Jesse in fire-making and immunity winner Cassidy granted him that wish.

"I'm glad that Cassidy selected me to make fire. I was the fastest fire-maker on the beach...I'm an outdoors man. I like to go camping and hunting so I'm familiar with fire. So, for me to go make fire, I was very bullish about going to do it. Now that said, making fire in front of Jeff Probst is a whole different kind of fire-making! I don't know if I was prepared for that but I just got in the zone and put on my battle gear," he said.

Fire-making aside, Gabler admits that he was pretty confident going into the final tribal as he had built strong relationships with everyone on the jury and knew those would come into play and they did in a big way when it came to the final vote. Gabler says he also relied on the fact that people underestimated him and thought he was playing from the bottom when he really wasn't.



Jesse Lopez, Mike 'Gabler' Gabler, Ryan Medrano, Noelle Lambert, James Jones, Cassidy Clark, Jeanine Zheng, Sami Layadi, Owen Knight, Karla Cruz Godoy and Cody Assenmacher. Photo Courtesy: Chuck Snyder/CBS.

"You know, that was the perception, that I was playing from the bottom but I was in the Ride or Die alliance with Jesse and Cody. Nobody knew about that alliance until final tribal but we were this trio that no one knew about moving around throughout the game. While I looked like I was an independent I was really part of this group that was sliding between the Baka Boys and we were moving around doing lots of stuff that nobody really knew about," he said. "I played with lot of humility in that I was okay with people underestimating me... I'm playing a bigger game than you're seeing right now. I didn't have to let anybody know that until the end and I think that took patience. Even look at when Ellie and Jeanine went through my bag. I sat on that for 10 days before I dropped that. That is a patient game. That is a strategic game to wait until the right time, which was in the middle of a merge feast, when you have all these new people coming together, letting it out there. That was that was a very key turning point in my game, I believe."

Speaking of Jeanine's unsanctioned foray into his bag Gabler was truly and honestly upset at the time, even though it wasn't against the rules.

"As a fan, you look at it, it's not against the rules to look into somebody's bag. It's okay to do that but when you have cameras on you, that is your privacy area. That is a violation...I could tell that somebody got into my bag. I'm very OCD. I had my idol at the bottom of my tube socks and my Shot in the Dark at the top. When I came back, it was smooshed and they were side by side," he said of the discovery. "I knew I could absolutely trust Sami at that point and then I gave opportunities for Ellie and Janine to come clean a couple times and every time they didn't. I knew I couldn't trust them."

For a portion of the game Gabler wasn't just dealing with the game and the personal relationships he was forming but also weakness and illness at the start and finish. Gabler lost 38 pounds while on the island.

Mike Gabler Survivor 43 Winner/Finale Interview

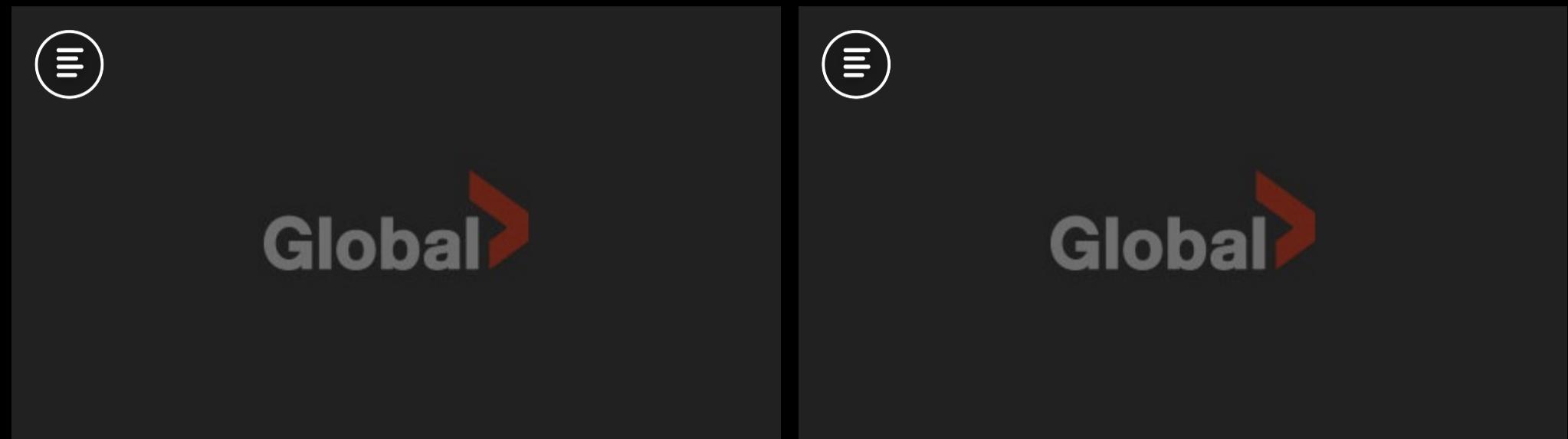


"The first three to six days of Survivor were the worst. Anybody reading this who is going on the show, be prepared for the first week on Survivor because you get there and you are tired, you are hungry, you are dehydrated. You're sweating like crazy. And guess what? You're delicious, because you're still full of salts, minerals and sugars. I had bug bites on my bug bites and on top of all that, the jungle itself is a harsh environment! My feet were rotting off! It was gross! It was like all these other things falling apart! I was thinking: 'Am I going to make it 26 days? Am I gonna make it?' But, once I made it about six days a switch flipped and I just got stronger. I kept going down at the end," he said.

Despite the hardships presented by his tour on the Fijian island this year's winner would love to go back not as a player but as a tourist.

"I want to go back there one day. I just want to stay in a resort be able to enjoy the scenery a bit more then it's right to the buffet!" he laughed.

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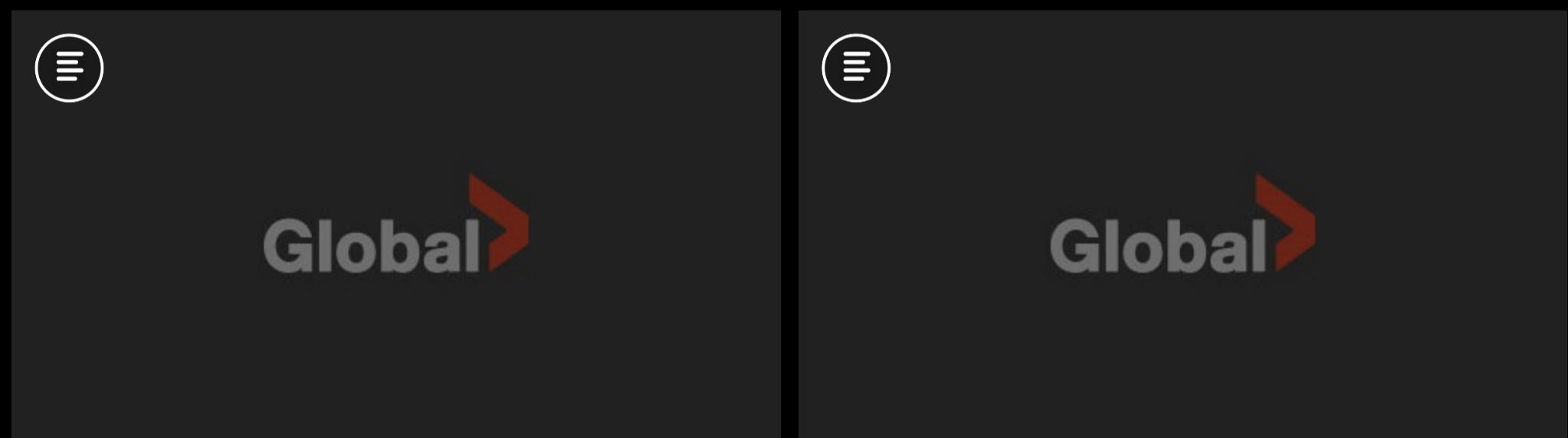
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