

CBS 'Survivor' Castaway Chad Crittenden Takes on the Ultimate Challenge

by Julie McKenna



photo by Monty Brinton/CBS

Chad Crittenden has survived some of the ultimate challenges life has to offer: he is a stay-at-home dad and a two-time survivor – once from cancer and once as a reality show castaway. In 2004, Chad was a participant on the ninth season of CBS' television show, *Survivor: Vanuatu Islands of Fire*, in which 18 strangers were stranded on one of the islands of Vanuatu in the

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South Pacific to compete for a million-dollar prize. Pitted against the other castaways, Chad battled his way toward the prize, but eventually became the eleventh member voted off the island. As such, he was able to secure a position on the jury that ultimately awarded the million-dollar

prize to Chris Daugherty, the last castaway left on the island.

Being a participant on *Survivor* is no easy task for anyone, but Chad took it all in stride ... even with a prosthetic foot. In October 2002, just two years prior to appearing on *Survivor*, Chad discovered a lump on the bottom of his foot that was diagnosed as synovial sarcoma. Amputation just below his knee was required to remove the cancer.

Having been athletic his entire life, Chad was not about to let the surgery stop him from enjoying his active lifestyle. In fact, he wasn't even going to let it slow him down. Just *nine months* after his surgery he participated in a triathlon. "I did it just to jump start me back into things," says Chad. "I've done them once a year for several years, so it wasn't anything serious. Now I know what serious is: I have six lined up for this coming year."

After two weeks of auditions and interviews, Chad was thrilled to be chosen as a participant for *Survivor*. In the first episode, after hiking through rough terrain and weather and setting up camp, castaways and viewers alike were stunned when Chad revealed he had a prosthetic foot. "It was tough not being able to tell anyone, but I wanted to prove myself first," explains Chad. "If I were to have revealed that I had a prosthesis at the very beginning, then all these guys would have preconceived notions about my abilities. So it was nice to be able to prove myself first."

Although there were some cast members who had already found out about his prosthesis during the auditions for the show, the ones who didn't know were shocked. "The reactions ranged from 'Oh my God I can't believe this,' to 'Now what are we going

to do because this guy is going to get the sympathy vote,'" Chad remembers. "A couple of them were thinking I was going to have people treating me differently. But I was really out there to prove that I could do things as well as anybody else, and very soon it became a non-issue altogether."

After Chad established his athletic abilities through competitions and daily tasks, his teammates all but forgot he had a prosthesis. "I got the feeling they were assuming that it really was no big deal if you were missing a foot and you could do



Chad gives his tribe an early lead in the relay race during the immunity challenge, "Outwit, Outplay, Outrig," in the fifth episode. Photo by Monty Brinton/CBS

anything as good as anybody else," says Chad.

The hardest part about being on the show didn't have anything to do with his prosthetic foot. The long days filled with mental and physical challenges were difficult, but Chad remembers the hardest parts of being on the show were the cold nights. "At night it was very cold because it was wintertime in the Southern hemisphere," recalls Chad. "The wind picks up and it gets down to the

mid-50s and we'd only have these shorts and tank tops on. It was very cold and windy so it was really hard to sleep at night."

Despite the hardships involved with being on the show, Chad cherishes what he calls the opportunity of a lifetime. One particular memory that stands out was when he and teammate, Chris, won a reward challenge. "We got to go to another island in Vanuatu and participate in a ceremony with some native people," says Chad. "Chris and I were privileged guests to be involved in this celebration because there were two tribes coming together for a wedding. Their culture is so different: there's no running water, electricity, or anything. It was just really cool to be accepted into this culture and have this experience I never would have otherwise. It wasn't contrived in any way."

When giving advice to other people who have been diagnosed with cancer, Chad says his first recommendation



Chad leads the members of the Lopevi tribe, Brady Finta, Rory Freeman, Travis "Bubba" Sampson, Chris Daugherty, John Kenney, John Palyok and Lea "Sarge" Masters, to a reward challenge in the third episode.

Photo by Monty Brinton/CBS

your mind starts to think, *well forget it, I'm giving up.* And I was not about to do that."

Chad suggests being more selective in what you read and finding out the source of the information. "Pick carefully through your Internet

with a grain of salt. Just really look within yourself first before you start to make any decisions, assumptions, plans, or anything. Think about what *you* want to do and not what everything else is telling you."

Chad has no plans to slow down and is currently preparing for the six triathlons he has committed to this year. "The Challenged Athletes Foundation just sponsored me, so I am training pretty rigorously now. The triathlons are going to be tough; they're not easy ones. But I did decide against trying to get into the Ironman triathlon competition this year – that's a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride, followed by a marathon. I'd like to go for that eventually, but not this year."

Chad has no regrets from being on *Survivor*, even though he didn't win. When asked if he would do it again, he says without hesitation, "I totally would! There are a couple reasons for that," he



Chris Daugherty, Chad Crittenden, Brady Finta, John Palyok, Lea "Sarge" Masters, Travis "Bubba" Sampson, and Rory Freeman take on the reward challenge, "Great Escape Run." The Yasur tribe looks on, Ami Cusack, Lisa Keiffer, Leann Slaby, Scout Lee Cloud, Twila Tanner, Eliza Orlins, Mia Galeotalanza, and Julie Berry, during the third episode.

Photo by Monty Brinton/CBS



photo by Bill Inoshita/CBS



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is to be wary of what you read on the Internet. "Don't just do a search for your type of cancer and read everything that comes up. Because I did that and I read some medical Web sites that gave statistics and mortality rates, which were not very good. It just freaked me out and it was really horrible to see that. Not that I want to have a 'Pollyanna' view of things, but I did want to hear some positive stuff," Chad explains. "When you start thinking that it is really deadly,

research and seek out support groups," Chad advises. "On the bulletin board on the Sarcoma Alliance Web site I sent out a post asking to hear from people who had good stories about synovial sarcoma and people who have lived. I got lots of responses that were all these great stories of survival.

"Always keep a positive attitude," Chad continues. "I know that sounds very cliché, but it is true. Don't believe the statistics and take everything

explains. "It was just an amazing experience in general and a really cool thing to do. Secondly, it gave so much exposure to sarcoma, amputees, and the disabled in general." Chad may not have won the million dollars, but he did win the ultimate challenge against cancer.

Editor's Note: Chad will be participating in a 10K race for the Sarcoma Alliance in April. For more information visit www.sarcomaalliance.org or call (415) 381-7236. ■