

SCRIPT

game changer

Big Brother *host Julie Chen*
dishes top strategies for winning it all

By *Jim Colucci*
Photograph by *Art Streiber*



HEN **GEORGE ORWELL** coined the term “Big Brother” in his 1949 classic novel *1984*, he was imagining a dystopian society where individualism and free thinking were viewed as crimes. But when ***Big Brother*** debuted on CBS in the summer of 2000, it soon became clear that it was the people with the most outsized personalities, crazy schemes and powerful alliances (Chilltown, anyone?) who were the most successful. And over the past 15 years, the show has evolved its rules, upped its game and become a summertime staple.

It's important to shake things up, host **Julie Chen** explains, to keep players on their toes. But it's not just the show's challenges that have changed. For one thing, Chen admits with a laugh, "as I look at old hairstyles and fashion choices, I either laugh, or cringe, or do a little of both." But also, having spent the past five years on CBS' daytime talk show, *The Talk*, Chen has become more comfortable sharing more of her own opinions. That feeling of freedom has occasionally spilled over into *Big Brother*, where, for example, she chastised Season 15 evicted player **Aaryn** for making racially insensitive comments to her fellow houseguests.

The mother of 5-year-old son Charlie with husband Leslie Moonves, CEO of CBS Corp., Chen started her career in news, and spent 12 years as an anchor on CBS' *The Early Show*. Hosting *Big Brother*, however, has now become "the longest-running job I've ever had," she says. As the show prepared to launch its 17th edition in June, *Watch!* sat down with Chen to discuss the winning strategies she's witnessed over the past decade and a half. Some are effective, some just entertaining and some are basically crash courses in sociology, psychology and, let's face it, good old playground scheming. But no matter the methods to the madness, all of these tactics have helped *Big Brother* become everyone's favorite warm-weather watch.

KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE:

"One of the most interesting things about the game has been the alliances people have formed—and, for whatever reason, how the guys are better at it. It started with Season 2's **Chilltown**, and I loved Season 14's **The Quack Pack** because it was amazing to watch little **Ian** outsmart **Mike Boogie**, the master. I didn't really care for Season 5's **The Four Horsemen**, because they were mainly just goofy guys and not really strong competitors—even though one of them, **Drew**, won. In Season 16, **Derrick** did pretty well with his **Bomb Squad**, which helped him win. And then there's that same year's **Team America**, with Derrick, **Frankie** and **Donny**. There was a funny moment where to figure out the identities of their Team America teammates, whom the viewers had chosen, each of them would ask the other about their favorite desert, and the code-word answer was 'apple pie.' It was fun to watch how they found each other, and I was impressed at how slick and sly some of them could be—to the point where many of the others never knew about the alliance, right up until finale night."





Big Brother host Julie Chen with Season 10 winner Dan

GO OVER THE TOP: “In Season 14, when previous Season 10 winner **Dan** staged his own funeral, that was a masterpiece. At that point, it was obvious he was done for, and so he went all-out. He realized he had nothing to lose, and so he ran right into the eye of the storm. There was a moment where, as I watched what he was doing, I wondered whether he had lost his mind. I remember thinking, ‘Is he crazy, or a crazy genius?’ Well, it was the latter; his strategy worked, he stayed, and he almost won the game for a second time.”

TRUST NO ONE:

“When **Marcellas** was evicted in Season 3—despite having the Power of Veto in his hand—I playfully slapped him during our interview, and to this day that’s one of the moments fans mention most when I meet them. I did what they wanted to do! I think Marcellas made that fatal mistake because when you’re living in the *Big Brother* house, you have tunnel vision. You have very few ways to gauge what’s ahead, and you can’t see the full picture. Season after season, we’ve now learned that trust is something you don’t really have in the house. But season after season, people forget that, because they’re



Season 3's Marcellas, after his ouster from the house

human. They develop friendships and bonds, and what they think is trust. But in the end, they shouldn’t trust, because everyone’s their competitor.”

BLEND IN: “Being quiet and down-the-middle may not be the most exciting strategy, but it can win you the game.

Maggie is the classic example of that, in Season 6. There had also been **Lisa**, in Season 3; I remember one time, as everyone voted in separate rooms by holding up their written eviction votes for the camera, how she quietly back-

stabbed her boyfriend in the house, **Eric** the firefighter. Season 5’s **Drew** is another example.

And Season 16’s winner, **Derrick**, too—he was mature and level-headed, and cruised to the finish line. I feel like that’s kind of a lot—that

out of 16 seasons, four winners were players who didn’t rock the boat. It goes to show, vanilla can be good. Don’t underrate vanilla!”

LOVE THY ENEMY: “One of the best ways to get attention, even if not to win, is the showmance. In Season 2, PR master Mike Boogie knew just what he was doing. He found a good way to steal the spotlight on finale night by proposing

to **Krista**, because he knew neither he nor his (short-lived) fiancée was going to win. And then there was Season 16’s “**Zankie**,” **Frankie** and **Zach**—they joked around, but I was rooting for them to make it work for real! I really admire couples who make it work outside the *Big Brother* bubble, like Season 12 and 13’s **Rachel** and **Brendon**, who did get married, went on *The Amazing Race* twice, and had roles on *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Or Season 13’s **Daniele** and **Dominic**—he entered the house a virgin, and then several years after they were on the show, they ended up married. I love that.”

PLAY DIRTY:

“One of the show’s most memorable moments happened in Season 2, when

Shannon used **Hardy**’s toothbrush to clean the toilet—and then we edited the episode to show, from behind the mirror, Hardy brushing his teeth so meticulously.



Was Season 2's Hardy's toothbrush tainted?



One of Chen's favorite houseguests was Janelle, who appeared in three seasons.

TELL IT LIKE IT IS: “One of my all-time favorite houseguests was **Janelle**, of Seasons 6, 7 and 14, who had no problem saying whatever was on her mind. I loved it in Season 6 when she won Head of Household, and rubbed it in, saying, ‘Bye-bye, bitches!’ Janelle always made it far because even though she was loud and brash, and didn’t care about making

enemies, what saved her was her ability to win games. In the end, her forthrightness was probably her undoing. But I think she's the best player to never win this game."



STAND OUT: "Dr. Will and Mike Boogie were the stars of Season 2, and they each ended up winning a season. Any moment with either of them in the diary room was hilarious, and together their chemistry was perfect, just right for television. Each of them had just what it took to charm and manipulate his way right to the end."

REVEAL EVERYTHING: In Season 16, Frankie held off for a while on revealing that he's Ariana Grande's big brother. When he finally did, he was adorable in how proud he was. People were only momentarily impressed, but it was a good distraction that got Frankie off the hook as the guy everybody wanted to turn against. I also love the twist we pulled in Season 5, the 'Summer of Secrets,' where we initially had twins Adria and Natalie

alternating in the house, pretending to be one person. I'll always remember, at that moment of reveal, how astounded every-

one looked. Season 4 had had the first big shocker, which we called 'The X-Factor.' The twists help us keep the show pure, and exciting. It's as if we're warning everyone, 'You think you

have this game figured out—but you don't!' "

GO IT ALONE:

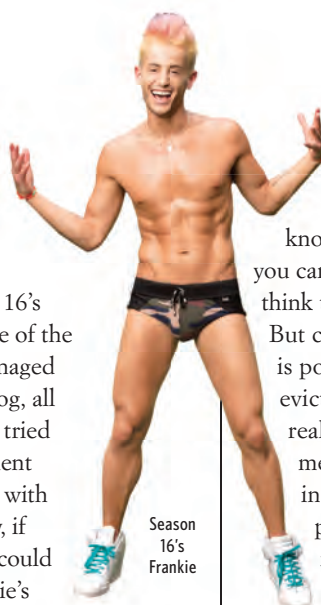
"I loved when Season 16's Frankie won the Battle of the Block, because he managed to do it as the underdog, all by himself. Caleb had tried to make such a statement by refusing to partner with Frankie—and actually, if Caleb had played, he could have sabotaged Frankie's game. I love, when Frankie singlehandedly did win that really difficult challenge, the sheer exhausted joy and surprise on his face. I think no matter how viewers felt about Frankie, they had to admit he'd earned it that week. He deserved that win."

HOLD ON TIGHT:

"There was an unforgettable moment in Season 8 when Evel Dick was down to the final three houseguests, and the Head of Household competition that week was an endurance challenge, where they had to hold on to a giant key hung above their heads. You could see the time lapse on the clock, as we tested them by pouring on fake rain. At one point, it seemed like Evel Dick had lost his mind, as if he were in solitary confinement, singing and screaming at the top of his lungs. It was fascinating to me to watch the transformation and the breakdown of this guy who on the exterior acted like nothing bothered him. But in the end, this was his victory season. And he deserved it."

TRY, TRY AGAIN:

"It's hard to return to *Big Brother* a second year, because people



BIG BROTHER
airs Wednesdays at 8 p.m. ET/PT,
Thursdays at 9 p.m. ET/PT and Sundays
at 8 p.m. ET/PT on CBS.

know some of your strategies, and you can have a target on your back. I think that's what happened with Janelle. But coming back a second season, it is possible to win. Rachel had been evicted in Season 12, and so it's really an unforgettable moment to me when she ended up winning in Season 13. The first time, both people in the house and fans were rooting against her, and making fun of her high-pitched voice, or irritating laugh. Even when she won, everyone in the whole house except her boyfriend, **Brendon**, was against her. That's why I found the victory so triumphant, and I think it's such a celebrated moment in the show's history."

SHAKE IT OFF:

"What's nice about *Big Brother* is, even for people who start out bitter enemies, once they exit that house and they're not playing for \$500,000, they have that common bond. Sometimes, they even make friends for life. In Season 12, Rachel and **Ragan** hated each other. He would imitate her laugh, and really told her off. Recently I saw him, and he told me they're best friends now, who talk every day. That's a nice thing to see. When the show comes back every summer, some of the past houseguests have their own reunions. Because *Big Brother* is a special thing that will always bond them together." U

