

# South Florida Hospital News<sup>®</sup> and HEALTHCARE REPORT

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**Dr. Michael Zahalsky is one of the cast members on Survivor 35.**

## Z Urology's Dr. Michael Zahalsky Competes on TV's Survivor

BY VANESSA ORR

Hard work has always been the key to Dr. Michael Zahalsky's success, helping him to establish Z Urology, the largest urologic practice in South Florida, as well as to become a leader in the field of biologic medicine. He recently started a company dedicated to treating and educating about erectile

dysfunction (ED) and Peyronie's disease, and has partnered with Johns Hopkins University to advance his research on biologic and stem cell therapy. In his spare time, he ran his first marathon this past January.

Yet his biggest challenge came this past summer, when it would take all of his talents, wits and will to succeed just to survive.

Chosen as one of this year's cast members on the reality TV show, *Survivor*, Dr. Zahalsky was one of more than 10,000 people who applied. "The fact that I was picked was an honor in and of itself," he said, adding that he cannot yet share how the season turned out. "What I can say is that I was able to do what my kids asked; their words of wisdom were, 'Daddy, don't die.' And I did come back alive."

A fan of the show since its very first episode, Dr. Zahalsky had talked about applying to the show for years before finally deciding to take the leap. He sent in a three-minute video that he produced in his medical office, talking about why he should be chosen.

"I probably stood out because of my quirky nerdiness," he laughed, referencing a joke he made on tape about the novel *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. "If they didn't read the book, they probably thought I was an idiot, but there was a method to my madness."

On his video, Dr. Zahalsky discussed the impact that the TV show has made on society. "Ethan Zohn was popular in season three, and the name Ethan then became popular in America for years after that because he was such an influential person," said the doctor, who also has a son named Ethan.

"Survivor also happened at the exact same time as the Internet boom, when people were becoming rich overnight, and kids began to believe that you could just go on a reality TV show and leave a millionaire, when the truth is, you have to work hard your whole life to succeed," he added. "I wanted to go on the show to remind people of this forgotten American value; that it's what you have to do to survive."

Dr. Zahalsky has never shied away from hard work; his many accomplishments include becoming the first person to perform robotic urology surgery in Broward or Palm Beach counties, and the first physician in the U.S. to publish results in a peer-reviewed journal about the use of biologics injected into a human with ED. He was also the first physician in the world to publish results from

injecting biologics into a person with Peyronie's disease.

He approached Season 35 of *Survivor: Heroes vs. Healers vs. Hustlers* with the same mindset. "I'm willing to bet that I trained harder than anyone in the history of *Survivor*," he said. "I approached it like a quarterback going into the Super Bowl. I watched all of the past episodes, and studied the different personalities, hoping to understand everyone's flaws and strengths. I looked at how everyone played the game because you don't know if you'll be dealing with new or repeating players."

Dr. Zahalsky also continued his marathon training, running three days a week and working three days a week with a trainer. "I concentrated on the things I know I struggle with, like balance," he explained. "My kids would just laugh at me every morning when they saw me standing on one foot while lifting weights."

Despite being selected for one of the biggest shows on TV, Dr. Zahalsky wasn't allowed to share his good news, which might have been the biggest challenge of all. "They called me at the office, and I was literally jumping up and down, shouting, and patients were running out of their rooms asking what was going on," he laughed. "Then the woman on the phone said, 'It has to be a secret!'" so I had to look at everyone and say, 'Oh, it's nothing.'"

Another complication came when Dr. Zahalsky's cover story about doing medical research in Indonesia began to elicit questions. "It's amazing how many patients and doctors know people in Indonesia," he said. "People were quizzing me on what city I'd be staying in, and what hotel I was going to, and one guy even insisted that I meet up with the head rabbi. I was like, 'Um, no, that's okay.'"

Dr. Zahalsky was worried about leaving his medical practice - with no communication - for the seven-week filming, but said that it was well worth it to participate in the opportunity of a lifetime. "We all have dreams, but it's so easy to become complacent," he explained. "In one phone call, my entire life changed. I can't wait to sit back and watch myself on TV; and I love that my children, and my future grandchildren, will be able to see it as well."

"It's super cheesy, but my kids now look at me a little differently," he added. "They see a person who isn't afraid to do the craziest thing in the world. I came back alive, so I'm kind of a badass."

While Dr. Zahalsky doesn't know how people will react to his appearance on the show, he hopes that it will be positive for himself, his family and his practice. "I think it will be good publicity," he laughed. "After all, who would you rather have doing your vasectomy - a regular doctor, or one who can tell you stories from *Survivor*?"

While he's ready to get back to work, Dr. Zahalsky isn't ruling anything out. "If I can use *Survivor* as a platform to educate the public about reproductive health or issues of sexuality, or find another way to help, I'm all in," he said.

"My son says that if I get to go back on *Survivor* a second time, I would be a *Survivor* legend," he said. "You never know - maybe that's my next challenge."

*Ed. Note: The new Survivor cast was announced Aug. 30. Episodes begin airing Wed., Sept. 27 at 8 p.m.*