

S4 E19: Navigating Greatness

(AJ II & Jeremiah Pierre & Victor Jimenez)

Previously recorded on Friday, May 27th, 2019

0:00 AJ: I have always thought the best part of my job at CBS is meeting extraordinary people every day, but this was solidified last week when I attended a retirement ceremony for several of our veteran cameramen and technical operators, who have each been in the news business over 30 years. Many of them have mentored me and influenced my career for the better, and as much as I've enjoyed their valued mentorship, I have also been lucky to meet remarkable individuals out in the field too. After attending last week's National Geographic Geo challenge, I spoke with two of those individuals, winners of Nat Geo's newest team competition, Jeremiah Pierre & Victor Jimenez of team navigators took home first prize at the National Geographic Geo Challenge for their project on cleaning up the Hudson River watershed. These brilliant fifth grade students and two of their classmates from Flushing Christian School in New York created a device to protect the Hudson's wildlife that are affected by plastic pollution. It was a privilege to get to interview these young men who embody the phrase 'black boy joy,' so let's see, are you smarter than a fifth grader? It's all coming up next on *Max Out Time!*

1:17 Intro Song: 'For the City'

1:54 AJ: Welcome boys, how you doing today?

1:55 Jeremiah & Victor: Good! Fine.

1:59 AJ: How's DC been for y'all this week?

2:01 Victor: It was an exciting trip, I took the plane here with my teacher and my friend, Alex.

2:07 AJ: And what about you, Jeremiah?

2:09 Jeremiah: I drove here with my family and—

2:11 AJ: Who's your family? You got your mom, your dad and who else?

2:14 Jeremiah: My two sisters.

2:15 AJ: What are your sister's names?

2:17 Jeremiah: Grace and Hannah.

2:18 AJ: And so, you're the oldest, you're the youngest?

2:21 Jeremiah: I'm the middle child.

2:22 AJ: Oh, you're the middle child. What is it like being the middle child?

2:25 Jeremiah: Um, it's it's fine. Sometimes you get your way, sometimes you don't.

2:30 AJ: Well yesterday you definitely got your way winning first prize in the Geo challenge, is that right?

2:36 Jeremiah: Yes.

2:37 AJ: So, how did that feel?

2:38 Jeremiah: It felt very exciting and fun.

2:42 AJ: And fun, what about you Victor? What did winning first prize in the Geo Challenge out of a thousand different competitors, you're a finalist, there on the stage at the National Geographic society, what was going through your head?

2:56 Victor: I was just so happy that our project could make it into first place.

3:03 AJ: And so they gave you a big trophy at the end and you, Jeremiah, you held it right up. What did it feel holding that trophy and knowing that you had been successful in your project?

3:12 Jeremiah: I felt that I've accomplished so much with my team.

3:15 AJ: As teammates, you know, have you guys been friends in school, take me back to how the project began and what the process was like, the last couple of weeks or months, or what was it like for the two of you? Jeremiah?

3:30 Jeremiah: So, our Science teacher introduced us to this challenge and we were interested, so we formed a team, and we competed and we won.

3:41 AJ: And Victor?

3:44 Victor: Yeah, it was hard and long, but we did it.

3:46 AJ: You did it. You guys conquered everything, were you ever nervous up there on that stage? You know with Mo Rocca who's a comedian, and a journalist, he works for a show called CBS Sunday Morning, he's very famous. Or, did you know, were you confident? You knew you had it?

4:04 Victor: Um I was actually nervous, but I was confident that we would do good.

4:10 AJ: Jeremiah? What was going through your head? You had a lot of lines up there, you were talking a lot.

4:14 Jeremiah: Yeah, I was nervous but I knew if we practiced, we would be--we would be able to come on top.

4:21 AJ: Confidence, I know who probably instilled that in you. Your parent's right?

4:24 Jeremiah: Yeah.

4:26 AJ: Mom and Dad, what about your teacher? How uh how does she influence you all? In your project, did she help a lot, did she give you ideas? Can you take us through how you collaborated with your teammates and your teachers and your parents? Victor, you can go with that one.

4:43 Victor: So our teacher, she helped us with our project, like she helped us memorize our scripts. She also helped us to concentrate on our projects and to not fool around.

4:58 AJ: Had you guys worked on a project like this before? Is this a brand new experience?

5:03 Jeremiah: For me this is brand new because I've never competed at this type of level before.

5:07 AJ: Had you been to DC before?

5:10 Jeremiah: No, this is my first time.

5:11 AJ: First time in DC?

5:13 Jeremiah: Yes.

5:13 AJ: Okay, what what's your favorite experience so far? I know that you've been working hard but is there anything that has stuck out to you so far?

5:21 Jeremiah: When I first walked in the National Geographic headquarters, that was my favorite part.

5:27 AJ: Oh seeing the pictures and, you know, everything that encompasses the National Geographic headquarters?

5:33 Jeremiah: Yeah.

5:34 AJ: What about you Victor?

5:35 Victor: This is a new experience for me and when I first walked in, it was like.... A lot!

5:45 AJ: It was a lot?

5:46 Victor: It was really exciting that I made it to DC at the National Geographic headquarters.

5:51 AJ: Did you guys ever think that you would be in a challenge like this?

5:58 Jeremiah: No, I never thought I'd be -- well I never thought I would be in a challenge like this because I don't usually do this type of stuff. But it was fun!

6:10 AJ: What do you usually do? Your mom says you really like to work with your hands, you like math?

6:14 Jeremiah: Yeah, I also like sports.

6:17 AJ: What sports do you play? I like sports.

6:19 Jeremiah: I play basketball.

6:21 AJ: You play basketball?

6:23 Jeremiah: Yeah and soccer --

6:23 AJ: Who's your favorite basketball player? You look like you would be a point guard.

6:26 Jeremiah: Yeah, LeBron James is my favorite basketball player.

6:30 AJ: LeBron's your favorite basketball player?

6:32 Jeremiah: Yeah

6:33 AJ: Victor, do you like any sports?

6:34 Victor: I play soccer, but I also like basketball.

6:38 AJ: Who's your favorite basketball player?

6:40 Victor: LeBron James.

6:41 AJ: We got uh we got the LeBron crowd over here! Are there any non-LeBron fans in the house right now? New York, y'all like anybody on the Knicks? Porzingis - I mean anybody?

6:52 Victor: mmm, nah!

6:53 AJ [laughs] Well you guys probably would have done better if you got the first pick in the draft last week, am I right?

7:00 Victor and Jeremiah: Yeah

7:02 AJ: Yeah, so speaking of school and sports, can you tell me about your favourite subjects in school. What's a normal day is like for y'all and what do you do just as regular kids?

7:14 Victor: Well my favorite subjects are Gym, Math and Technology and I also like Science. And like a normal day for me, I just be like...on summer vacation I usually play on--go around on my bike or kick around the soccer ball.

7:36 AJ: And you Jeremiah?

7:37 Jeremiah: The subjects I like are gym, I like Spanish and I also like Math. And a normal day for me, I'll just go home and take a shower, eat and then play--play basketball.

7:56 AJ: Okay, let's flip it though. What's a normal day when you are studying and grinding hard for the Geo challenge? What's different?

8:04 Jeremiah: I'll be trying to memorize my scripts or trying -- practicing presenting.

8:11 AJ: How was it? Was it hard memorising that script -

8:14 Jeremiah: Yes. It was very hard because we changed it multiple times and each time I had to memorize a different script.

8:22 AJ: What was--what were the difficulties and how did you overcome them? What do you do to memorize?

8:29 Jeremiah: I see the word seven times and then I read it on the paper seven times and then I recite it in my brain.

8:37 AJ: You ever write it seven times?

8:38 Jeremiah: No.

8:39 AJ: That's another technique, what about you Victor?

8:41 Victor: Well to memorize? I just like I'd read a section and I say that about five or six times. Then I'd add another section to it and try and read it a few times, and then try and memorize that. I add another section, read it and try and memorize that whole thing.

9:01 AJ: So you both got up on stage in front of hundreds of people and you were the top prize getter out of over a thousand competitors. Outside of your teachers, your parents and you already talked about the subjects that influence you in school. Do you have any role models um or people that inspire you every day?

9:21 Victor: Well, I look up to my parents and my coach because my parents keep pushing me to do more, and my coach also never stops trying to get us to the top.

9:33 AJ: Which coach is this?

9:36 Victor: Ms. Rosic.

9:38 AJ: So your teacher?

9:39 Victor: No, our teacher's Ms. Nelson.

9:41 AJ: Okay, and then you had a coach for the project?

9:44 Victor: Mhmm.

9:44 AJ: Okay, Victor, can you tell me a little bit about the project? People are going to be listening and want to know what exactly it was that you all did. So, can you describe that a little bit?

9:56 Victor: Well our project, we made a filtration system that cleans up the plastics in the Hudson River park. We made it small so it can be portable in the US and globally. We also made a section that will push out the marine life, so they won't get harmed. When we're done filtering the water, we'd send the micro plastics to a plant where they'd be converted into energy.

10:27 AJ: How did you guys know how the world was being polluted? Did you learn about this in school? Did your parents teach you about this? How did you know that something's wrong? Plastic is a huge problem in the world, and we should do something about it and then you translated it to the Hudson River. What was the thought process behind all of that?

10:50 Victor: Well, I think I learned most about this when we started our project because we spoke to river keeper--riverkeeper.com, we spoke to a scientist and we also looked at - had a lot of research and we found that plastic was a huge problem.

11:13 AJ: How huge is it Jeremiah?

11:15 Jeremiah: Um it's very huge, at the point where it's hurting marine life and a lot of animals are dying because of it.

11:22 AJ: Which animals are dying in the ecosystem?

11:24 Jeremiah: Fish which mistake the plastic as food, but they only get sick and die. Also birds, and whales, and other animals.

11:36 AJ: So how is your project going to help all these animals?

11:39 Jeremiah: Our project will help these animals by collecting the plastics before it gets to them.

11:44 AJ: And that's why they won! [laughs] That's why they won! So you guys won \$25,000 -- \$25,000.

11:53 Jeremiah & Victor: Yes.

11:54 AJ: And you're going to spend it all on candy?

11:54 Jeremiah & Victor: No!

11:55 AJ: No? Okay! What's the first thing you guys going to do with this money?

12:01 Jeremiah: We're going to implement our solution and actually make this solution come to life.

12:05 Victor: Yeah, we're going to patent it first and make a real life size model and test it out.

12:10 AJ: That's a big word, patent. [laughs] how old are you guys again?

12:14 Victor & Jeremiah: Ten!

12:15 AJ: Ten years old, okay! Ten year old Jeremiah Pierre and Victor Jimenez, 2019, Geo challenge champions! I want to thank you guys so much for coming in today and being on the show with me. Is there anything or anyone that you want to shout out and give a big thank you to, for all your success now? You guys are rich now, I don't have \$25 000. One day, So one day I'm going to be

calling you for \$10 and since I put you on the show, you got to... [laughs] is there anybody else that you guys want to shout out and talk about for a second?

12:49 Victor: Well, I want to thank my coach for keep for keep for never giving up and she always kept on going.

12:59 AJ: Perseverance, she taught you, perseverance.

13:02 Jeremiah: I want to thank my school, my coaches, my family for keep - for keep on pushing me and helping me achieve greatness and yeah.

13:16 AJ: Alright, well thank you so much. As always, my special guests Jeremiah Pierre and Victor Jimenez, ten-year-olds from Flushing New York, 2019 Geo Challenge champion. \$25,000 men right here everybody, thank you guys for coming.

13:31 Jeremiah & Victor: You're welcome.

13:33 AJ: Please continue subscribing at *Max Out Time* with AJ II on iTunes. Like me on Facebook, follow on IG and Twitter rate and review this podcast on all podcast streaming services today, AJ out!

13:48 Outro Song: 'For The City'

14:15 –End–

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