

Coach Takes TV Show's \$265,000 Deal

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Tracee Jones of Tennessee State appears on "Deal or No Deal."

Tennessee State University's head women's basketball coach is a little bit richer after winning \$265,000 on NBC's popular game show "Deal or No Deal."

Perhaps if Tracee Jones held out a little longer, she might have won \$1 million, the contents of a case she'd picked at the beginning of the game and the show's grand prize. Jones turned down offers of \$130,000 and \$189,000 before accepting her final deal.

"NBC edited down [the time], but it [actually] took me 10 minutes to make the decision whether to take the deal or not to make the deal," Jones said.

On each show, "the game of odds and chance unfolds when a contestant is confronted with 26 sealed briefcases full of varying amounts of cash ranging from a measly penny to \$1 million. Without knowing the amount in each briefcase, the contestant picks one his to keep, if he chooses until its unsealing at game's end," according to NBC's explanation of how the show works.

"The risk element kicks in when the player must then instinctively eliminate the remaining 25 cases which are opened and the amount of cash inside revealed. The pressure mounts as in each round, after a pre-determined number of cases are opened, the participant is tempted by a mysterious entity known only as 'the Banker' to accept an offer of cash in exchange for what might be contained in the contestant's chosen briefcase" prompting host Howie Mandel "to ask the all-important question Deal or No Deal?"

More than 50 of Jones' supporters, including students, family and co-workers, gathered on the Tennessee State campus for a television feed of Jones' Oct. 30 appearance.

University President Melvin N. Johnson and first lady Marcelite "Marcy" Johnson attended the viewing, taking seats next to Jones and her boyfriend, Bubba Wells. Wells was once a shooting guard for the Chicago Bulls and Dallas Mavericks and now serves as the assistant coach for Austin Peay University's basketball team.

"I am so happy for her," said Johnson. "It gave the university publicity that you can not buy."

Jones' first appearance was Oct. 26. On the show, she said she wanted to win enough money to take her family on a vacation, as well as enough to purchase "a car that a head coach drives."

At the end of that first appearance, Jones received a treat an appearance by the 15-member squad of majorettes known as the Aristocrat of Bands' Sophisticated Ladies. They marched onto the stage to an audio clip of the Aristocrat of Bands, the university's marching band, playing a drum cadence.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to be on television in front of millions of people," said Christian Buggs, a senior physics major from Nashville and second-year Sophisticated Lady.

Jones said she attended an open audition in her hometown with her boyfriend and sister-in-law.

There were 6,000 people in line, Jones said. "It took four hours to get in the auditions."

In the auditions, she got only a minute to tell the producer why she should be selected, Jones said. Based on contestants' initial audition tape, producers would call back the candidates who'd made it to the next round.

"After the audition was finished, the producer said that they would call me back if they if they wanted me on the show," she said. "I did not think they were going to call."

But much to her surprise, Jones was contacted by the producer in mid-August, saying she would get an opportunity to be taped on Aug. 28-30.

NBC flew Jones' family, boyfriend and Athletic Director Theresa Phillips to California for the show. According to Jones, the producers also selected Phillips because she was Jones' head coach when the contestant played at Tennessee State from 1994 to 1998.

"The producers like the idea of having my former coach on the show," Jones said. "Going into the show, our theme was Team Jones."

Phillips, Wells and Jones' mom stood on stage wearing specially made Team Jones polo shirts for both tapings to cheer Jones on; also, her family in the studio audience wore Team Jones T-shirts.

"When it came down to decide . . . whether to make deal or no deal I was thinking if she says no deal it was not promised that she was going to win the million," said Phillips, the athletic director. "I did not want her to walk out empty-handed."

While Jones said the experience was great, she'd much rather take her Lady Tigers to a basketball championship this season.

"This was a once [in] a lifetime experience, where you can experience every emotion," Jones said. "The highs [were] high and the lows [were] low. But, the ultimate high would be to win the OVC championship."

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