

## Shilpa lives to fight another day

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Former pop singer Jo O'Meara has denied being racist after she and actress Cleo Rocos were evicted from Channel 4's Celebrity Big Brother by the public, leaving Indian cine star Shilpa Shetty as one of the favourites to win.

Former S Club 7 singer Jo, who was involved in a reported race row, which saw Jade Goody and her mother bullying Shilpa Shetty, received almost 48 per cent of the vote, while 28 per cent viewers wanted Rocos to go. Now 31-year-old Shilpa Shetty, former A-Team actor Dirk Benedict and ex-Steps singer Ian "H" Watkins are up for eviction.

Shilpa is now odds-on favourite to win when the show ends. Pop Star Jermaine Jackson, model Danielle Lloyd and Goody's boyfriend Jack Tweed are also still in the reality TV house.

In an interview with Big Brother presenter Davina McCall after she was evicted, Jo denied she was racist. When showed footage of the moments that caused the international row, she said, "Looking at it, it looks absolutely terrible, but inside it didn't feel terrible." But she told host McCall that the edited version of events distorted what really went on.

Of the comments she made about Shilpa while in the house, she said, "I never meant it in that way. I'm not a racist. I know that I'm not. I'm not going to deny that Shilpa did aggravate me a lot -- you can't click with everybody, you meet. "It's not because I'm racist. I think she's a very beautiful, very elegant woman."

Jo was shown mimicking Shetty's voice but she responded, "We were doing that with her and she was finding that really funny." The singer admitted that while she was in the house she had felt that something was not quite right. On being shown the footage of the race row making headline news across the world, Jo exclaimed: "Oh my God!" She said, "It does look very bad" but insisted, "I'm not a racist person at all. My cousin is married to an Indian, and my cousins are half-Indians."

Asked by Davina about mocking Shilpa's cultural background, Jo said, "I didn't even know I was doing it." She said she did not think that she had encouraged Jade in any way, adding, "I didn't mean to, if I did."

Jo said she did not dislike Shilpa, but she was not as close to her as other housemates Danielle and Cleo. She said she had not trusted her for a long time, and she had had her guard up.

And she told Davina she had laughed during the argument between Jade and Shilpa because she was "uncomfortable" and her reaction to nerves was to giggle. The double eviction was a surprise twist for the housemates.

The evicted pair emerged from the Big Brother house to a mixture of boos and cheers after the result of the public vote was announced. The eviction comes after Big Brother bosses were forced to apologise when they had to scrap eviction votes following a technical fault. Fans were offered refunds after the fiasco, which could have led to Shilpa being evicted by mistake. Words alongside her number wrongly stated viewers should ring it to save her, instead of boot her out.

Celebrity Big Brother organisers later said Jo would not be taking part in a press conference with Cleo for similar reasons to Jade. Jade had faced career meltdown over her treatment of Shilpa.

She claimed her home has come under attack as a result of the race row and plans to tour India in an attempt to restore her public image. Meanwhile, Hertfordshire Police have contacted Goody and her mother Jackie Budden who was also on the show, with a view to interviewing the pair.

Before Saturday's show, a police spokeswoman said, "An investigation into allegations of racist behaviour inside the Celebrity Big Brother house is continuing.

"Hertfordshire Constabulary can confirm police will be making approaches to speak to housemates if and when appropriate once they have left the house. "We are also making contact with two of the housemates who have already been evicted but at this stage no interviews have taken place."

Goody has denied being racist but told the News of the World

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