

transcripts

Morning News

No Knockout Punches in First Presidential Debate

Aired October 4, 2000 - 9:01 a.m. ET

THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT. THIS COPY MAY NOT BE IN ITS FINAL FORM AND MAY BE UPDATED.

BILL HEMMER, CNN ANCHOR: The big story from last night certainly is debate number one. Debate number two coming up in about a week's time. But let's talk about last night now.

Round one is over. There were no knockout punches, though, in the first presidential debate between George Bush and Al Gore. However, both candidates at times did go on the offensive, clashing over taxes, prescription drugs, character and credibility.

CNN's Jonathan Karl now with more on the highlights from last night's face-off in Boston.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

JONATHAN KARL, CNN CORRESPONDENT (voice-over): Almost immediately after the opening handshake, Vice President Gore was on offense, hitting a theme he'd return to again and again.

VICE PRES. AL GORE (D), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: He would spend more money on tax cuts for the wealthiest one percent than all of the new spending that he proposes for education, health care, prescription drugs, and national defense all combined.

KARL: His tax plan under repeated attack, Bush did not engage Gore on the numbers; instead, he questioned his credibility.

GOV. GEORGE W. BUSH (R-TX), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: This is a man, he's got great numbers. He talks about numbers. I'm beginning to think not only did he invent the Internet, but he invented the calculator.

KARL: The issue of prescription drug coverage for seniors dominated the first part of the debate; Gore using an example of a Wisconsin man to compare the two candidates' proposals.

GORE: He's 70 years old. He has high blood pressure. His wife has heart trouble. They have income of \$25,000 a year. They cannot pay for their prescription drugs, and so they are some of the ones that go to Canada regularly in order to get their prescription drugs. Under my plan, half of their costs would be paid right away. Under Governor Bush's plan, they would get not one penny for four to five years.

BUSH: I cannot let this go by, the old-style Washington politics of we're going to scare you in the voting booth. Under my plan, the man gets immediate help with prescription drugs; it's called Immediate Helping Hand. Instead of squabbling and finger-pointing, he gets immediate help.

GORE: They get \$25,000 a year income; that makes them ineligible.

KARL: Throughout the debate, Gore was aggressive, eager to jump in, frequently signed or chuckling while Bush spoke.

When a question about the recent Yugoslav election came up, Gore seemed eager to show off his knowledge of international issues.

BUSH: This will be an interesting moment for the Russians to step up and lead as well. It will be a wonderful time for the president of Russia to step into the Balkans and convince Mr. Milosevic. It is in his best interest and his country's best interest to leave office.

GORE: But being as they have not yet been willing to recognize Kostunica as the lawful winner of the election, I'm not sure that it is right for us to invite the president of Russia to mediate this dispute.

BUSH: Well, obviously we wouldn't use the Russians if they didn't agree with our answer, Mr. Vice President.

GORE: Well, they don't.

KARL: As the debate drew to a close, Bush took on the question of character.

BUSH: And we can do better than the past administration has done. It's time for a fresh start, it's time for a new look. It's time for a fresh start after a season of cynicism.

And so, I don't know the man well, but I've been disappointed about how he and his administration has conducted the fund-raising affairs. You know, going to a Buddhist temple and then claiming it wasn't a fund-raiser is just not my view of responsibility.

GORE: Well, I think we ought to attack our country's problems, not attack each other. I want to spend my time making this country even better than it is, not trying to make you out to be a bad person. You may want to focus on scandals, I want to focus on results.

KARL: Even before the smoke cleared, both sides predictably declared victory, fully aware they meet again in just a week.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

KARL: Going into last night's debate, strategists for Vice President Gore had said the debate could be the definitive moment in the campaign. But with no clear knockout punch last night, both candidates are on the road, hitting those battleground states: Governor Bush off to Pennsylvania, Vice President Gore going to Ohio and to Michigan, with a quick stop in New Jersey though for a fund-raiser hosted by rock star Jon Bon Jovi.

Now, as this goes on though, pretty soon, both candidates will be back into debate preparation because the next debate is only a week from today.

HEMMER: Before we push on to that point, Jonathan, you talked with the vice president this morning. What did he have to say following the morning after?

KARL: Well, the vice president clearly in a very good mood this morning. Most of the polls show a slight advantage to Gore last night, as far as who actually won the debate. He clearly thinks he won. But there was one area of regret he did have, although he called it a minor area, and that was during the debate hearing all those audible sighs, seeing his reaction, seeing him chuckle, as Governor Bush was trying to make a point. Many viewers thought that was condescending towards Governor Bush. And what Gore said is he didn't realize that the camera would showing him while Bush was speaking. He didn't realize you would see that split-screen effect. So he said in the next debate he won't doing so much sighing and so much, you know, visible reaction.

HEMMER: All right, Jonathan Karl, next stop, St. Louis next week, thank you.

Here's Andria now with more.

ANDRIA HALL, CNN ANCHOR: Before leaving Boston, of course, as Jonathan Karl indicated, Vice President Al Gore got a chance to talk with CNN.

Here is a little bit of that interview he had with Jonathan.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GORE: I thought I had a great opportunity to tell them about my plans. I'll balance the budget every year. I will pay down the debt. I will put Medicare and Social Security in a lock box. And I will give a cut in taxes to middle class families. I'll also help parents and strengthen families by making sure all schools are safe and making sure parents have the tools to protect their kids against cultural pollution, entertainment that they think is not appropriate for young children. Those are the kinds of agenda items that I think are very important.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HALL: Last night, of course, Al Gore says that was chance for him to speak directly to the voters of America. Meanwhile, Governor Bush campaigns in Pennsylvania and Ohio. We expect to have a live interview with the governor later on today.

TO ORDER A VIDEO OF THIS TRANSCRIPT, PLEASE CALL 800-CNN-NEWS OR USE OUR SECURE ONLINE ORDER FORM LOCATED AT www.fdch.com