

MATT ZIMMERMAN

Perot proves his dog can't hunt

On the whole, I have to admit that I was a bit disappointed with The Great NAFTA Debate. With so much riding on the line, the possibility was definitely there that some halfway-intelligent discussion would finally come out about the trade pact.

Granted, the two combatants were Al Gore and Ross Perot, two gentlemen who have mastered the fine art of talking without saying anything; but since the debate was in part staged in an attempt to sway undecided members of Congress, you would think they would try to at least make some kind of effort. Unfortunately, it more resembled Mr. Rogers versus the Grumpy Old Man than an economic discussion.

Al Gore continues to be an intriguing figure. For someone who is as intelligent as he is, the vice president certainly does a good job of hiding it. As always, he had a good grasp of the facts Tuesday night, but rather than translating his knowledge into well-planned verbal attacks, Gore chose instead to follow his old reliable tactic of rolling his eyes at everything that was said. I never knew one man could sigh and shake his head as many times in a 90-minute period as Gore managed to do. Still, considering that public speaking is obviously not one of his strongest skills, Gore did make a respectable showing — especially when you remember that his most recent debate experience was against master orators in their own rights, Dan Quayle and James Stockdale.

As for his opponent, though, I knew it was over for Perot when the most creative line he could muster was, "This dog just didn't hunt." The straight-talking Texas billionaire routine wore thin long ago, and cute sound bites just don't cut it anymore. His behavior Tuesday night made it all the more clear that his popularity has everything to do with what he represents and almost nothing to do with who he really is. The problem



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is, Perot tends to believe his press. Did anyone else find it remarkable the way he continually snapped at Gore and Larry King? Many times, Perot stared at Gore with a look of stunned disbelief on his face, incredulous that he was not able to rattle off his anecdotes. Perot couldn't seem to comprehend that someone would dare question his often-weak arguments or his recurring inconsistencies. He seemed shocked that anyone would think that he, a billionaire businessman, could have any kind of conflict of interest when it came to formulating economic policy. He was Ross Perot, for God's sake, and how dare you submit him to the same treatment he reserves for his own adversaries?

To put it mildly, Perot has this nasty habit of slipping into delusions of grandeur at the drop of a hat. I'm just doing this for the people, he continues to spout off. But what is "this?" Once the election was over, there was really no cause for him to champion. He essentially had to invent this overblown NAFTA controversy to maintain his high level of exposure. As Gore pointed out in the debate, the vast majority of economists support the trade agreement. And, despite what Perot thinks, the reason NAFTA is on the verge of being defeated is not that everyone knows that it is a bad deal. It is because his staunch supporters will follow him anywhere, and lawmakers fear the power that he holds.

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reform movement that contains millions of disenfranchised voters, he becomes a bit more dangerous. Perot has managed to refocus the healthy expression of voter dissatisfaction into something that bears a closer resemblance to a lynch mob. He has vowed to actively seek the defeat of any member of Congress who dares to vote for NAFTA. This from a man who said that if he were elected president, he would be able to eliminate governmental gridlock in a snap. At a time when single-issue politics are poisoning America, he seems to be successful in making support for an alternative economic theory into a capital offense. Bush only had the nerve to call Clinton a bozo. Perot has all but called Clinton the anti-Christ.

As I watched Chart Boy in action the other night, I couldn't help but think we would be better off without him. His career as a foil in the presidential campaign was positive for the country, but he has since worn out his welcome. The movement he represents has stagnated and been corrupted because of the fact he has hung around so long.

Honeymoon's over, folks. Perot believed the Republican party plotted to ruin his daughter's wedding last summer. Now he believes he is trying to be murdered by a band of Cuban assassins. It was fun while it lasted, but it's time to forget this distraction and move on to the real issues of the day.

Zimmerman is a junior English major and Daily Nebraskan columnist.

ANNE STEYER

Cameras create Barney craze

It's amazing what a couple of camera crews will do to the average UNL student.

The media descended upon the Nebraska Union ballroom Wednesday afternoon with microphones and cameras in hand. Representatives from KMTV, WOWT, KETV and KOLN/KGIN were present, as were representatives of "Hard Copy" and various state newspapers.

All of them were there to cover the University Program Council's latest Wacky Wednesday event.

A Wacky Wednesday event — you know the ones that bring free ice cream and cupcakes to the crib, the ones that last maybe an hour, with little or no hoopla?

From out of all these news hounds, three of those news stations' reports went network. That's right, they were going to get picked up by the national networks.

That's damn crazy — network TV?

But I don't think that's as crazy as the behavior of some of those in attendance.

Obviously I went. But I only went for the Purplesaurus Rex Kool Aid, a.k.a. Barney punch.

What I got was an eyeful of chaos.

The ballroom was filled with more than 200 screaming UNL students, cheering on the bashing of the beloved purple dinosaur. Students were pounding Barney with rubber mallets, ripping his stuffing out with their teeth.

And I'll bet more than half of them were only remotely familiar with Barney before this media blitz. Sure, we'd all seen the dinosaur, but who cared enough to hate him?

You wouldn't know it from the situation Wednesday.

People were beating Barney with a vengeance I imagine is usually reserved for Oklahoma. I really don't think many would have pounded the stuffing out of him if there hadn't been camera crews in such abundance.



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There's something crazy about cameras. It's like cameras trigger some bizarre hormone in people, some endorphine not yet discovered. Once that film starts rolling, freakish activity takes hold of the body and the senses and people go completely out of control.

One Barney basher was standing about mild-mannered, pounding Barney with one of those popular rubber mallets.

That is, until the camera crews turned their lights on him.

Then he turned into some crazy combination of Chuck Norris and Bruce Lee. But his foe wasn't a drug dealer, a gangster or even the ever-popular evil ninja. It was a little 12-, maybe 14-inch stuffed purple dinosaur.

Tell me, isn't that just a teensy-ensy bit on the absurd side?

I think so.

Crayons can elicit strange behaviors as well. UPC set up a coloring table, complete with Crayola markers and crayons, and piles of pictures of Barney.

No signs said anything about same-color coloring only, please. No one said stay in the lines. It was supposed to be an artistic free-for-all, allowing students to color Barney as they saw him, or how they thought he truly appeared.

Some participants were dutiful in their accurate representations of big ol' Barney. He was purple, smiling with a green belly. Others had altered his appearance, giving him perhaps a more colorful coat.

But some sick attendee drew a

swastika on Barney's belly. Barney a Nazi? No way — this dinosaur sings about peace, love and understanding, not fascism, hate and The Ideal.

This is what I mean about crazy behavior.

But really, the Barney bashing was only getting warmed up. Next there was the purple piñata. The crowd swelled as individuals took turns battling at the hanging candy-filled piñata. Finally somebody just jumped up and pulled the dinosaur down. Then the crowd pounced. It was almost frightening to see the passion that consumed them as they headed for the small, mutilated creature.

Things really came to a head when Travis Fox, the event's director, took to the stage to introduce the face-off between Barney and Big Bird. It was hard to tell who was more excited, the cameramen or the bozos trying to get on camera.

Light flashed as cameras focused in on the bloodthirsty crowd.

Remember, the crowd was lusting for a battle between two completely fictitious children's idols. This wasn't an Evander Holyfield fight where dollars were on the line.

Absolute insanity.

I thought it was funny at first, but it really got out of hand. UPC members said Barney Day was all in fun, that it wasn't to be taken seriously.

I certainly hope not, because if the hungry media and the media-hungry thralls on camera were serious, they seriously need therapy.

Steyer is a senior English and history major, a Daily Nebraskan arts and entertainment senior reporter and a columnist.

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