

# In Mello's campaign, experience hurt

MELLO from page 1

people saw or cared to see, Mello said. Just because they fit a pattern doesn't mean he and his party wouldn't do a good job, he said.

Experience was key in his mind. But Mello wouldn't get away from the tag. The A-Team, who in the end would be his toughest opponent, openly attacked Empower and Impact, another so-called traditional party. The two parties didn't deserve another chance, A-Team candidate Joel Schafer, who targeted the uninvolved and non-voters, said in debates.

Mello also heard it from the Daily Nebraskan on its opinion pages. And slowly, other students caught on.

Toward the end of his two-month campaign, it was like Mello was swimming upstream. It didn't matter whether he had experience. It didn't matter whether his party had good or even bad ideas. And it didn't matter what its strategy — which included an action plan typed up on orange paper — for winning was.

Because, in the end, Mello lost.

\*\*\*

*It perturbs me that someone is labeling not only myself, but people who I'm associated with in this campaign as being the establishment, and it just irks me that they use that, that he (Schafer) uses that word. That he doesn't give me credit for the things that I've done on this campus or things that I've helped improve on our campus.*

*He's not giving me any credibility. That it's simply, "I'm a person who hasn't done jack." And it's like I can't be happy or try to put it off in a funny way because I can't do that. Because it pisses me off.*

\*\*\*

Mello's might be considered the ideal student's résumé.

Before college, he was involved. Football. Basketball. Baseball. Academic Decathlon. Drama. Speech. Choir. "I love to sing."

"Actually, if I lose this election, I'm going to try out for Scarlet and Cream (Singers)," he said. The idea was reiterated after he lost in a run-off between Empower and A-Team.

In college, he's studying education and political science.

Mello was a member of the Student Impact Team his freshman year. He was also appointed by ASUN to sit on the Publications Board.

He was elected to the Arts and Sciences advisory board for his sophomore year. He sat on the senate as recording secretary during his sophomore year and was elected as senator for his junior year.

Mello worked on current ASUN president Andy Schuerman's campaign and helped with a campaign the year before that.

He's a New Student Enrollment leader. He works in the office of Admissions. He's a member of Alpha Gamma Sigma Fraternity.

He's in the honors program. He's always running.

During the campaign, his day started early, with e-mail and phone calls. He rarely missed class. He didn't get home until after 10 p.m. Every time I saw him, he was heading to another activity.

But he doesn't claim to be a career student politician, working his way up a ladder of activities. He said he never planned on running for president of the student body.

\*\*\*

*In all actuality, I never imagined I would be in this position. As a freshman, I came down, I did set some goals coming out of high school about ... I wanted to be, to play a significant role in ASUN. And I think I needed to be, I wanted to be elected as a senator to my college ...*

*And after I got elected last year, I was like*

*I can't, I was on a high that I accomplished that goal. And I have no idea, honestly, I have no idea really 'til things started shaping up in the middle of first semester that I actually, you know, if I wanted to run for president, I would have just as good a shot as anybody else did as running for president ...*

\*\*\*

He was the second candidate to enter into a campaign for the presidency. He started his run for ASUN as a potential senatorial candidate for Impact.

Mello said he met John Conley, that party's presidential candidate, when they both worked on Schuerman's campaign last year, but Mello doesn't remember seeing Conley often at the meetings. He got to know Conley through friends more than anything.

Mello said Conley approached him and told him he was running for president in early November. Mello was also considering a run for office.

"I told him I was contemplating it, and then we contemplated running together," Mello said. "He wanted me to run for senate with him."

Mello attended at least one Impact meeting. After that, he decided two things: that he wasn't confident in Conley's ability to lead ASUN and that he wanted to do more than run for senate.

"I told him I can't," Mello said. "This would not fall into anything I want to do — to run for senate again — because I want to provide leadership in this organization, and I've already done it already as a senator."

So, Mello decided to form his own party. But it created some tension between him and Conley.

Later, Mello was accused of stealing ideas he heard about in an Impact meeting. Conley even said Mello took his party's colors — navy and orange, Empower's eventual colors.

Mello denied the charge. "Butterfield came up with our colors, not me," he said.

When Mello left that meeting and the party, Mello said, he warned Conley that he would be using some of those ideas simply because he "had them before." Mello said most of the issues Impact was addressing had been looked at in past elections.

This friction became most clear to Mello after Impact lost in the first election, and Empower was pushed into the run-off election. It helped determine Empower's fate. Mello said he realized Impact supporters may not vote for Empower.

"I know Impact hates me," he said the Friday after the general election. "They don't trust me because of that first meeting."

After leaving the Impact party, Mello had to find running mates.

Many candidates who he would have liked to have, had already committed to Impact, he said. Even some of his friends went to that party.

Mello started brainstorming people for his first and second vice presidential candidates. Butterfield was one of his first choices for second vice president.

"I picked Mike because he fit the position," Mello said. Butterfield was speaker of the Residence Hall Association senate, an organization in which the second vice president works closely.

Mello asked two people before he asked Rometo. One was a current senator, and the other was one of Rometo's good friends. When both said no for different reasons, Mello heeded Butterfield's advice and sought out Rometo, who Butterfield had been on the honors advisory board with during their freshman year.

By that time, it was nearing the end of Christmas break. Official campaigning began the first day of second-semester classes.

Mello hadn't met Rometo, but he said he remembered her from advisory board elections his freshman year. He had remembered beating her. Butterfield had heard of Mello last year, during Schuerman's campaign. Butterfield was working with the more conservative party Focus, Schuerman's competition.

"Heath was the bad guy," Butterfield said. "He was one of the bad guys. Not a lot

of people in Focus really liked him. He was very outspoken, and, you know, he pushes pretty hard."

But Butterfield never formally met Mello until last September, and he said he realized Mello's drive was one of his best assets, in terms of being a leader.

"When he sees something that he wants, he goes after it, and he's not going to stop until he gets it," Butterfield said.

\*\*\*

*With (my sister) and my parents, we talked about this campaign all during Christmas break. They really didn't realize, 'cause I've seen it, you know ... I know what goes into this.*

*I was like 'I know I'll be getting like four hours of sleep per night most of the week. I'll, I know I'll be missing classes at times.' I was like 'I know I'm going to have a tough time with Cami (his girlfriend).' I was like 'I know, I knew all these things from the get-go. And I try to explain that to them, but they're like 'No, it's not that hard,' you know ...*

\*\*\*

**Mike Butterfield**  
Heath Mello's running mate

Mello has pretty much forged his own path in college. He is a first-generation college student. His father was a factory worker for nearly 16 years, and his mother was a janitor in the Gretna public schools, until she had brain surgery the weekend before the first ASUN election.

He said his father had been trying to go back to college for several years. At the same time, Mello said, his father was working several jobs just to help keep the family afloat. His father also had a problem with alcohol, he said.

Eventually, during Mello's freshman year, the two had a "blow-out," and his father

decided to start school again at a community college. Now, he will graduate before Mello does with a degree in management information systems, a top computer field.

"It's provided me with a lot of inspiration," Mello said.

But he and his father haven't always seen eye-to-eye. For example, when Mello joined a greek house, his father didn't understand.

"He's never been a fan of the greek system," he said. Mello's sister, who is a student at Doane College in Crete, is Mello's opposite. She is an introvert and doesn't get as involved, he said.

But through the campaign, his family learned more about what Mello does.

"They were amazed. I mean they really didn't realize everything that went into this," he said.

\*\*\*

**(Last year) Heath was the bad guy. He was one of the bad guys. Not a lot of people in Focus really liked him. He was very outspoken, and, you know, he pushes pretty hard.**

*They said they saw me grow a lot. They saw how I learned how to handle a lot of things. And that was the big, and that was probably the biggest thing, was criticism from other people ...*

*Other people called me a name, or people labeled me, or people said that I wasn't, my beliefs on certain issues, I shouldn't be elected*

*because of that or whatnot. Or my lack of ingenuity or whatnot. He (My father) said it was interesting to see it didn't phase me as much ...*

*I knew that some of that would happen, you know, with like fetal tissue stuff and College Republicans, and the Right to Life group is out to get me ...*

*I knew kinda from the outset, I knew from Joel's party announcement that we were, we were, you know, he was hunting for us ...*

*I don't know, it was interesting. The best part about it is that I think the organization will survive ...*



Heather Glenboski/DN

**HEATH MELLO SHARES** a moment with his girlfriend, sophomore communications and psychology major Cami Shreve, at the Meet the Candidates night at Mainstreet Cafe. Mello said, because of an election's constraints, he knew campaigning could be hard on his relationship with Shreve.