

Low-key outlook defines A-Team

By Lindsay Young
Senior editor

Even if you wanted to, you couldn't have predicted when an A-Team meeting would be held.

Every once in awhile, by chance, I'd run into presidential candidate Joel Schafer. "When are you meeting next?" I'd say, wanting to get a peek into the makings of his party.

We don't know, he'd reply. Maybe Sunday.

"Hey Hal! When are we meeting again?" Schafer asked his campaign manager Hal Hansen, who in reality did more of the busy work, such as designing A-Team's infamous newspaper ads, while Schafer ran the party. "Sunday," Hansen would reply.

The place was always questionable.

Finally, I was able to pinpoint one. I arrived a little after 7 p.m., when the meeting was scheduled to start, at Joel Webber's house, which he shared with two roommates.

Webber lets me in, and instead of seeing everyone ready to meet as I am used to following Empower, I see his roommate sitting on the couch playing a video game. No one else is there.

I sit down and wait. Fifteen minutes later, Schafer shows. About five minutes after that, Hansen shows. And nobody knows for sure when Riley Peterson, first vice presidential candidate, would be coming. But they knew he was supposed to be late.

No one seems too concerned. The party seemed to have its own way of getting things done.

Amid all this waiting, talk ensued about how the campaign was going.

Was the letter to the editor against the A-Team's plan to fight credit-card solicitation planted by another party? Hansen asks.

The Daily Nebraskan isn't picking up on our attacks on the other parties, Schafer says. We have to look to other means to distinguish ourselves.

Schafer says the party isn't too far behind the other groups in planning. Hansen responds: "I don't know about that."

A brief discussion of who their target audience is follows: It's not the Greeks, though in the end, a few Greek houses supported A-Team.

Christina Riesselman, Schafer's girlfriend and the party's treasurer, arrived, and the party went over its finances.

Doing fine, especially with much of the A-Team's costs covered by Schafer's father.

Discussion jumps back to Daily Nebraskan and the ads to come. Hansen is nearly done with the one that will run the coming Friday.

There's not an agenda, but typical campaign strategies are discussed: handing out T-shirts, stuffing residence hall mailboxes with A-Team fliers - complete with Schafer's phone number and address - and making announcements during Monday night Greek house dinners.

President's Day is also that week, and they talk about dressing up as Abraham Lincoln and George Washington and having a booth in the Nebraska Union to draw attention to themselves.

The idea never materializes.



Heather Glenboski/DN

HEATH MELLO COMFORTS nerve-wrecked Cecily Rometo with Mike Butterfield before their campaign announcement. A lot of preparation went into not only the announcement, but also the party's debates and public appearances that were to follow.

Empower party begins, ends with details

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People were looking tired.

Mello, Rometo and Butterfield sat on the couch in the sorority's basement, and everyone circled around them. Mello led the charge. Campaign manager Sarah Kippenbrock, who had lost her voice, sat opposite him eating chips and cheese with some of the supporters.

They shot out ideas, such as improving the use and facilities of the Culture Center, including ES/IS requirements on the ASUN Web site and what hours NU on Wheels should be run.

Mello, Rometo and Butterfield took notes.

A topic that brought considerable mulling was making teaching evaluations universal and keeping them on file in the ASUN office for students to peruse.

It was a hot spot for Rometo, who sat on the couch listening to comments supporting the idea, itching to explain why such a proposal is "dangerous."

Rometo, whose father, Albert Rometo, is a UNL music professor, said the file could turn into a "hate file." The idea is eventually knocked off Empower's platform.

Other ideas, such as improving parking or changing the distribution of ASUN senate seats, are also knocked down, mostly because they were unpopular. Or in some cases, you'd hear: "If we put that on our platform, we'd lose."

Without fail, Empower had two general meetings a week: one on Sunday to update its party members and one on Thursday nights they called a work party, where they would do busy work, such as paint posters for Greek houses or highlight names in phone books.

"You're talking to students, not faculty."

Heath Mello
Empower presidential candidate

But the three executive candidates and who they deemed their cabinet - freshman coordinators, a treasurer, a graphic designer and others - had more. They would meet before the 3 p.m. Sunday meetings. On Fridays they met at 5 in the union.

And it wouldn't be strange if just Mello, Rometo and Butterfield met one, two or even more extra times during the week.

After their platform meeting that Saturday afternoon, they visited for about 30 minutes at the sorority house.

The three then met at Butterfield's residence hall room in Neihardt Residence Center. They stayed there until close to or after midnight - making it about a 10-hour day.

At this meeting, the three put on new faces - less business, more fun. They planned to hammer out their platform - make it official and have it done, so Mello can take it to a meeting the next day around noon. But there's a lot of sidetracking.

Among the tangents, a discussion arose about whether the group should report a keg of beer Mello would receive as a gift at the Empower Meet the Candidates party at Mainstreet Cafe that next Wednesday.

Donations to student election groups have to be reported to the electoral commission. But Mello insists the keg is a personal gift and that they shouldn't have to worry about telling the commission.

Only problem: He's only 20. He can't legally drink it.

It takes time, but Rometo and Butterfield convince him otherwise. They don't want to get into trouble later.

"The electoral commission won't see it that way," Rometo said. Butterfield nods his head and kind of reiterates her thought.

Besides, they said, having alcohol at the party is perfectly legal. The event will be in a bar, and the people drinking the beer will be at least 21. They shouldn't worry about the image having beer at the party brings.

What to wear at the event? Reflect

our attitudes, Mello said. They don't want to look unapproachable, too professional. But they don't want to wear jeans and a T-shirt, either. Then, it's agreed: khakis and a button-down shirt for the guys and casual business for Rometo.

Next, they prepare for their party announcement to be held the same day as their Meet the Candidates night. How to do their speeches? Rometo said she'll have hers typed out, point, bullet, bullet. She can't write it out. She'll get lost in the content.

Butterfield said he'll do the same. Mello, though, said he planned on ad-libbing it.

At the end of the meeting, the three agree Rometo will just take the platform ideas home with her, format them on computer and drop them off for Mello the next morning.

There's little talk or worry about the other parties at this point in preparing for the election. Sure, there's talk about impact being a viable competitor.

As far as eventual winner A-Team and Duff goes, though, not much is said.

At this point, it's still what to wear, what to say and predictions of how debates will go.

This changes as time goes on. The Sunday before the election, the three are meeting in Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority, home of Rometo, to prepare for their final regular election debate. Friends Jake Wobig and another student join them.

Here, Mello expressed his interest in who the Daily Nebraskan will support in its annual endorsement editorial.

At this point, he said the opinion wouldn't make a difference in the election. He also doesn't know that at this point the editorial board had already chosen. And it wasn't Empower.

At this meeting, Mello is helping Rometo prepare for her first debate -

"Interface is not a power word."

Empower party member at debate preparation meeting

just the president and second vice president were invited to the previous two. Butterfield is not here.

Rometo practiced her opening speech, words like "amelioration" and "dichotomy" scattered throughout. It draws laughs from everyone.

"That's how I talk, though," Rometo said.

It's true, especially in a public forum.

Mello said: "You're talking to students, not faculty."

And then in a sing-songy voice, its meaning not completely known, he said: "This is like Broadway, man. Broad-way," and lifts his hand up and down, as if he's conducting himself.

And later, after Rometo reads more of her speech, Mello mocks her in a high voice:

"I'm Cecily Rometo, and I'm nervous. My hand looks like it's swimming, but don't worry, I can still talk with this other hand..." he said, moving his hand accordingly. Rometo and the others laugh.

The group works out the kinks in Rometo's speech, focusing on using "power words."

"Interface is not a power word." Cut that out of the speech, a supporter said, looking up from his economics homework. Use the word "empower" more.

All this for debates that Mello admits are rarely attended by anyone outside the election parties' circles.

As the weeks wound down to the election, even though Mello continually claimed his party was lagging behind past elections, everything got done.

T-shirts were ordered. A banner for outside the Nebraska Union was purchased. Booths were reserved. Greek house banners were painted. And many, many meetings were held.

But, according to Mello, what really mattered was the week of the actual election.

And more importantly, the day of.