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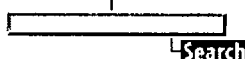


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U.S. Edition

Special Issues

Memo To: Al Gore

From: George Stephanopoulos

Newsweek International, November 1, 1999

Well, you got what you wished for. Challenging Bradley to debate early and often energized your campaign, and put Bradley on the defensive. But the victory came at a price. By taunting Bradley as "timid," you raised the bar for your own performance. Expectations are out of control; meeting them will be tough.

Bradley is nothing like your past opponents. You faced no penalty for attacking Dan Quayle (seen as a lightweight), Jack Kemp (excitable) or Ross Perot (a little wacky). Bradley is more thoughtful, reserved and well respected—especially by the elite media who will be the filter for this performance.

The town-hall forum is also different from a traditional political debate—especially in New Hampshire, where the voters pride themselves on asking policy-wonk questions and getting substantive answers. The biggest mistake you can make is to engage Bradley and ignore the studio audience. Don't forget, this will also be the first time that a broad television audience will tune in to see you and Bradley on the same stage. Show them the person behind the vice-presidential seal. Tell them about growing up in Tennessee, but also take them on a journey into the Oval Office during the budget showdown with Newt Gingrich. Your experience is still your best selling point.

So for now, at least, drop the charge that Bradley is a disloyal Democrat. It actually helps him with Independents, and he will characterize your first strike as the same old politics from a politician desperate to stay in power.

Instead, consider killing Bradley with kindness. Thank him for the Senate battles he shared with you on the 1993 economic plan, NAFTA and other legislation. Not only will this surprise him, but it will put him back inside the Beltway, which is the last place he wants to be. If you have to fight, do it with your real opponents: George W. Bush and the congressional Republicans. That's the contrast you want to draw, and Bradley can't disagree with you.

But your trickiest challenge will be dealing with the politician who won't be on stage. When a question on Bill Clinton's conduct comes up, humanize yourself by explaining in greater detail both your disappointment in Clinton and your decision to stand by him and your shared work. Take the opportunity to defend the Clinton-Gore economic record. In New Hampshire, people are doing a lot better than they were eight years ago—and they are the voters who made Bill Clinton "The Comeback Kid."

Stephanopoulos is a contributor to NEWSWEEK and ABC News.

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