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US election 2020: Donald Trump will keep throwing punches in White House fight

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By **JOE HOCKEY**, CONTRIBUTOR12:00AM SEPTEMBER 28, 2020 •  547 COMMENTS

Donald Trump loves boxing. For years he used to sit ringside in Atlantic City or Las Vegas with legendary promoter Don King watching and funding championship fights involving the likes of Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield and George Foreman.

Now, after months of trying to get Joe Biden in the ring, Trump finally has his way. The first of three presidential debates will be played out in Ohio on Tuesday night. And as an unexpected bonus, a second fight is thrown in with [the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court](#) back in Washington DC.

About 90 million people are expected to watch the first debate and Trump knows that when it comes to fights he can't disappoint the big TV audience.

So much depends on preparation. Trump learnt a valuable lesson in his first debate with Hillary Clinton in 2016 when he went on stage overconfident and underprepared. He lost. Clinton threw the first punch by referring to Trump's inherited wealth and he never really recovered.

At the time Democrat insiders lamented to me that no one in the Clinton camp had the courage to prepare Hillary for questions about Bill Clinton's previous alleged infidelities. They underestimated Trump. Not only did he do a media conference with three Bill Clinton sex accusers two hours before the final debate but he tried to arrange for the accusers to sit next to Bill Clinton in the VIP box. It was a pre-fight play to get into his opponent's head. Trump knows how to throw a punch.

This week the punches in the first debate will be targeted at Biden's capacity, history and family. Trump will make much of Biden's age, labelling him a future "teleprompter president". He will take aim at a Harris-Biden ticket, inferring that Biden is just a puppet for the socialists.

Trump's cut-through line will focus on Biden's qualifications for getting the economy back on track. He will claim that "Joe Biden has never had a job outside Washington". Trump is sure to mention the Washington swamp.

This will be more cage fight than boxing ring if it descends into an argument about family frailties. Both candidates have exceptional families and are good fathers. It rightly grates with Australians when family punches are thrown but American debates are different particularly given the roles played by contemporary families in both wings of the White House.

Biden won't hold back but it's his counterpunch that will be under scrutiny. If Biden is slow to react to a question or a jibe Trump won't miss the opportunity. Trump has just spent four years jousting with the media. He is in form and he and his team have been training hard.

Since the 2016 election Trump's West Wing staff have been tuned in to the newly created White House Quad Channel. This is a unique TV channel that blasts Fox News, MSNBC, CNN and Fox Business all on the same split screen. They watch because their boss always has it on either in the Oval Office or in the President's more private rooms. They often learn what's happening in the administration by watching the Quad Channel. Sometimes Trump reacts to news stories and at other times he rings up spontaneously and makes news stories.

With only 36 days to go Trump now needs to lead the fight. [In almost every credible poll in crucial battleground states such as Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Nevada he is uncomfortably behind.](#)

Moreover, in states Trump should win easily, such as Georgia, Ohio, Iowa and Texas, the numbers are simply too close. On less reliable polls he is way behind.

If you don't believe in polls just follow the candidate spending. The Trump campaign has been pouring money into states he should easily hold. And some Senate races are way too close, with even Senator Lindsay Graham on a knife edge in South Carolina when he should be 10 points ahead.

The [nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court](#) is a turning point. Her supporters will portray her as a smart, loving mum of seven with a formidable intellect and a big heart. She was born in the deep south and lives in the midwest. Perfect. Our fictional swing voter, Mary Milwaukee, will love her.

Barrett will be labelled by critics as a God-loving anti-abortionist out to defend the right to carry guns, destroy the Obama health system and protect Trump from a White House eviction notice. VP candidate Kamala Harris, who sits on the Senate judiciary committee that grills the candidate, is the one to watch in this battle.

The Senate needs to break all sorts of speed records if it is to confirm Barrett before election day, November 3.

This gives rise to a classic Trump play. During the Republican primaries in 2016 Trump was the only candidate on stage to declare that he may not accept the decision of the party to nominate someone other than himself.

Similarly, against Clinton, he alleged the election may well be rigged against him. Last week he did the same.

Critics were outraged but they shouldn't be surprised. He's consistent. He does not defend institutions that he does not control and the electoral process is well beyond his reach.

A little-known provision in the US Constitution allows a president to make interim appointments without the approval of the Senate. In 1956 president Dwight Eisenhower used it to appoint lower court judge William Brennan to fill an unexpected Supreme Court vacancy. It was an election year and Eisenhower wanted to appoint a Catholic Democrat to counter the campaigning of Catholic John F Kennedy for Democrat presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson.

The Senate Democrats in the majority didn't object to the interim appointment of a Democrat judge. If Trump doesn't get his way he may appoint an interim judge to the Supreme Court without Senate approval. It would be a big swing and it would want to connect.

Donald Trump doesn't like losing. In business, on television or politics, he is always up for a fight. When he loses he usually litigates the result. Although the fight begins this week you can expect Trump will still be throwing punches after the final bell on November 3.

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