

# Two Debates – One Winner



So Donald Trump refuses to pledge allegiance to the Republican Party. If he's not the GOP nominee, he can't say what he'll do – and that includes possibly running as a third-party candidate.

If he meant any of it, this would make Donald the real RINO in the race. But he doesn't mean it.

The morning after the debate he explained that it was all about “leverage.” It was Donald's way of trying to insure that the other GOP candidates treat him with respect, as he put it. If they don't, if they're mean to him and call him bad names, he just might take his ball and go home, which in political terms, of course, means running as an independent.

I was wrong when I said he wouldn't run in the first place. I was wrong when I thought he'd never catch on. I was wrong when I thought he jumped the shark with his shot at John McCain. So here goes again:

Trump will not run as a third-party candidate – period.

If he does, there's a 100 percent chance he'll lose. And there's no way anyone with his narcissism and his ego would intentionally do something that would legitimately label him a loser. And not that he loses sleep over being hated, but he would be if he ran as a third-party candidate since that would guarantee a victory for Hillary Clinton or whomever the nominee turns out to be.

And we'll know soon enough – when the new polls come out in a few days – if his threat of political infidelity will hurt him

– or who knows – will actually increase his popularity. I know it sounds crazy, but with Trump, you never know.

There were two debates, of course, the one in primetime with the big live audience, and the other one for the second-tier candidates. That one played to an empty arena, which was like watching a ball game on TV at home and noticing that nobody was in the stands. It didn't feel right. Candidates need electricity in the room when they talk; they need reaction.

Fox should have figured out a way to get rear ends in the seats.

Two debates, as one headline had it, but one winner. Carly Fiorina.

As Byron York put it in the Washington Times, "It was hard to declare a clear winner of the primetime debate. Combine the two sessions into one, however, and Fiorina emerged as the likely winner of the entire evening."

He's right. And she came off as the candidate you'd most like to see go head to head with that other woman running – the one on the Democratic side.

This was Carly in her closing statement:

"Hillary Clinton lies about Benghazi, she lies about e-mails. She is still defending Planned Parenthood, and she is still her party's frontrunner. 2016 is going to be a fight between conservatism, and a Democrat party that is undermining the very character of this nation. We need a nominee who is going to throw every punch, not pull punches, and someone who cannot stumble before he even gets into the ring."

Fiorina has been near zero in the polls, which is why she was on the undercard. There was talk that she was really running for the VP slot. But the day after the debates, that sounds more than a little condescending.

As for the others: I thought Marco Rubio did well. Same with John Kasich, Chris Christie and Mike Huckabee. Jeb Bush and Scott Walker, not so much. They came off as run-of-the-mill politicians – and that's not something voters seem to want this time around.

Ben Carson, a neurosurgeon, came off as immensely likeable, especially in his closing remark when he tried to distinguish himself from all the pols in the debate. He mentioned that he was the only one on the stage who separated Siamese twins and finished with one of the best lines of the night: "I'm only one who removed half a brain, but if you went to Washington, you'd think someone beat me to it."

If this were a Mr. Congeniality contest, Ben Carson would have been the big winner of the night. Too bad for him that it wasn't.

Iowa and New Hampshire are still light years away. But we're into it now for real. So let's see if Donald fades – and Carly rises.