

9-7-2016

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Recommended Citation

University of Dayton. "3 Things To Know: The First Debate" (2016). http://wayback.archive-it.org/4727/20160920160053/https://www.udayton.edu/news/articles/2016/09/sparks_first_debate.php

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NEWS

Wednesday September 7, 2016

3 Things To Know: The First Debate

University of Dayton marketing professor Randy Sparks is applying his research on style versus substance to the political arena. He offers the following three things to know about the first debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump on Monday, Sept. 26.

1. Looking back might be a mistake.

Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump might examine each other's past debate performances as they prepare for their first meeting, but Sparks say "that would be a mistake."

"The one thing Donald Trump has shown that's very predictable is he's unpredictable," Sparks said. "Hillary Clinton is much more calculating. And I think Trump can probably get a better idea of what Clinton is going to do in her debate based on previous debates with Bernie Sanders, rather than Clinton being able to look at Trump and say, 'This is what he's going to do in this debate.'"

2. Everything could change after the first debate.

The first meeting between Clinton and Trump will "involve a lot of getting a feel for the other person," Sparks said. "And more will be set in terms of style, tone and things after this first debate."

"It will be very interesting to see, both in terms of style and in terms of substance, what the two candidates bring to the table this first time," Sparks said. "Will they try to do something that's been very consistent with their campaign message and their campaign style all along? Or will they try to do something unpredictable in order to knock the other candidate off balance? I think that's going to be the real fun of the first debate."

3. Style matters.

In the general election, voters get few chances to see the candidates next to each other, Sparks said, so debate style becomes very important.

Even if a voter disagrees with what a candidate is saying, the way in which they say it still matters.

“The style of speaking involved, especially as they interact with one another, will say an awful lot to voters about how the president might interact with other leaders around the world or might interact with members of Congress in certain situations,” Sparks said. “It gives them a real sense of their assertiveness. It gives them a real sense of how powerful they are in terms being able to be persuasive of their points and move the country along on a particular agenda.”