

# Take-No-Prisoners Donald Trump at Center of First Debate

Donald Trump will be at center stage and potentially in the line of fire on Thursday as 10 leading Republican presidential candidates look for a break-out moment at their first debate on the road to the November 2016 election.

The real estate mogul, along with rivals Jeb Bush, Scott Walker, Marco Rubio and six others, square off at 9 p.m. EDT (0100 GMTFriday) at Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, Ohio, just three hours after seven candidates who rank lower in the polls wrap up a separate debate.

The prime-time event, to be moderated by Fox News anchors Bret Baier, Megyn Kelly and Chris Wallace, will offer Americans their first look at the major Republican candidates en masse six months before Iowa holds the first nominating contest.

For Trump, the first debate offers an opportunity to prove whether he has a substantive vision for the country and go beyond brick-throwing rhetoric.

His rapid rise to the top of the Republican pack in polls has earned him center-stage status in the debate.

Trump's take-no-prisoners style of campaigning, with a penchant for incendiary remarks such as those on the war record of Senator John McCain and on Mexican immigrants, whom he branded as criminals and rapists, has also earned him a level of press coverage that has eclipsed many of his rivals.

The big question for Trump's rivals is whether they will be willing to take him or simply stand back and hope he implodes on his own in Thursday's debate.

Leading contenders like Bush, Walker and Rubio are likely to stress their records and vision while others more in need of a polls boost like Ohio Governor John Kasich or New Jersey Governor Chris Christie may find value in tangling with Trump.

The Bush camp made clear the former Florida governor intends at the debate to sell his record as a conservative, tax-cutting governor. The Walker camp made similar pledges about the Wisconsin governor's aim.

Republican strategist Katie Packer said the smart strategy is to steer clear of the mud-slinging Trump.

"There's no point in fighting with a pig because you just get dirty and you make the pig mad," she said.

### **"Big Boy"**

Bush, who ranks second behind Trump in most polls, told NBC News last week he had no problem going head-to-head with Trump or any other Republican candidate in the debates.

"I'm a big boy," he said. "I'll be showing up with my big-boy pants on."

Trump told ABC's "Good Morning America" on Wednesday he wants a civil debate.

"I don't want to attack anybody and maybe I'll be attacked and maybe not," Trump said. "I'd rather just discuss the issues."

Most Republicans believe Trump will positively influence the debate, saying his presence will challenge the establishment and open the party to new ideas, a Reuters/Ipsos poll shows.

Many rank-and-file Republicans see Trump's blunt and unpredictable style as an asset. More than two-thirds agreed that his debate appearance would challenge the establishment, while 62 percent said it would lead to more honesty, and 61 percent said it would open the party to new ideas.

The poll found about half of Republicans thought Trump's presence meant something offensive would be said, while 42 percent believed he would add comedy to an otherwise boring event. Thirty-two percent thought he would make a mockery of the political process.

Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus urged the candidates to maintain civility.

"We've got to ... make sure that we don't really put up with a whole lot of mudslinging and call it out when you see it but let some jabs go by as well. It's a balancing act that we have to let happen without us kind of killing each other at the same time," he said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" program.

Democratic candidates for the White House will hold their first primary debate in the swing state of Nevada on Oct. 13 in an encounter hosted by CNN, the party said on Thursday.

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