

Trump Compares Himself to Reagan, and Other Highlights of the GOP Debate

Just about every 2016 U.S. presidential candidate at the first Republican debate had a difficult moment at Quicken Loans Arena, a venue better known as home to the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team and their star player LeBron James.

It was a fractious affair late on Thursday, with the Fox News Channel moderators confronting each of 10 candidates on the stage with their political weaknesses, prompting testy exchanges between candidates Donald Trump and Rand Paul, Paul and Chris Christie, and most notably Trump and Fox News host Megyn Kelly.

Trump had been expected to dominate the two-hour show, and the boastful billionaire did not disappoint. He made news by refusing to rule out a third-party bid and then, when asked about his view of women, taking a jab at Kelly.

It was classic Trump with few kind words for anyone but himself. At times he blasted politicians ("stupid"), insurers ("They're making a fortune!"), bankers ("They're killers!"), the media ("They're a very dishonest lot"), the moderators, his rival candidates, and President Barack Obama.

He sought to play down his past liberal positions on abortion and healthcare, and he compared himself to late U.S. President Ronald Reagan. But it wasn't all about Trump, known as "the Donald" by friend and foe alike.

Here are some other highlights and lowlights of the first of many debates expected to pepper the run-up to the November 2016 election:

THE TRUMP EFFECT: U.S. Senator Paul of Kentucky, who had been losing momentum for weeks, appeared to use Trump to try to resuscitate his candidacy, twice interrupting Trump to pick a fight with him. But Trump savaged him at one point by saying, "You're having a hard time tonight!"

PAUL BRAWL: Apparently feeling his oats, Paul also got into it with New Jersey Governor Christie over domestic surveillance. Christie drew blood when he accused Paul of "blowing hot air" in a Senate subcommittee on the issue. Paul knocked Christie for embracing Obama after Superstorm Sandy in October 2012; Christie countered by talking about hugging families of 9/11 victims. Both stuck to principles, staging a rare battle over policy that stood out amidst the Trump sideshow.

A STANDOUT ZINGER: It came actually during the second-tier debate, for candidates polling less well. When former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina was asked to compare herself to Trump, she said, "I didn't get a phone call from Bill Clinton when I got in the race." Fiorina was widely viewed on social media and by Republican strategists as the standout of the earlier contest.

INVISIBLE MAN: Lost in the crowd? Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson at one point joked about not being given a chance to speak again.

SLOW AND STEADY: Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, as is his wont, had few memorable lines, but by all accounts appeared calm and unrattled.

EXPERIENCE MATTER MUCH?: Asked about his relatively brief U.S. Senate career, Florida's Marco Rubio replied, "If this election is a resume competition, then Hillary Clinton's going to be the next president." Rubio, somewhat quietly, had a strong evening, offering specific answers on policy without being drawn into the dust-ups.

BRAIN DRAIN?: It was an awkward moment when Trump said: "We

need brain in this country to turn it around.” He dealt in non-sequiturs much of the night, at one point charging that Hillary Clinton, the Democratic front-runner, only attended his wedding because he made a donation to her foundation. “That hurts her feelings,” Clinton’s communications director, Jennifer Palmieri, joked in response.

HOME TEAM ADVANTAGE: Governor John Kasich of the host state Ohio received a huge roar when introduced. Distancing himself from the other conservatives on the stage, he fiercely defended expanding Medicaid and taking care of the drug-addicted and mentally ill. In a plea for compassion, he told the audience he had recently attended a same-sex wedding.

ODD COUPLE: In what might have been a bid to insulate himself from attack, Kasich went out of his way to praise Trump. “Donald Trump is hitting a nerve in this country. He is. He’s hitting a nerve. People are frustrated. They’re fed up,” he said.

For candidates’ comments at a glance:

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