

THE SECOND PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE: A RIVETING DUEL, THAT LEFT VIEWERS PANTING FOR MORE



Round two in the debating duel left no one in doubt that the President had learnt from his first-contest mistakes. By the time the ref called time, he had made it one-all, setting up a huge third in Boca, on Monday evening where the winner promises to take all. It was clear that the first debate was won by Romney, not because he won it but because Obama allowed him to win it, this time he wasn't going to do him any favors. This time there was no uncertainty, no complacency, no boorishness, he was raring to go. Within minutes he had called a Romney claim untrue and when the governor loudly paraded his five-point plan, he derided it as a one-point plan, for the wealthy, by the wealthy- the remaining 98 percent have to fend for themselves, he warned. This time he wasn't looking at his shoes or looking down, angry and uninterested. He stared Romney in the face and took him on. Suddenly realizing that it wasn't a Clint Eastwood chair he was confronted with, Romney swung hard trying to regain his poise and dominance by a disdainful, "That wasn't a question that was a statement." Obama painted Romney as a big business mogul, who did not understand the middle-class and those less fortunate as he. That he inspite of earning almost 20 million dollars a year pays a lower income tax rate than the bus driver or the ordinary worker and will continue to do so. That for all his bluster against China, he invests there and if George W. Bush was a costly mistake for which the country is still paying, well, he is more extreme than Bush. Romney painted Obama with an aristocratic brush. Don't talk about what you will do in the next four years, talk about what you have done in the last four. Defend your indefensible record, he challenged. You are a failure and the proof is in the economy that is worse since you took over. Knockout punch, Obama then delivered. I inherited an economy that was the cause of the policies that Romney wants to bring back. Did that convince his undecided voters, we'll have to wait and watch? Obama was a clear winner on a number of issues. On women receiving lesser pay than men, contraception, immigration policy and China, Romney for all his imposing rhetoric came second. Fumbling on facts regarding the death of Americans in Libya, he said that the President was not sure whether it was a terror attack or whether a demonstration had turned violent. He accused the President of going about trying to raise funds for the election on the second day of the attack. The President said he did not believe in playing politics over the death of American lives. Moreover, he had told on the second day itself that it was an act of terror and that the perpetrators would not be spared. But Romney instead that it took the President a fortnight to decide what it was. "I want to make sure we get that for the record," he challenged. To this, Obama countered, "Get the transcript." Crowley intervened: "He did, in fact, call it an act of terror," she told Romney. To loud laughter from the audience Obama wisecracked, "Could you say that a little louder, Candy? Terror." A chastened Romney returned to his corner, down and deflated. Romney scored a self-goal by referring to the 47-percent remarks in response to the final question of the evening and said that he was misunderstood and that he would care for 100 percent of the Americans. It gave Obama enough space to land a telling punch, to tell what Romney thinks of half the country and there was no time left for the governor to clarify. If only the Obama campaign can somehow tell the voters, why the economy is not as rotten as it looks, then they will have effectively taken away the only assault-weapon that Romney has, one that he uses most convincingly and effectively. If they can do that the next bout at Boca Raton, Fla., is going to be one-sided. It promises to be the most viewed television spectacle in America.