

Emotions flare at debate watch

By **Joe Ferguson**

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Students clad in red, white and blue T-shirts announcing their political affiliation crammed into a small lecture hall last night to watch the first presidential debate of 2004.

More than 200 people attended the debate-watch party, sponsored by UA's political science honorary Pi Sigma Alpha.

Emotions during the 90-minute debate flared as students from all sides of the political spectrum cheered and jeered the candidates.

After the debate, students listened to two UA political science professors analyze the debate. Professors James Todd and Henry Kenski each offered lessons in history to put the debate in context.

Kenski applauded the audience who turned out to watch the debate. He predicted the debate itself would not sway many in the audience in their choice for president. He also predicted 85 percent of people watching the debate had already made up their minds.

"Not many will change their minds (after watching the debate)," Kenski said.

Kenski said despite the slim margin of undecided voters, the debates are important.

"I think that Bush won (in 2000) because of the debates," he said.

Kenski said going into debates in 2000, Bush was down 5 percentage points in the poll. But after the debate, Bush was ahead in the polls by 5 percentage points.

Students' opinions of the debate reflected Kenski's prediction.

Ben Cohen, an undeclared freshman, said the



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About 200 people showed up at the Center for English as a Second Language to watch the first presidential debate last night, sponsored by the pre-law fraternity. Students were encouraged to wear red, white or blue shirts to denote their party affiliation.



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and Kerry is very structured*

debates did not change his mind about whom he will vote for. Cohen, who identifies himself as an Independent, said he was uninspired by the debates.

- he knew exactly what he was going to say.
- Mike Hulse, marketing and philosophy junior

"They sounded like a bunch of rich, old white guys," Cohen said.



Mike Hulse, a marketing and philosophy junior, also came away from the debates undecided about his choice for president.

"I'm confused more than ever," Hulse said.

Hulse, an Independent, said he felt the debate was rigid and formatted. He said it was difficult to appreciate either candidate.

"Bush is not the best speaker and Kerry is very structured - he knew exactly what he was going to say," Hulse said.

Wearing a Kerry/Edwards button, nutritional sciences and political science senior Sara Risner-Adler said she plans on voting for John Kerry.

"I think Kerry did a wonderful job," Risner-Adler said.

She also said she thought the debates revealed President Bush's weaknesses.

Jackilyn Drake, a senior majoring in English, said she felt both candidates did equally well in the debates.

Drake, a Republican, said she will vote for President Bush. She said Bush's experience as president fighting the war on terror was her reason for voting for Bush.

"I feel it is better in his hands," Drake said.

Todd said he thought President Bush did a remarkable job during the debate.

"He is a clever and smart person," Todd said sarcastically, moments before picking on Bush.

During the debate, Bush said our troops were fighting "vociferously."

Todd said the debate was well coached and said he felt cheated there were no candidates who spoke their mind in this election cycle.

"They are not debating in a honest way," Todd said.

Political science professor Patrick McGovern, seated in the audience, told the audience during a question and answer session it was important to decide for themselves.

McGovern recommended the Web site factcheck.org as a way to check the accuracy of statements made during the debate by both presidential candidates and the political ads they might watch.

Pi Sigma Alpha, a nonpartisan organization, encouraged students to wear colored T-shirts. They asked Republicans to wear red, Democrats to wear blue and Independents to wear white.