

Opinion

Rather and Bush were both playing games

It was "great picture," the nation's vice president and a network anchorman slugging it out, live. But the debate over who "won" Monday night's ruckus is a prime example of television's constant emphasis on form over content.



Sue Krenk

As most people are beginning to realize, Rather and Bush both lost when they let their tempers get out of hand on live TV. The difference is that Bush is getting some temporary political mileage out of his Rather-bashing. Rather is just getting bashed.

Bush's campaign manager, Lee Atwater, noted that "Any time any Republican gets into a fight with Dan Rather

and wins, he's going to come out very well with Republican primary voters."

Apparently Bush came out well with viewers, too. CBS affiliates — including Bryan's KBTX-TV — were flooded with calls from people who agreed with Bush's aides that what they had seen was "an unfair journalist trying to mug the president."

But that's not what happened. Rather did lose his cool, something he's been known to do: The six-minute blackout is now part of broadcasting legend. And it isn't the first time he's tangled with a government official. At a press conference during the Watergate scandal, Rather's questions prompted President Nixon to ask if he were running for anything. Rather shot back: "No, Mr. President, are you?" To steal a line from Tom Shales of the *Washington Post*, it was the journalistic equivalent of stunt flying.

So is it wrong for a news anchor to have a temper? Not necessarily.

But government officials have a nasty habit of crying harassment when journalists ask them tough questions, even when the questions are asked politely. Ted Koppel, master of the eloquent interruption, still is accused of badgering the witness on occasion.

The nasty truth is that journalists often have to ask questions that officials don't want to answer. The tension that goes along with it rarely shows up in print. Television, however, focuses on the reporter as much as the reporting (which some see as a problem in itself). And the question, as Dan Rather knows, can become as important as the answer.

Broadcast reporters, good ones, know their subjects may want to weasel out of answering a question by accusing the reporter of unfairness or hostility. It's enough of a problem when the reporter is doing his job well. It's more of a problem when the reporter is doing his job poorly.

So when Rather let his temper take

control in the Bush interview, he gave the vice president ammunition for the cries of foul play that Bush has been spouting ever since. Those cries, though, are completely unjustified.

Bush knew damn well what he was getting into when he agreed to a live interview. As *The New York Times* pointed out, CBS spent the weekend promoting the interview as focusing on the Iran-Contra scandal. And it was no media innocent who demanded that Bush appear live and unedited.

What it comes down to is that both sides were playing games. CBS hoped to surprise Bush with information appearing in the taped segment that preceded the interview. Bush hoped to come off as something more than a wimp. And according to most people, Bush won big in the short run.

In the long run, we all lose. As Rather said, one of the unfortunate things about journalism is that the heat some-

times gets noticed more than the light. And the truth is that Dan Rather — all journalists — have been truly, questionably right in trying to get Bush to answer questions about his involvement in the Iran-Contra affair.

Bush so far has been unwilling to answer those questions, something which should make all Americans profoundly uncomfortable. This nation does need another president who supports criminal activity *a la* Richard Nixon. Nor does it need another president who is mysteriously unable to recall critical meetings and basic foreign policy decisions. Unless he is willing to stand behind — and stand up for — his actions, George Bush does not deserve to be our president.

Unfortunately, Dan Rather's temper may keep the country from realizing that until it's too late.

Sue Krenk is a senior journalism major and editor of *The Battalion*.

Mail Call

Brian makes me cringe

EDITOR:

When I read a column by Brian Frederick, I have to read it twice. The first time I laugh at the clever sarcasm he uses so astutely, and the second time I cringe when I realize that he is being serious and that people actually think the way he thinks. By the way, does Mr. Frederick fund *The Battalion*?

Paul Fritz
grad student

Brian shouldn't parent children

EDITOR:

Brian Frederick, I truly hope you never decide to parent any children. I have never seen anyone so narrow-minded as you are about the rights and responsibilities of young adults.

You believe that "the purpose of the schools is the production of literate young Americans." Is that all you want from America's school system? When a young adult walks across a stage to receive his diploma, it is my hope that he is graduating from high school as a literate young American and a unique individual, full of independent thoughts and ideas.

Your disregard for the need of high school students to express their thoughts disheartens me. You seem to think that students who are attempting to educate themselves and others about the problems surrounding them are distracted from their education. It seems to me that the students involved in the Hazelwood decision were focusing a good portion of their time on their education. They were bold enough to research and write articles that were pertinent to situations surrounding them, and when their ideas were censored, they were intelligent enough to speak up for their rights and took the case to court. I think the students involved were gutsy, smart, freethinking individuals who showed excellent leadership qualities.

I'm sorry that you seem to think of young adults as shrill children who lack the maturity to handle adult freedoms. I wonder what kind of child you were when you graduated from high school and before you became a legal adult.

Julie Holden '91

No more senseless murders

EDITOR:

By now most of us have heard about the senseless murder of Dallas police officer John Chase. This has brought national attention to the dangers faced everyday by "our men and women in blue." I believe the death of officer Chase and many other police officers could have been avoided. Where was his partner when officer Chase died? The sad truth is that Chase was patrolling alone. A second police officer on the scene could have prevented this tragedy.

Too often our nation's police departments are forced by tight budgets to assign only one officer to a patrol car. Was it worth the loss of life in order to save taxpayers a few dollars? The police are protecting us with their lives. Why can't we protect them with our dollars? As graduates of A&M, many of us will someday hold influential positions in many communities across the nation. Support the police with your voices and votes when they ask for funding to hire more officers. We will be investing in their lives and in our own.

Jerry L. Gribble '88

What is the point, Mr. Kaul?

I am writing in response to Donald Kaul's article on the firing of Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder. I would like to agree with Mr. Kaul's observation that Jimmy "the Greek" is a bigot with a capital B. However, as a Greek American, I was offended by the sensationalist tone he donned by pointing out, rather astutely, that Jimmy "the Greek" and Al Campanis are both Greek and guilty of bigotry. What was the point, Mr. Kaul?

Pete Koplos '88

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.



Life with a Mickey Mouse watch

As a child I was deprived. I never had a Mickey Mouse wristwatch.

It wasn't that my parents didn't want to buy me one. But in our neighborhood nobody bought watches from a store.

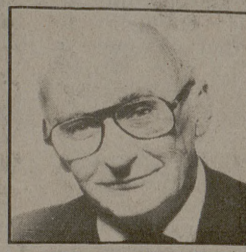
Everybody got their watches from Stanley's tavern. That's because when somebody needed a few dollars or ran up a bar bill he couldn't pay, they went to Stanley with a watch. So Stanley wound up owning a lot of watches, and when someone needed one they bought from Stanley.

When I graduated from grammar school, instead of a Mickey Mouse I got a big, round railroad watch bearing the engraved inscription: "To Bruno, with love, Sarah."

Fortunately, not having a Mickey Mouse watch didn't bother me. The only time I even thought of it was when someone asked what time it was. Then I'd throw a tantrum and lie on the floor crying and kicking my feet. After a while, none of the other men in the barracks would ask me the time.

The old desire for a Mickey Mouse watch came back last week. While shopping for a watch in the budget basement of a department store, I saw in a corner of the display case a genuine Mickey Mouse.

I didn't even know they made them



Mike Royko

anymore. Today's parents, I assumed, bought their children Swiss jobs that tell the time, year, date, and play rock 'n' roll chimes.

When the saleswoman asked, "Can I help you?" I thought, why not?

"Yes, I'd like that one there."

"Oh, the Mickey Mouse. Do you want it gift-wrapped?"

"No. Just wind it and I'll wear it."

She froze with her hand in the case. "You'll wear it?"

"Yes."

I could tell she expected an explanation, something about a joke. She was waiting for me to say something so she could laugh. But I said nothing and looked dignified. She shrugged, I paid her, strapped it on, and left.

The strap was the only flaw. It was wide, red, and plastic. That's OK for a kid, but a grown man shouldn't have that on his Mickey Mouse watch.

I went to a jeweler and asked the short, round man if he had cheap bands.

"Sure. I wear them myself. Give me your watch and I'll put it on."

I slipped the Mickey off the red band and handed it to him.

He stood for several seconds just staring at it in the palm of his hand. Finally he looked up and said, slowly and firmly:

"This is a Mickey Mouse watch."

"Yes, it is."

"You wear it?"

"Of course."

He looked stern and suspicious. I never seen a man wear a Mickey Mouse watch before.

It appeared he wouldn't put a band on or return it unless he got an explanation, so I said:

"I never had one when I was a boy."

He brightened. "Oh, in that case, your entitled." And he cheerfully sold me a black band.

That is the way it has been for several days. Wearing a Mickey Mouse is more fun for an adult than for a child.

There was the bartender who blinked and asked the standard question: "Is that a Mickey Mouse watch?"

"Of course not. Who ever heard of a grown man wearing a Mickey Mouse watch?"

He nodded. Then he looked close and said: "What ya givin' me? That's a Mickey Mouse watch." He called out to his wife in back: "Hey c'mere. He's got on a Mickey Mouse watch."

She smiled, a bit confused, and said: "Well, isn't that wonderful?"

And the bank cashier who said: "You really wear that? All the time?"

"Sure. A man's got a right to wear a Mickey Mouse on his wrist, hasn't he?"

"Sure, sure," he said. As I walked away, he added: "Atta boy, atta boy."

This proves it is never too late.

Now, if I can just find a pair of "high tops" — those great boots with the little pocket on the side for a little knife. BOY!

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by Berke Breathed

The Battalion

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