



SHOWBIZ TONIGHT

The Funniest Campaign Ever; More of Marcia Brady's Confessions; Will Madonna and Guy Ritchie's Divorce Battle Get Dirty?; Elisabeth Hasselbeck Will Stay on The View

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A.J. HAMMER, CO-HOST: Now, on SHOWBIZ TONIGHT, the funniest campaign ever. John McCain and Barack Obama doing stand-up comedy.
(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SEN. JOHN MCCAIN (R-AZ), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: All of their positions will now be held by a man named Joe the Plumber.

SEN. BARACK OBAMA (D-IL), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: I was recently told we would be able to move this outdoors to the Yankee Stadium.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAMMER: Plus, McCain taking on Letterman.

And big news tonight about Sarah Palin and "Saturday Night Live."

But are Palin and McCain getting a raw deal from the comedy shows? Tonight SHOWBIZ TONIGHT with a fired-up debate over the funniest campaign ever.

(Transcript cut)

With us tonight in Washington is Amy Holmes, who is a political analyst for CNN. And in New York is Ashleigh Banfield, anchor of "In Session."

All right. So listen to this, guys, a conservative watchdog group called the Center for Media and Public Affairs counted up - they took the time. They got their out their advocates and they counted up the jokes on David Letterman and Jay Leno shows in the past five weeks since McCain chose Sarah Palin as his running mate.

Can we put up the results of this particular survey here? The total jokes about McCain and Palin, 286. Compare that to Obama and Biden - look at that - only 42.

Now, Amy, let me begin with you. Surely, the Palin factor has played a big part into that. A lot of material there. But do you think there's something else going on here?

AMY HOLMES, CNN POLITICAL ANALYST: Well, also, John McCain was getting a lot of jokes over his age. And, you know, that he's a little stiff when he walks and things like that. I think there are a couple things here that oftentimes that comics, they go back to, sort of what are the cultural stereotypes around the person they can use.

And with Barack Obama, it's hard to figure out what that would be. He's a very sort of enigmatic man with a multicultural background. Hawaii, Indonesia, Kansas, Kenya - what do you pick out of all of that?

I also think there's another reason, which are these shows - these are coastal shows in blue states, in the bluest of cities. And I can tell you, I've gone on "Real Time," and for HBO quite a bit, and I know the producers. They want more conservatives in the audience. So when you have the talk show hosts cracking the jokes, if he has an audience full of

liberals, those are the types of jokes they're going to play a lot better than jokes about conservatives.

HAMMER: Yes. And historically, this has been the case. I mean, the study also points out Republicans throughout history have been targeted more than Democrats. But, you know, this election has something different going on, because the jabs at Republicans have really been off the charts.

Ashleigh, what do you think? Is it possibly because comedians and writers are just reflecting, you know, what's really an overwhelming dissatisfaction with the Republican administration?

ASHLEIGH BANFIELD, ANCHOR, "IN SESSION": I think that could be some of that. But I also think that policy wonks aren't funny, and Joe Biden is a bit of a policy wonk. And unless you are a policy wonk with some weird affectation like Al Gore speaking ...

HOLMES: Or John Kerry -

BANFIELD: ... or John Kerry speaking, which was very funny in 2000 and 2004, there's not a whole lot of good material to work with there.

And I agree with Amy. I don't think there's a whole lot of good material to work with for comedians when it comes to Obama other than his ears, which, of course, "SNL" does very well with, you know, the depiction of Obama in the campaign. So I think it's just that Palin is just a really, really funny character for Tina Fey to work with.

HAMMER: Well, John McCain certainly gave David Letterman had plenty of material. Letterman has just been relentless, brutal. I've watched virtually every night, and virtually every night, he's gone after McCain on his show because McCain canceled an appearance on the "Late Show" at the very last minute.

Well, last night, at long last, McCain came back to make amends. Watch what happened.

LETTERMAN: Now, what exactly happened?

(LAUGHTER)

I thought I was doing my part to save the economy. And then later on, I think maybe I'm just not important enough.

MCCAIN: Can I give you an answer?

LETTERMAN: Please.

MCCAIN: I screwed up.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

HAMMER: (UNINTELLIGIBLE) I personally believe that McCain owed Dave that apology. I think he did the right thing by giving it to him. That said - Amy, over to you. Isn't it remarkable? We're living in a time that the presidential candidates feel they have to make nice with these late-night talk shows or else.

HOLMES: Yes. It's pretty strange, I have to say. I think politics and policy and choosing your commander-in-chief are more serious than sitting on a chair across from David Letterman and apologizing because you wanted to come back to Washington and fix an economic crisis and a mess.

But you know what? It was the sort of denouement of a long story line that Letterman had been playing out. You know, it arrived. It was cathartic. It's over. McCain has put that behind him and he doesn't have to worry about Letterman, you know, jabbing him anymore.

HAMMER: Ashleigh, 10 seconds - give me your gut here. Do you think these shows really influence the election or the candidates just spinning their wheels here?

BANFIELD: I do. Here's why and I'll do it in 10 seconds. Nixon once said, "If I lose Cronkite, I lose the country." And these days, a lot of people get their news from the late-night comedians. If you lose them, you'll lose the country.

(CROSS TALK)

HAMMER: Let`s not forget that Nixon said that. That`s very true. Amy Holmes, Ashleigh Banfield, thanks for joining us tonight.

HOLMES: Thanks.

BANFIELD: Thanks, A.J.

HAMMER: I can tell you now Sarah Palin is going to be on "Saturday Night Live" this weekend. So you see right here, our question of the day, what we want to hear from you tonight - "Sarah Palin: "Is doing `Saturday Night Live` the right thing?" You can vote at CNN.com/ShowbizTonight. Or you can E-mail us - showbiztonight@cnn.com is our address.

(Transcript Cut)

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