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Bill de Blasio V. Joe Lhota: Expert Scorecard

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Democrat Bill de Blasio and Republican Joe Lhota dueled Tuesday night in the second of three debates in the 2013 mayoral race. How did they do? Three experts analyzed the debate for the Daily News:

Micheline Blum, director, Baruch College Survey Research:

SUBSTANCE: Wide range of topics, with surprising agreement. Disagreements and attacks were about the past, with more emotion and discussion about the Giuliani years versus the Dinkins years that many voters don't remember or care about, than about the future and their own visions.

STYLE: Lhota more engaged than at last debate. Funny on regrets and "what color is the sky on your planet?" but repeated "mad hatter" line about de Blasio fell flat twice and reinforced tea party image. De Blasio started out aggressive, with long responses. Both mellowed later. No sparks in lightning round. Lhota closed with "safe or sorry;" deBlasio with "safe city and a fair city."

TAKEAWAY: No game changer, so the candidate with the 44 point lead wins again. Lhota needed a bombshell to blow open this race -- or a monumental mistake by de Blasio. Neither one happened. DeBlasio still the runaway favorite.

GRADES:

De BLASIO: B+

LHOTA: B+

Jon Cruz, Bronx High School of Science, Speech and Debate Team director:

SUBSTANCE: A lot of ground was covered in tonight's debate, though both candidates danced around specifics when it got uncomfortable. Lhota called out de Blasio's lack of a "plan B" for his Pre-K plan, but

was unable to name specifics about what exactly would change safety-wise if de Blasio were mayor. Lhota is more than 40 points behind in the polls. He needs to give details more than de Blasio does.

STYLE: Lhota was far more forceful in this debate, pointedly criticizing his opponent's comments about Rudy Giuliani. A split-screen does not help de Blasio. He needs to watch his facial expressions when listening to Lhota; they are often dismissive and frequently off-putting.

TAKEAWAY: While the "tale of two cities" line is starting to sound stale, it's hard to blame de Blasio for playing it safe and sticking with what works. That has been the theme of both of the debates so far. The "safe choice or sorry choice" line from Lhota could have been an interesting theme for a campaign, but it's a little too late in the campaign to find one's voice.

GRADES:

De BLASIO: A-

LHOTA: A-

Jeanne Zaino, Iona College & NYU professor of Political Science:

SUBSTANCE: A substantive and energetic debate. The candidates had vigorous exchanges on issues ranging from stop and frisk, taxes, and education, to affordable housing, charter schools, surveillance, and more. They gave viewers a clear sense as to where they disagree, as well as a few areas of agreement (getting rid of horse-drawn carriage rides for instance).

STYLE: Lhota was much stronger than he was during the first debate. He came out swinging, landed several blows against his opponent, defended his former boss, expressed confidence, seemed comfortable, and even managed to show he has a sense of humor. The question is whether it's too late to make a difference at the polls. De Blasio was as aggressive this time as he was last week. He exhibited a lot of energy, never gave any major ground to his opponent, and clearly isn't playing it as safe as someone 40+ points ahead might.

TAKEAWAY: We saw a more fiery Lhota and an equally charged de Blasio. The question now is whether enough undecided voters watched the debate to impact the polls in any meaningful way? It is unlikely at this point in the race, but Lhota's performance was strong enough that we may see the polls close just a little bit.