

**THE BLOG**

Why Has Joe Scarborough Rolled Up His Sleeves?

By Marty Kaplan

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Playing the expectations game is apparently no work for wimps. When the warriors of the cable news networks got dressed in the dark this Election Day morning, some of them surely did an extra set of forearm-strengthening exercises. After all, it takes one helluva powerful pundit to punch a presidential candidate out of the race if she wins only Ohio, say, or if she doesn't win Ohio by enough.

When did the Fourth Estate become the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse? Who hired these media personalities to be the hosts of some nightmarish Democracy Gong Show? "Hillary Clinton, you're fired!" Is it any less ridiculous for MSNBC's paid help to be saying so, than for Donald Trump? Is "Leave the runway!" less arrogant when it comes from John Harwood or Chuck Todd than from Heidi Klum? (To be fair to the other networks, I can't say that The Best Political Team on Television, or The Worst, wields the guillotine with any more humility than General Electric's stars.)

I suspect it was this media power-drunkenness that caused the voters of New Hampshire to keep Clinton in the race, and if she stays on her feet after today to fight on to Pennsylvania, I think it will be attributable in part to the public's justifiable fury at the media's amnesia, its narcissism, its fantasy *Hardballs*, its relentless reduction of politics to spectacle, policy to showbiz, deliberation to mixed martial arts.

To be sure, campaigns play the expectations game, too. But when Tom Brokaw implores his colleagues to "let the voters vote," he's not lamenting what politics has become; he's reminding his colleagues that their job description doesn't include putting horses' heads in candidates' beds, fitting them with cement shoes, or anything else that might require a couple of cuff-turns on their impeccable oxford broadcloths.

You know what might be a nice touch? How about white lab coats for the anchors? And scrubs for the pundits. With stethoscopes around their necks. That way, when they declare that a candidate has irrecoverably slipped into a permanent vegetative state, they'll really wield some authority.

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