



OPINION: TRUMP SCORES TKO IN CNN'S TOWN HALL DEBATE - INSIDE SOURCES

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Donald Trump won the first debate of the 2024 presidential cycle Wednesday night, and it wasn't even close.

What debate, you ask? Then you didn't watch CNN's broadcast from the leafy confines of St. Anselm College in Manchester, N.H., on Wednesday night. Like the old joke about boxing matches and hockey games, Granite State Republicans came to a voter town hall, and a debate broke out.

CNN touted the fact it gathered a roomful of potential GOP primary voters to help them make their choice in the 2024 race. Then the network proceeded to all but ignore them — only a half-dozen questions were taken from the crowd during the 90-minute event — and instead sent moderator Kaitlan Collins in swinging.

She never had a chance.

Collins kept most of the first half hour focused on two issues: Trump's claims the 2020 election was stolen and his refusal to take responsibility for the January 6 riot on Capitol Hill. In a surprise to absolutely no one, except perhaps the news producers of CNN, Trump repeated what he had been saying for two years. "The election was rigged," and "unless you're a very stupid person," you know it.

Collins, who appeared taken aback by Trump's statements, kept pushing. Instead of going to audience questions and letting voters ask about what was on their minds, Collins was determined to let everyone know what was on hers: He's lying!

1414901 Republican Presidential Town Hall with Donald Trump moderated by Kaitlan Collins Live from New Hampshire

So she kept pressing him about his "false claims" regarding 2020, and he kept responding with talk about ballot boxes being stuffed in Pennsylvania and voter fraud investigations in Wisconsin.

At one point, an exasperated Collins insisted, "The election was not rigged, Mr. President. You can't keep saying that all night."

But of course, he could keep saying it, and he did. Because CNN put him on live TV, and he's *Donald Trump*.

Are the people who run CNN unfamiliar with his work? What did CNN chief Chris Licht expect Trump to do — wilt under the unrelenting fact-checking from Collins and blurt out, "You're right! I confess! I know I lost fair and square. My entire political reason for existence is a lie!"

The question of the night, asked by both horrified Democrats and dispirited, anti-Donald Republicans, was, "What the hell was CNN

thinking?”



For Trump, the event was a twofer. He got to participate in a presidential debate, but alone — no pesky Chris Christie to put him off his game. Even better, his opponent was a finger-wagging Millennial media member, a stand-in for the people who hate Trump voters and who Republicans love to hate.

As veteran political analyst Jeff Greenfield tweeted, “Collins keeps trying to debate or refute Trump as he talks over her, and the audience cheers Trump on. It’s more evidence that this is a disastrous format.”

Not for Trump. He could hardly ask for a better setting. Holding a town hall, then having the “moderator” come out swinging reminded Republicans how unfairly the press treats them and their candidates. It also gave Trump the opportunity to walk into the media lion’s den and walk out with a win.

When the final bell rang, Trump World knew they had a winner.

“Smart people are asking: Where does DeSantis even go from here? There’s no oxygen for anyone not named Donald J. Trump,” one Trump ally told InsideSources.

A less-than-Trump-friendly GOP strategist who asked to speak on background had a similar take.

“Donald Trump should thank his team for talking him into doing the town hall. He steamrolled Kaitlan Collins repeatedly and, judging from the audience’s response, they loved it,” the strategist, who is not aligned with any presidential campaign, told InsideSources.

“He may not care about suburban moderates, but he doesn’t need to in order to crush the GOP primary field. And he may not even need to in a race against an increasingly feeble and unpopular Joe Biden.”

Biden responded to the CNN event with a bit of snark.

“It’s simple, folks. Do you want four more years of that? If you don’t, pitch in to our campaign,” Biden [tweeted](#).

The obvious retort from millions of Trump fans on Twitter: OK, Joe — now it’s your turn. When are you spending 90 minutes in a town hall with Tucker Carlson?

Biden won’t, of course. And nobody would ever expect him to. And that may be the most significant subtext of the beatdown Trump delivered on TV Wednesday night: Can you even imagine Biden doing this?

While Biden is shuffling between nap time in the White House and ice cream cones on the Delaware beach, Trump walks into the liberal media’s coliseum, faces the lions, and walks out holding up a bloody head.

And yes, we are entertained.

If this all feels familiar, it should. In 2016, CBS CEO Leslie Moonves famously bragged that Donald Trump’s candidacy “may not be good for America, but it’s damn good for us.”

What America witnessed Wednesday night was a disaster for CNN, but it was damned good for Donald Trump.