

A brief history on choosing the second banana

By Kenneth Janda

At the 1960 Democratic National Convention, John F. Kennedy chose Lyndon B. Johnson, his archrival during the primary campaign, as his vice presidential running mate. Should Barack Obama copy Kennedy and pick Hillary Clinton?

To put it mildly, Kennedy (Harvard) was not close to Johnson (Southwest Texas State Teachers College) and had no plans to lean on Johnson in the White House. But Johnson helped Bostonian Catholic Kennedy carry Protestant Texas and most of the South, producing Kennedy's razor-thin victory in the general election.

Obama might not be comfortable with Hillary Clinton as No. 2, with Bill Clinton hanging close as No. 2½. Adding to Obama's discomfort, Hillary Clinton put him on the spot by implying that she wants the job. What should he do?

Should Obama pick someone he would want to help run the country (assuming a

November victory), or should he choose someone who would help achieve a November victory? Does the choice matter?

In 2000, George W. Bush picked Dick Cheney to help him govern, not to deliver Wyoming's three electoral votes. After a fashion, Bush's choice worked. In 2004, John Kerry picked John Edwards to help win Southern states, but Edwards failed to carry either of the Carolinas he calls home. Kerry's decision didn't work.

In 1988, George H.W. Bush chose boyish Dan Quayle (low on presidential qualifications) to bring youth to his

ticket. Although Quayle may have helped Bush to his huge victory (Bush did win Indiana), he was a drag on Bush's failed bid to win re-election in 1992 (despite reclaiming Indiana).

These recent elections demonstrate that candidates may fare better in selecting comfortable running mates than ones who help win. Nevertheless, Obama should consider Clinton, because his presidential campaign has lost momentum.

Although, Obama won more pledged delegates than Clinton in state contests through February, Clinton won more delegates than

Obama after February. Moreover, she won six of the last 10 contests since April.

Like Sherlock Holmes, Obama should be puzzled by the strange case of the bandwagon effect. Eh, Holmes, what? Precisely, Watson, there was no bandwagon effect. Usually campaign front-runners increase their margins with succeeding contests, but not Obama. Even when the delegate mathematics doomed Clinton, she was winning primary voters, who are normally reluctant to "waste" their votes by voting for losers.

Obama's failure to build

on his early successes implies that he faces real problems with the American electorate concerning issues of race, class and religion. As his running mate, Hillary Clinton may not deliver specific states, but she should help the ticket's appeal to key demographic groups across all states.

Should Obama, like Kennedy, bite the bullet and choose a vice presidential mate on the basis of winning rather than governing?

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