

Limbo

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suspense.

"Those of you who have stayed up with us, you have been rewarded with one of the all-time close races," CBS' Dan Rather said at one point.

On Tuesday night, several analysts said their networks were taking time declaring states for either candidate, wanting to make sure exit poll results matched up with actual returns.

"We're waiting on a possible decision in Florida, but you've got

time to put on another cup of coffee and pour it," Rather said before 8 p.m. EST.

Ten minutes later, NBC projected Gore the winner in Florida. Other networks followed soon after. But two hours later, video of Bush appeared on TV screens saying he wasn't giving up Florida. By 9:55 p.m. EST, CNN had taken back its projection that Gore had won the state. CBS quickly followed, then NBC.

"This night got even more complicated and tricky," CNN's Jeff Greenfield said.

An early sign of a tight race

came during the network evening news. Anchors usually can be counted on to drop subtle hints from exit poll results about how the night will unfold, but few were forthcoming.

Rather convened a panel of political experts and asked them to pick a winner at about 6:40 p.m. EST. Linda DiVall picked Bush, Harrison Hickman guessed Gore and Norm Ornstein took a pass. "I honestly don't know," he said.

ABC's George Stephanopoulos, the former political operative for President Clinton, predicted legal challenges to vote counts would be

brought in several states if the race stayed close.

Peter Jennings anchored ABC's coverage from a midtown Manhattan studio, alternating between the lights of Times Square blinking behind him and the lights from an electoral map.

On NBC, analyst Russert used a laser pointer to pick out states on a red, white and blue map. Later, Russert discarded the pointer to scribble voting projections in pen on a white tablet.

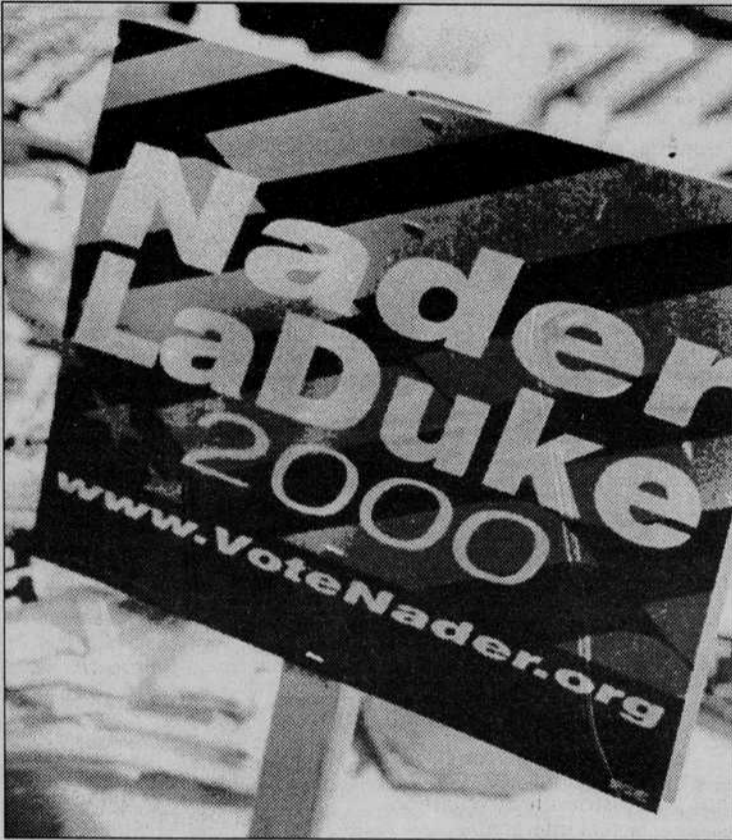
CNN and Fox News Channel used a graphic borrowed from sporting events, displaying an

electoral vote count as a scorecard on the corners of their screen.

MSNBC — the cable network started by Microsoft — was disarmingly low-tech: A production assistant, Kara Kaplan, filled in states on a map like a giant jigsaw puzzle.

Even as they faced the prospect of a sleepless night, political reporters were almost gleeful.

"This is Christmas Eve for us political junkies," MSNBC's Chris Matthews said before any polls closed. "It certainly beats the Oscars. It beats the World Series."



Dan Brunell Emerald

A Green Party sign supporting Ralph Nader and Winona LaDuke is hoisted at the Lane County Fairgrounds on election night. Nader earned three percent of the popular vote.

Nader

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and his supporters assert that many of Nader's voters wouldn't have voted at all if they couldn't vote for Nader and that only Gore was to blame should he lose the election.

While the election teetered over the final undecided states, Nader lambasted the Democratic Party for being corrupt and ineffectual and told about 100 of his backers who remained at the National Press Club that their support of the Green Party was well-placed, though the party didn't gain enough votes to secure federal campaign funding.

"How many years are we going to be betrayed by a Democratic Party with an atrocious record," Nader said. "[Green Party supporters] can say: 'Don't blame us, we voted for Nader/LaDuke.'" Winona LaDuke was Nader's running mate.

Nader said that this election was a victory for the Green Party's cause. It jettisoned the Green Party into becoming the nation's biggest third party and shook up the Democrats, he said.

"There are a lot of people in the Democratic Party who are squirming," he said. "If we make them squirm enough and sweat enough, maybe we could make them a little more honest ... a little more like the party they were decades ago, the party of the working people."

Earlier in the evening, about 300 Nader supporters listened to Nader rail against Republicans and Democrats saying the parties had "morphed into one corporate body with two heads."

"If you vote for the least of the worst and the lesser of two evils ...

at the end of the day you're still stuck with the worst and the evil," he said.

Though a president opposed to much of Nader's platform may well be elected, many of the Green Party supporters at Tuesday night's rally in Washington, D.C., said they would still vote for Nader and not for Gore, given the chance. Nonetheless, a pall seemed to fall over the jovial rally when the race came down to the wire.

Greg Kafoury, the Portland lawyer who organized Nader's Aug. 25 rally in Portland, said he didn't regret supporting the campaign and voting for Nader. "He's the kind of man who comes a long once in a century," Kafoury said, adding that he left his law practice for three months to support Nader.

"Young people, particularly the smartest and most active, have received a baptism in progressive activism," he said. "They've come to appreciate the corruption of major parties. They'll become better people and do more for the world than they would if Ralph Nader never ran for president."

Reflecting the vehemence of many Nader supporters, Chris Andino, a sophomore at the University of Virginia and Nader campaign volunteer, said he would have never voted for Gore.

"If it was Bush, Gore and Jell-O mold running, I would vote for Jell-O mold," he said. "I wouldn't vote for a person I don't believe in. I believe in Ralph Nader."

Still, a handful of Nader supporters at the rally who lived in states solidly favoring either Gore or Bush said they would have reconsidered their votes if they lived in contested states.

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