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One Race, Many Factors

Now comes the real race.

As Mark Green and Fernando Ferrer screech toward the finish line, the polls put the two of them so close, a sheet of loose-leaf paper couldn't pass between them.

Mike Bloomberg, of course, is still waiting — not in the shadows exactly, having already spent \$29 million shining a bright light on himself. In just the past five weeks, Bloomberg's campaign burned through \$8 million, and Election Day for him doesn't arrive until November.

But the rich guy will wait.

From now 'til Thursday, Green-Ferrer is the only game in New York, a fight between two men the voters have been extremely slow to warm to.

But with so little time left, either one could win it or blow it in the blink of an eye. One stupid outburst, one false move, one strategic miscalculation — the race will be turned on its head at the most dangerous possible moment, the moment when voters are headed to the polls.

Want to handicap the outcome? Keep an eye on half-a-dozen crucial factors — and the questions each one generates. They'll reveal who will win.

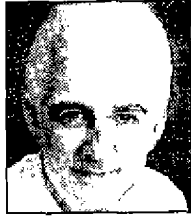
Guaranteed.

THE COMBATIVENESS FACTOR

After months of being Mr. Nice Guys, Green and Ferrer have both harshened their rhetoric considerably. "He hasn't risen to the emergency," Green said of Ferrer, a direct hit almost unthinkable a month ago. "The responses have been late and little ... Now is not the time for more studies and more commissions. It really is the time for strong action, smart plans."

Ferrer, not to be left out, belittled Green's strong ties to Bill Bratton, the former police commissioner who could be in line for a second run: "Being police commissioner should not be a reward for political loyalty," Ferrer snapped.

The question: Which man can come off strong without seeming nasty?



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They're both inching that way.

THE SURROGATE FACTOR

Both candidates are employing high-profile surrogates to say the things they won't.

So Ferrer has Ed Koch, Pat Moynihan and Geraldine Ferraro on television, trying to tell white voters they trust this man they call "Freddy." (No "Fernandos," please.)

Green has Bill Bratton, Alan Hevesi and others, broadening him out.

Sharpest surrogate barb of the week came from Jerry Hauer, the former Giuliani emergency director who's joined Green's team. "We can't afford to have somebody with no vision in City Hall," Hauer said. "Clearly Freddy doesn't, and I think that puts the city at risk."

Ouch!

The question: Does anyone actually listen to these surrogates? How many votes does Pat Moynihan or Bill Bratton really deliver? Can you count them on one hand?

THE SHARPTON FACTOR

He's the biggest surrogate of all.

The big challenge for Ferrer at this point is attracting white votes. He did great with Latinos. He did pretty well with blacks (52 to 35 percent). He got clobbered with whites, attracting just 7 percent of the white vote on Sept. 25. While Sharpton is a powerful ally in the city's black neighborhoods, his embrace can really alienate whites, Jewish voters especially. And he sucks up an awful lot of attention, seeming at times to overshadow the smaller, quieter, blander Ferrer. (And really, who isn't smaller, quieter and blander than the Rev. Al?)

After Wednesday night's debate, Ferrer found himself assuring voters that Sharpton won't be picking the next police commissioner, despite the reverend's role as a top adviser.

The question: Does he hurt more than he helps?

THE UNION FACTOR

With the support of the United Federation of Teachers, Ferrer now has the big three munis. Green has the construction guys and some uniforms, too.

It's not that the members of these groups vote slavishly as their leaders urge. In fact, the exit polls say Green got big support from individual teachers last time, even though their union endorsed Alan Hevesi. But the big three — especially the city and health-care workers — have crack get-out-the-vote operations. That matters in low-interest, low-turnout races like this one threatens to be.

The question: Will Green's union guys keep him even with Ferrer's?

THE RUDY FACTOR

The basic facts are all well-known. Green agreed to the three-month extension. Ferrer balked. Rudy's still super-popular, and he's everywhere. Green got points for being flexible. Ferrer got even more for being tough. But now that Extra Rudy is off the table, is all this moot?

The questions are many, and they remain.

How will this look on Election Day?

How will Rudy punish Freddy?

Will he look beyond his long-time loathing of Green?

Count on only one thing here: Rudy Giuliani will find a way to insert himself in every twist of the mayor's race.

THE TERROR FACTOR

Times have just gotten a whole lot tougher in New York.

Neither man quite wants to admit it, but most voters understand that, after Sept. 11, New York has fundamentally changed. Times were getting tough already. Now, the city comptroller says, whack an extra \$100 billion from the city economy. Subtract another 115,000 jobs. Forget about a lot of promises that were made in this campaign.

The question is one of character, talent and temperament: Which of these guys seems like the leader to rebuild New York? Who is smart enough and tough enough? Who is a leader for these dreadful times?

Answer that, you'll have your next mayor.

Guaranteed.

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