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FINAL DEM FACE-OFFS GET NASTY

By ROBERT HARDT Jr.

Mayoral candidates Mark Green and Fernando Ferrer got personal in their final debates yesterday, bickering over who was first to "go negative" and who can best lead the city following the World Trade Center attack.

During much of the two televised showdowns on WNBC and WABC, Green went after Ferrer on several fronts, charging he was inconsistent on the death penalty and abortion, and ill-prepared to deal with the city's recovery.

Ferrer's strategy was to complain that his rival was simply engaging in negative attacks.

"I've counted before I walked onto this stage — from Mark and his campaign — 19 separate attacks," Ferrer said near the outset of the first debate.

"It is essential that we compare our leadership now," Green said. "That's not attacks, Freddy. It's facts."

Later, in the second showdown, Green told Ferrer: "If you can't take the heat, you shouldn't be in the debate."

"Mark, I can certainly take the heat, but I'm not going to allow you to stand there and distort," Ferrer testily replied.

Green's tactics reflected the feeling by some in his camp that his support has been slipping and that Ferrer is even — if not ahead — in the tumultuous Democratic primary race that ends with Thursday's runoff.

Almost as soon as the first debate began, Green went after Ferrer by criticizing his recovery plan for the city.

"It is really wrong and naive to imply and say that we have to disperse the communications, financial-services industry," Green said.

"This isn't the penalization of Wall Street," Ferrer replied. "Fact is, by Mayor Giuliani's own estimates, the reclamation of the site will take at least a year."

Green also took a dig at Ferrer for his three different positions on the death penalty: "You're allowed to change your mind, but on a fundamental issue like that, that's curious."

"That's the fifth attack — and I'm keeping score here," Ferrer said.

By the end of their first debate — in which the two were visibly annoyed at each other — WNBC moderator Gabe Pressman asked Ferrer: "Do you like Mark Green?"

Ferrer replied: "Yeah, I like the old Mark Green."

Green asked Ferrer: "When you said I'm a quote machine, did you mean to praise me, Freddy?"

Ferrer said: "Yes, it's a very great skill."

"Freddy, you're being disingenuous," Green said.

The pair also argued over whether Green sought support from the Rev. Al Sharpton — who's backing Ferrer.

"Who are you trying to kid, Mark?" Ferrer said. "You took them [Sharpton and his wife] out to the theater. You had them at your apartment for breakfast!"

"I'm the one who had dinner with him, not you," Green said. "A courtesy is not a solicitation."

Ferrer also claimed the day Giuliani pitched extending his term, Green called to say they should unite against it. Green, who later agreed to the plan while Ferrer said no, didn't reply on-screen, but later denied saying it.

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