

# Down to the (TV) wire

Until last week, Joe Hashmall '06 was undecided about which candidate he would support in the caucuses. He spoke to Tom Brokaw about his indecision and the candidate he ended up supporting.

by Erin Petty

The humor of the situation was not lost on his friends.

"Joe, you're my hero!"

"Can I have your autograph, Joe?"

Joe Hashmall '06 warded off the adulation good-naturedly and with a grain of salt: after all, he was being interviewed for being interviewed.

On Jan. 16 and Jan. 19, Hashmall spoke to NBC Nightly News about his undecided status approaching the Iowa caucuses. He appeared on NBC alongside fellow undecided caucus-goers Gary Brown and Mary van Zante. Brown faces unemployment after renal failure and 18 hours of dialysis a week made him too ill to work. Van Zante works as a manager at the Pella Window Corp and is married to a farmer.

Hashmall called Brown's and van Zante's stories "much more compelling than my own," but as a Political Science major and first-time caucus-goer, Hashmall was exactly what NBC was looking for in an interviewee. Though he spent much of winter break in Iowa volunteering with NBC through their coverage of the Democratic Presidential Debates, NBC found Hashmall independent of this connection. The network called Barb Trisch, Poli. Sci., looking for a student to interview, and so Hashmall came to voice his opinions on the Democratic nomination to the rest of the country.

Hashmall originally supported Howard Dean following the candidate's visit to campus last spring. But he reconsidered his position following the extensive media attention Dean received for his off-the-cuff remarks.

"As I read more and more in the news," Hashmall said, "I questioned myself more and more."

Hashmall started to consider other candidates, particularly John Edwards.

"Edwards had the Southern appeal, and the ability to remain really positive, which I liked a lot," Hashmall said. "But I ended up being unsure of Edwards's ability to remain positive

and overtake Bush."

Hashmall expressed this uncertainty in the first of the two interviews he did with NBC. An off-camera producer conducted the interview on Jan. 14, and it aired two days later. The second interview was both held and broadcast on Jan. 19. According to Hashmall, the interviews were very different in nature.

"The interesting thing about the first interview was it was really, really long," he said. "If she didn't like the way I said something, I'd have to say it again in a different way. Because the questions weren't being shown on air, I had to integrate them into my answers, which could be kind of challenging."

Hashmall's dorm room, the setting of the interview, also presented some challenges. Not only did the cameramen have problems keeping the boom mike from hitting the ceiling, Hashmall returned from break to find that his room wasn't in the cleanest of states.

"My roommate and I had a small end-of-the-semester party, and by small I mean relatively large, so I had to do some quick cleaning," Hashmall said.

But for all the time NBC spent taping Hashmall and his freshly-cleaned room, the network only aired two short clips from the first interview.

"One was of me saying, 'I am undecided,'" Hashmall said. "The other was the obligatory shot of me at the computer, because I'm a college kid and of course I use the computer a lot."

Though undecided in the first interview, Hashmall had his mind made up when Tom Brokaw interviewed him, along with Brown and van Zante, at the Raccoon River Brewery in Des Moines on caucus day.

"Seeing Dean again in person [drew me back to him]," said Hashmall. "He had some really good ideas about overtaking Bush, which is my number one priority in this election. I was also impressed by his Internet campaign and his ability to



Above: Joe Hashmall '06 faces an interview. Above right: NBC Nightly News anchor and Joe Hashmall interviewer Tom Brokaw.

Below right: the NBC peacock.

All images courtesy of NBC

draw small donations."

At the time of the interview, Brown was still undecided and van Zante had settled on John Kerry. Brokaw asked each caucus-goer variations on the same questions. One of the issues Brokaw addressed was the fairness of the ability of 35,000 Iowans to position a candidate as a front-runner.

"Someone who's going to be able to come here and run an effective campaign . . . is someone who's going to have the qualities to maintain their front-runner status," Hashmall said to Brokaw.

By most accounts, Dean's campaign wasn't as effective as his supporters, including Hashmall, had hoped.

"It was a disappointment," he said, "but I'll support whoever wins the nomination."

If nothing else, Hashmall came away from the caucuses having shared some words with Brokaw.

"[Brokaw] asked me a little bit about how I liked Grinnell," Hashmall said. "He asked me if I thought it was way too isolated. And he offered me his prediction, which ended up being kind of off. He thought Dean and Kerry would be the big winners, and that Gephardt wouldn't do very well."

Overall, "[Brokaw] was very nice and very intelligent off-camera," said Hashmall. "I was impressed."

And another thing about Brokaw that made an impression on Hashmall?

"He did his own makeup."

## Early Iowa caucus history

- 1968— controversies surrounding the Vietnam War divide the Democratic Party. Seeking to broaden its constituency, the Democrats conduct a commission led by Iowa Gov. Harold Hughes.
- 1972— the Iowa caucuses are nationally significant for the first time.
- 1976— little-known Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter wins the caucuses. Iowa Republicans hold their caucuses on the same night as the Democrats for the first time.

Information from the Des Moines Register