

THE GRAY LADY'S LIZARD-BRAIN LOGIC



Here.

Fact One: After McCain appeared before a lime jello and cottage cheese background in June, Steve Schmidt swore that he would never let the campaign embarrass John McCain like that again.

Steve Schmidt, a senior adviser to Mr. McCain and a veteran of President Bush's 2004 campaign, could barely hide his fury in the coming days, as he announced – to anyone who would listen – that he personally would make certain the McCain campaign would never again embarrass Mr. McCain.

“Fun Steve is dead,” Mr. Schmidt said.

Fact Two: After the lime jello cottage cheese incident, McCain had Evil Steve Schmidt take over the campaign.

Mr. Schmidt traveled with Mr. McCain for the first part of the year. But Mr. McCain sent him back to the headquarters in Crystal City, Va., after Republican complaints about Mr. McCain's struggling campaign, epitomized by that Green Wall episode.

Mr. Schmidt gave the war room a more central place in Mr. McCain's campaign, streamlining its decision making so only a few key aides decide what is worthy of response and, more important in Mr. Schmidt's view, what presents an opportunity to attack Mr. Obama as elite, out of touch and lacking substance.

Fact Three: Thursday night, John McCain was once

again embarrassed by being placed in front of a green backdrop—made even worse because it was an image of Walter Reed Middle School that should have been an image of Walter Reed hospital.

Three months after Mr. Schmidt's "Fun Steve is dead" declaration, there was Mr. McCain giving his acceptance speech at the convention on Thursday night. His backdrop? A shimmering screen of green, until it was switched over to a more dignified blue.

Conclusion: AdNags and Jim Rutenberg conclude that this represents great improvement and the sign of a masterfully competent campaign, all thanks to Schmidt.

In the three months since that night in June, the McCain organization has become a campaign transformed: an elbows-out, risk-taking, disciplined machine that was on display last week at the convention that nominated Mr. McCain. And the catalyst for the change has largely been Mr. Schmidt, a 37-year-old veteran of the winning 2002 Congressional and 2004 presidential campaigns, where he worked closely with Karl Rove, then President Bush's senior strategist.