

Parting shots: Donald Trump questions Hillary Clinton's stamina to run country; she pounces i

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Washington: In their first presidential debate on Monday, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton slammed her rival and Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump for his remark that she "lacks the stamina needed to run the country".

Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton

Moderator Lester Holt of NBC asked Trump what he had meant by questioning whether Clinton had a "presidential look".

Trump didn't back off, "She doesn't have the look. She doesn't have the stamina. You have so many different things you have to be able to do and I don't believe Hillary has the stamina."

He made his point, feeding into the conspiracy theories swirling about Clinton's health, as well as feeding into sexist questions about whether a woman is tough enough for the job.

Clinton stood stock still, waiting to pounce.

First, she let fly a recitation of her exploits as secretary of state: travels to 112 countries, negotiations on peace deals, cease-fires and imprisoned dissidents "even the 11 hours she spent testifying before a congressional committee investigating the Benghazi situation."

Once Trump can do all that, said Clinton, "He can talk to me about stamina."

Then, she quickly pivoted to the point she'd been dying to make all night, hoping to turn every woman in America against him and evoking memories of Trump's boorish behaviour in the primary election season.

Trump, she said, had tried to switch the context of his remarks from talking about her "looks" to her "stamina."

"But this is a man who called women pigs, slobs and dogs," she continued.

She went on to reference his past remarks calling pregnancy an "inconvenience" for employers and questioning when women should get equal pay.

Then, she went to Exhibit A, bringing up a onetime beauty queen whom Trump had called "Miss Piggy" and "Miss Housekeeping, because she was Latina."

That woman, Clinton said, is now an American citizen "and you can bet she's going to vote this November."

Trump was left to ask: "Where did you find this? Where did you find this? Oh really?"

He didn't deny he'd said it.

Instead, he played the victim, and offered himself as a model of restraint.

"I was going to say something extremely rough to Hillary, to her family. And I said to myself, I can't do it, I just can't do

it," he said.

Clinton, he said, had spent hundreds of millions of dollars on negative ads on him, and "it's not nice. And I don't deserve that."

Later, during post-debate press interviews, Trump disclosed what he had held back:

"I was very happy I was able to hold back on the indiscretions of Bill Clinton."

There were plenty of tit-for-tat moments between Trump and Clinton over the 90-minute debate.

In this one, Trump made his point. But Clinton managed to revive a whole body of questions about how the Republican nominee treats half the electorate.

- With AP Inputs