

Democrats warn not to discount Jackson yet

By **BETH BUFFINGTON**
Staff Writer

With the Republican and Democratic national conventions close at hand, candidates George Bush and Michael Dukakis appear to be the obvious nominees for the upcoming presidential election, campaign observers say.

But the Democrats themselves have yet to call the nominee race over.

"There's no way of telling right now who will be on the ticket," said a press spokeswoman for the Democratic National Committee.

"The Democrats are a neutral party," she added. "We don't favor one candidate over the other until they've been placed on the ticket."

The Rev. Jesse Jackson, the sole remaining opponent to Mass. Gov. Dukakis, is in the race to stay.

"Jackson is not pulling out of the race," said Eric Easter, a Democratic Party spokesman. "(Jackson) still has primaries in Oregon, California and New Jersey and is still geared up to win.

"Right now we're running hard and keeping spirits up (at the Democratic headquarters)," he added. "The press may have given up on us, but we haven't and neither has our voter base."

Still, the consensus of the public and the polls seems to have dismissed Jackson as the possible nominee.

"Dukakis is far ahead in delegates, and there's really no one in sight of him," said UNC political science professor William Keech. "The Democratic convention will be more interesting not because of the ques-

tion of who will be the nominee but how much will be done to appease the support Jackson has gathered."

Dukakis doesn't seem to have any enemies within the party and has avoided negative campaigning, he said.

"There's no fundamental lack of support that would move to an anyone-but-Dukakis ticket right now.

"There's no movement against him such as the stop-Carter movement 12 years ago," Keech said.

As for the Republicans, Bush is the clear ticket holder, he said.

"The Republican (National) Convention will be one of sweetness and light," Keech said. "(It will be) one big, happy family with no division or conflict and with the adulation of Reagan beginning to transfer the mantle to Bush."

But through all the speculation of the presidential race, the public's curiosity now turns to the question of who will be chosen for vice-presidential slots.

In choosing a running mate, Dukakis must be concerned about covering for his lack of foreign politics experience, appeasing Jackson and maintaining the support he's gathered, Keech said.

"It's hard to imagine a candidate winning the (presidential) election without carrying the South," he said. "Dukakis is a pretty liberal guy so I wouldn't be surprised if he chooses a conservative running mate."

"It really doesn't matter who Dukakis picks because he has to run on his own," said Tom Ballus,

assistant communications director at the N.C. Republican headquarters.

"As long as Jackson is in the race, Dukakis is seen as a moderate and as soon as Jackson drops out, Dukakis will have to stand on his own and will be shown as the liberal that he is," Ballus said. "We don't feel that a liberal is what the mainstream public wants."

But the public only hears about Dukakis since Bush hasn't had to fight for his party's nomination, he said.

"The press seems only to mention Bush with Iran-contra, but people are tired of hearing about Iran-contra," Ballus said.

Bush and the Iran-contra affair is a dead issue which will fade out before the Republican Convention, Ballus said.

"The Republican Convention in New Orleans will be pretty boring since everyone pretty much knows Bush will be on the ticket, even if they don't know who his running mate will be," he said.

"My own personal speculation — which doesn't mean much — is that Bush will pick someone like Jack Kemp or a Southerner as a running mate to win the South," Ballus said.

While the economy seems to be in "good shape" and Bush has been able to mobilize support readily for

himself, Bush has to worry about his own ambiguity in the party, Keech said.

"George Bush has a capacity to stumble. That's just a gut feeling I have, but still, in four out of five of the last elections, the Republican party has had a strong base on states

that have always voted Republican.

"The upcoming election could well be close because there's no superiority for either (party nominee) in the polls," Keech said.

"I wouldn't put money on either one of them (Dukakis or Bush)," he added.



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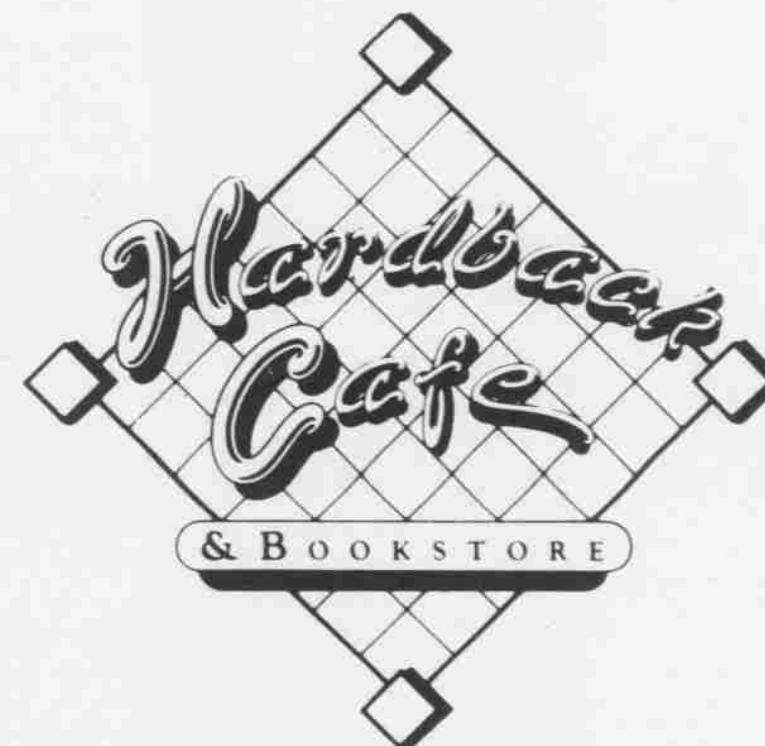
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