

*'To injure no man,
but to bless all mankind'*

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TEEN POWER

Should 14-year-olds vote? OK, how about a quarter of a vote?

By DANIEL B. WOOD
STAFF WRITER

LOS ANGELES — On the sidewalk outside Toy Mandala, a local hangout where teens buy Yu-gi-oh cards and then face off for unofficial competition, the conversation turns from fantasy card games to ... politics.

"I would so vote if I could. It would be cool," says Tommy Arbor, wearing a beak cap sideways to shield his eyes from afternoon sun.

"I would be so clueless," says his opponent, who calls himself simply "Shags" and wears a SpongeBob SquarePants T-shirt. "School bonds, budgets, taxes ... what do I know about that stuff?"

The street-side back-and-forth typifies a new debate that is raising both hope and eyebrows among teens, parents, politicians, and activists from here to Washington and beyond US borders. The question: Should kids as young as 14 be able to vote?

Four California legislators proposed just that in the Golden State this week, with the twist that 14- and 15-year-olds would get only a one-quarter vote and 16- and 17-year-olds would get one-half.

The idea is being touted as a kind of electoral apprenticeship known as "Training Wheels for Citizenship," and is designed to both prod and inspire youth to participate in democracy on a kind of sliding scale — helping them to raise consciousness and take responsibility in small bites.

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RICH PEDRONCELLI/AP



VOTE: Senator Vasconcellos (l.) proposes votes for teens.

Terrorist bombings jolt Spain

■ Simultaneous explosions in Madrid, blamed on the Basque separatist group, killed at least 182 people just days before general elections in Spain.

By LISA ABEND and GEOFF PINGREE
CONTRIBUTORS

MADRID, SPAIN — The bombs that exploded early yesterday morning in Madrid, killing at least 182 people in the single deadliest terrorist attack in modern European history, turned the city's Atocha train station into a scene of carnage and transformed Spain's

political landscape three days before general elections.

Though no one has claimed responsibility for the 10 blasts that tore into trains and commuter railway stations during the morning rush hour, the police and government leaders blamed ETA, the separatist group demanding independence for the Basque region of northeastern Spain.

The deadly explosions thus blew every issue off the agenda other than the government's war on ETA, which the ruling Popular Party (PP) had made a key plank of its electoral platform.

World leaders who have joined the US-led war on terror were quick to draw analogies with terrorist incidents elsewhere. "Terrorism has once again shown it is prepared to stop at nothing in creating human victims," Russian President Vladimir Putin said. "An end must be

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EDUARDO ABAD/AP

UP IN ARMS: Spaniards in Seville yesterday rallied against terrorism.

For sports news, see business, crime pages

By PETER GRIER
STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — Here's a new definition of "the good old days" when sports didn't make news until games actually occurred.

Nowadays scores seem to be the least of it. It takes a whole newspaper, not just an ex-jock, to cover sports action.

- Economics reporter (figures present-day value of deferred contracts).

- Washington correspondent (attends steroid hearings).

- Police reporter for the pros (hockey assaults, bullpen attacks, general indictments).

- Police reporter for amateurs (Tracking college recruiting abuses is a full-time job.)

To get a pro contract or sports scholarship is almost like an arms race.

— Doug Abrams, law professor

What's wrong? One thing, say some: money. As television and sponsorships pour cash into sports, the pressure to perform increases exponentially. That pressure moves down the sports system, all the way to youth league fields.

"It's hard to tell whether the problem [with sports] is with the pros or with the kids and parents who want to reach the

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THE WOMEN'S VOTE

Behind the gender gap

■ President Bush makes overtures to women, but is largely solidifying support among men.

By LINDA FELDMANN
STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON — When President Bush addressed a Cleveland forum on women's entrepreneurship this week, the visuals matched the theme — the president standing with women. But the talk's focus on jobs seemed aimed more at Ohio, a central battleground of the 2004 election and a state struggling with massive job losses, than at the female vote.

In a nation where the "gender gap" has become a permanent feature of electoral politics, Bush is finding it as difficult as most other recent GOP presidents to bring women to his side. So far this year, the Gallup Poll gap between male approval and female approval of Bush is above 7 percent — slightly higher than it was in 2001.

Bush can get away with lower support from women as long as he keeps support from men high. And that is exactly what the president seems to be doing in the early phase of the campaign: solidifying and expanding his support among men (see appearances at NASCAR and the Houston rodeo) and saving the "compassionate

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