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Campaign whiz provides state's Dems an ace in hole

By Willie Brown
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When it comes to political campaign managers, San Francisco's Ace Smith is the heavyweight champion of the year.

Smith's engineering of Attorney General-elect Kamala Harris' come-from-behind win over Los Angeles District Attorney Steve Cooley set conventional wisdom on its ear. When the post-primary polls showed liberal Democrat Harris badly trailing Republican Cooley, the campaign found its sources of money drying up. The big names and big money were suddenly nowhere to be found. Plus, just about every police union in the state was supposedly ready to hit Harris over her refusal to pursue the death penalty for the killer of Officer Isaac Espinoza.

Rather than start spinning all the reasons it wasn't his fault, as many consultants do these days, Smith went on the attack. He hit Cooley hard on his own home turf with ads about his plan to collect his L.A. pension at the same time as an AG paycheck.

Smith also did something most other campaigns only talk about. He put together one of the best get-out-the-vote operations I've seen in years. He pushed Harris hard in L.A.'s black and Latino

communities, having her work the churches and community centers 24/7.

It was classic Smith, and very reminiscent of the wins he got for Hillary Clinton in California and Texas during the hard-fought 2008 presidential primaries.

The contacts he developed running Antonio Villaraigosa's Los Angeles mayoral races also came into play.

Smith is no stranger to bareknuckle politics — he's known the game all his life. His father is former San Francisco District Attorney Arlo Smith, and in addition for his work with the Clintons, Ace managed Jerry Brown's run for attorney general.

He was also a key adviser in Gavin Newsom's successful lieutenant governor's race.

On the night of the election when it appeared that Harris was going down in defeat, Smith sat down with a laptop and confidently predicted that Harris would eventually win by 50,000 votes.

She did. And so did he.