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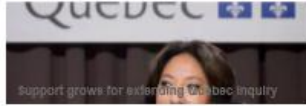
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Justin Trudeau: 'I know some people are gunning for me.'

▶ POLITICS INSIGHT

By Michael Harris | Dec 6, 2012 9:03 pm | [Comments](#)

"I love a man who grins when he fights," Justin Trudeau says.

If he really believes those words, attributed to Winston Churchill, he will be doing a lot of grinning over the coming months. Sitting on a couch in the Centre Block office of fellow Liberal MP Dominic LeBlanc, tieless and with the top buttons of his shirt undone, he knows he is in for the fight of his life.



Michael Harris is a writer, journalist, and documentary filmmaker. He was awarded a Doctor of Laws for his "unceasing pursuit of justice for the less fortunate among us." His eight books include *Justice Denied*, *Unholy Orders*, *Rare ambition*, *Lament for an Ocean*, and *Con Game*. His work has sparked four commissions of inquiry, and three of his books have been made into movies. He is currently working on a book about the Harper majority government

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The party his father electrified in 1967 is looking for a new leader and once again a Trudeau is in the hunt. It is a different Trudeau and different times, but the road to power is the same: before he gets a chance in the main event against Stephen Harper, he must vanquish all comers in a Liberal party trying to pick itself up off the canvas after recent electoral drubbings.

Working in his favour is star power. Working against him is the fear that once again the Liberals are substituting a new image for substantive reinvention. He will face questions on everything from his liberalism, to his grasp of policy and his often spontaneous pronouncements. There may even be a Manchurian candidate thrown in for good measure.

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"I know we will have a vigorous leadership race. There are strong, credible contenders who deeply believe in public service. No one is guaranteed victory. I am in training for this just as I was for the match with Patrick."

to be published in the autumn of 2014 by Penguin Canada.

The training regime is simple: he's not reading the pundits ("self-perpetuating whirlwinds"), and he's not spending the same amount of time on social media, where he has been so active in the past. The name of the game these days is meeting people face-to-face — pressing the flesh, adjusting the message and assessing the magnetic pull after each outing.

For that reason, Trudeau is a solid target for the next six months for a press that will be dogging his tracks, including that adjunct of the PMO known as Sun Media run by the prime minister's former communications director. The way the mainstream media used to troll for Reformers in the day of Preston Manning, the Sun group will be lifting rocks on all of Trudeau's political sins. Less effort continues to be expended on sussing out the government's peccadilloes.

For Trudeau, there have been bumps in the road already and, as the French say, the odd stumble over flowers in the carpet.

The candidate's endorsement of the Nexen deal drew gasps in certain Liberal party circles where the deal is seen as reinforcing Canada's image as a resource colony.

His critical comments about Albertans — which "resurfaced" during a recent by-election in Calgary Centre the Liberals had a chance to win — exacted an apology and a clarification.

And after five straight, solid performances in media availabilities last week, there was the awkward stumble on the now-defunct federal gun registry, when Trudeau was mocked for voting for a piece of legislation he now describes as a failed policy.

In a media world where nuances are munched like peanuts, his explanation only made things worse. Embarrassing flip-flop and all, he still brought flowers to the National Day of Remembrance in Montreal — an occasion the government of Quebec marked by announcing that province's own long-gun registry.

There is also the fact that Trudeau said initially he would not seek the leadership because he wanted to spend time with his young children and wife Sophie.

"My answer the first time was the kids. You know why I changed my mind? The kids. What kind of country would they get?"

"My wife still has moments of doubt and worry. It would be selfish not to fight for what you believe about Canada. When you've been given a lot, a lot is expected from you."

The one thing Trudeau doesn't do — unlike the prime minister — is deny that mistakes have been made and, to some extent, he is practicing the piano in public.



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"Have I misspoken, have I made mistakes, am I learning? Yes. I don't pretend to be perfect. But I think authenticity is more important.



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"I know my core values. Those oak, core values are what sustain me. I know some people are gunning for me, and layered on that, the political opposition is trying to test me, to knock me down."



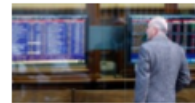
Ottawa to prepare 'alien invader' plan

It could be the understatement of the year. Trudeau's run for the leadership has jumped the first volts of life through what has been a moribund party since the debacle of Michael Ignatieff's short and unhappy tenure dropped the Liberals to third-party status. As visible as his stumbles have been, his strength is just as obvious.



Quebec election-night shooter contacts media

Despite the pundits, the trolls and the political hit men, Trudeau has given the Liberals a 5.5 bump in the polls in two successive polling months. No one knows if it will last, grow, or diminish. But Justin Trudeau is now on the FMO radar as a clear and present danger. The Conservatives have ATIPS out covering every public statement Trudeau has uttered in ten years. Harper's grim reapers are coming again. Their scythes still bear the genetic material of Stephane Dion and Michael Ignatieff.



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The Conservatives also have announced plans to drag Trudeau before a parliamentary committee along with fellow Liberal MP David McGuinty. Both men will be asked to explain themselves over their controversial comments about Albertans.

"I'm not afraid of going before the committee. I'm delighted. It's just another example of how the Harper government disrespects the parliamentary institution of committees. Everything to them is to be used for partisan purposes. They are giving me a stage."

Meanwhile, Trudeau is building his ramparts and girding for battle.

"What I try to do is surround myself with extraordinary people I trust, people who can help me learn and people who can pick me up and get me going again when I fall."

Falling and getting up started early. The first time someone picked him up when he fell was back in December 1973. He was tobogganing with his famous father at Harrington Lake. The toboggan overshot a second knoll and Justin ended up at the river's edge: "Fall down river," he cried. "Mitts in water." He could hear the bounding strides behind him coming to the rescue.

The "oak core values" he talks about as his defence against personal attacks are founded on a father and mother who lived extraordinary and tumultuous lives in a very different Canada.

"You know, if my house was burning down, and my wife and kids were safe, the thing I would have under my arm running out of the flames would be a charcoal drawing done by the artist who did my father's portrait (Myfanwy Pavelic). She crumbled a piece of charcoal in her hand and said there was one more thing she wanted to create. It was a drawing of the back of my father's head cradling my head."

Looking down the road to bigger potential rumbles, Trudeau is surprisingly measured in his assessment of both the current prime

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minister and the leader of the opposition, neither of whom he has gotten to know personally.

"I've never told anyone this, but there was a time in Montreal where we were trying to get our four post-secondary institutions involved in setting up an international institute for the environment. There was a lot of American money interested in coming up to Canada in those days because of the anti-environmental atmosphere in the United States. But the proposal was not backed by Thomas Mulcair who was Quebec's environment minister at the time. It never happened."

As for Prime Minister Harper, Justin Trudeau's main complaint is that he governs without offering Canadians any explanation beyond sound-bites and doesn't seem to understand the institutions over which he "temporarily" has control. For Trudeau, there is no secret Harper agenda beyond this: a high-handed, undemocratic instinct to govern without accountability.

"Our democracy is in trouble. I trust the people to change that. I trust the people to restore the idea that Canada is a better place than it is now. I trust the people to decide if I'm right for this job.

"I would like to see people vote for something rather than against something. I would also like to improve our idea of citizenship — not just obeying the laws and paying taxes, but Canadians getting involved and being the agents of change. I love the country and I trust Canadians to believe in themselves again."

It is a long way to the Rubicon election of 2015, and no one knows whether the country will choose the furtive corporate management of Stephen Harper or Trudeau's sense that Canadians want to get back something magical that has been lost. But not many would disagree about who the underdog would be, should these two men ever meet in the political ring.

Not only does the Harper government have the magic wand of incumbency, it has the ruthless machinery to destroy its opponents. The political roadkill is everywhere. And the coming assault on Trudeau hangs in the air like an unspent thunderstorm ready to burst.

"When I fought Brazeau, he hit me so hard in the first round that he made my knees wobble. I couldn't believe it, I had never experienced that feeling before. So I punched back, I hit back harder. At first, the punches didn't land, then they did. I powered-through mentally.

"So far, I've never been hit hard in politics, but I know hard shots are coming. I will power through."

Everyone knows Justin Trudeau can take a punch. Rabbit punches are another matter — and low blows involve a whole new level of pain.

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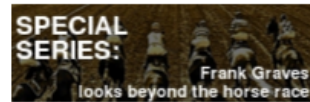
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