

## Cover Story

# Magic moment

Jolene Campbell on Alex Salmond's return

**W**AS it the acoustics in Dynamic Earth, or was there a resounding optimism in the SNP when the results of the leadership ballot were announced? To borrow a phrase from the big screen, it was "the sound of inevitability".

Alex Salmond romped into first place in the leadership contest after joining up at the last minute. As expected, his return to the top was conducted with the same headline-grabbing style with which he left it in 2000. It was a decisive victory, as he trounced the other candidates taking over three-quarters of the vote.

Close aides have said Salmond's decision to stand was a result of pressure from party members to stand, while others believe he only entered the race because he believed Sturgeon could not win unless she could come in on a joint ticket. In the end, she took over half the vote to secure the bid for deputy.

With the battle for the leadership now won, Salmond and Sturgeon are undeterred by critics within the party who say

that there can't be strong leadership from Westminster. In the run-up to the election, deputy leadership candidate Christine Grahame said, "What are they going to do, set up a party hotline to the leader?"

But on the day, teeth were gritted and disagreements were put to one side, as all members expressed the belief that new leadership could fire up the changes for the better, and restore unity to the party. Salmond pointed to the task ahead, reminding the assembled press that something had gone amiss with the current leadership, because 73 per cent of the population would vote SNP under the right circumstances.

"Nicola and I intend to win the 2007 election in Scotland and we will do that by offering a vision to the people where currently there is a vacuum. We can offer a Government with purpose and direction, and a new vision of social democracy. This vote is the springboard to reinvigorate the independence campaign."

The new SNP leader has Jack McConnell's job in his sights, although he will leave the head-on challenges to Sturgeon. She is ready for her adversary.

"I'm delighted Alex has been elected to lead the SNP. I believe he will now lead us to victory in 2007. Between now and then I will take on Mr McConnell in the Scottish Parliament and win. The real battle for the future commences now, and we can move beyond the disappointment of devolution and the mind numbing mediocrity of Labour. I belong to a party that will never sell its soul to power, and I look better in a skirt."

Perhaps party members were inspired by the possibilities of strong leadership from Salmond, who has proved time and again that he is not afraid to speak his mind. Perhaps it was the social democratic policies of the Salmond-Sturgeon manifesto, including the flagship policy to abolish student loans. But in the end, Salmond's promise to deliver "wizardry" to the party was what finally swung the vote in his favour.

Colleagues are upbeat about the team, and have rediscovered their optimism. Banff and Buchan MSP Stewart Stevenson, who backed Salmond, said he anticipated significant development for the party.

"John Swinney has laid the foundations over the last four years. He had the grave misfortune to preside over the party at a time of electoral difficulty. Alex has the ability, energy and motivation to take the party forward. He is indefatigable. And Nicola is a formidable opponent for the lacklustre McConnell."

In a bid to bridge the gap between the public and politicians, Salmond has pledged to allow the Scottish public to choose one topic each week for parliamentary debates. And if you can't see Salmond in the chamber, perhaps he's just making use of the wizard's indispensable tool - his invisibility cloak. ■

Jolene Campbell is a freelance journalist based in Edinburgh

**CAN SCOTLAND  
BE A WORLD  
LEADER IN  
SCIENCE?**



**Investing in medicines for a healthier Scotland**

You are invited to join an open discussion to be hosted by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) Scotland

**Thursday 23 September 2004**

At the Castle Room, The Palace Hotel,  
Ness Walk, Inverness  
5.30pm - 6.30pm

**SPEAKERS:**

Alasdair Morgan MSP, Convener of the Enterprise and Culture Committee  
Jim Eadie, Director, ABPI Scotland

**BUFFET AND REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED**