

OPINION

Little future seen for Ross Perot



Oh Ross, why did you come back? Things are vastly different this time around. Call the campaign "Perot: The Sequel." And like most sequels, there is a high chance of it being a total flop.

When he slipped out the presidential back door in July, it caught many — mostly campaign supporters — by surprise. After pledging to run if his groupies got him on all 50 state ballots, Perot decided he didn't want to be president bad enough.

Must have been all those nasty questions the media was asking.

Badd media. You should know better.

Well, three months later, Perot is on every ballot. His entourage remains (somewhat) faithful, and he's thrown his 10-gallon hat back into the ring.

Question is, why? Or better yet, how has this Tolkein-character-gone-haywire captured the American public's adulation?

Why he's running is simple enough to answer. Most presidential types who put themselves up for public slaughter do it for one, or a combination of three reasons:

- They think they can win.
- They have a point to make.
- They have really, really big egos.

On the first, Perot is a non-starter. The colloquial term is "snowball's chance." Back before his July bow-out, maybe he could have wheedled his way into the White House. Now, his credibility shot all to hell, Perot's popularity is running in the single digits.



No, Ross is back in for the latter two reasons. He relishes the spoiler roll, though he denies it. He wants to tweak the noses of Bush and Clinton. And — I'll be gracious here — he wants to air his controversial views, because he truly believes in them.

As for his ego — none come much bigger. He plays his ever-shrinking constituents on a string, confident they will stick with him no matter what he does.

The scary part is that he's right.

What is it about Ross that appeals to the American public? It isn't his frightening ideas for deficit control, his wiggled-out plan for fighting the drug war or any of his other amorphous campaign planks.

No. Most of his support comes from the fact he's not a "politician," which in these days of anti-incumbency backlash is good for some percentage points, even if you are an egomaniac who's idea of employee supervision would make Lon Mabon blanch.

And to give credit where it's deserved, Perot has also successfully tapped the quirky American political legacy that loves a rogue.

By being the iconoclast, the outsider, the very image of the knight slaying bloated political dragons, Perot has once again reaffirmed that Americans root

for the underdog.

No matter how strange his ideas, Perot attracts supporters because he's different, an odd-ball out of the status quo. His biggest political advantage is that he's not Bush or Clinton.

In a land, as Bill Murray said in *Stripes*, where your ancestors were kicked out of every decent country in the world, being different wins votes.

Here's a prediction: Perot will run a campaign of a kind never seen before. He'll be included in the television debates because to shun him would only add to his outsider image. He'll probably even land a few pre-planned debate zingers on the two favorites.

Throughout the campaign, Bush and Clinton will treat him like a mosquito; annoying, but one who'll suck a little of your blood if you let him get too close. Perot's popularity will continue to hover around 10 percent.

Come Nov. 3, Perot will lose. Badly. In the post-election interviews he'll crow about "making a point," or "showing the two parties they can't ignore the American public."

And then he'll slink back to Texas, never to be a political factor again.

Don Peters is freelance editor of the Emerald.

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