



## Political Notebook by George Pascoe-Watson

Nick Clegg may have won the battle - but the LibDem leader has a long war ahead of him.

His triumph in Britain's first ever TV debate may be short-lived as the media turn the spotlight of scrutiny on him like never before.

Expectations are now building on his shoulders and without careful management; they may be too great for him to bear next time around.

The TV debate was the first time a large number of the nine million viewers have ever really been exposed to Mr Clegg.

His assured performance was better than many had predicted. But it doesn't mean he's going to form the next government.

Next week's round two - hosted by Adam Boulton on Sky News - will be on foreign affairs, traditionally the LibDems' weaker ground.

Here there are questions to be answered and I'm told David Cameron and Gordon Brown are gearing up to expose them.

Does the nation really want a leader who would scrap Britain's nuclear deterrent with North Korea and Iran hell bent on equipping themselves with weapons of mass destruction?

Eurosceptic Britain is highly unlikely to warm to a political party which believes in scrapping the pound and an ever-closer union with Brussels.

All eyes will be on Sunday's opinion polls. Expect a flurry of surveys which will give us the first real snapshot of how the parties' support is bearing up.

Some expect the LibDems to be gaining at the expense of the minority parties.

If Mr Clegg's vote surges, will it be at the expense of Labour in the north or the Conservatives in the south?

Mr Cameron must win 24 seats from the LibDems to form a government, so it's not in his interests to attack them aggressively.

Tory HQ will operate a twin track strategy ensuring Mr Cameron keeps reassuring floating voters in the middle classes who must be tempted to back the blues on Polling Day.

Of course, diehard right-wingers who've never agreed with the Cameron strategy are now agitating for an all-out war on the LibDems.

They say the TV debate was proof if any was needed their warnings were correct all along and Mr Clegg must be neutralized.



Strategists are keen to start briefing the newspapers about LibDem policies and to frighten middle class voters away from Mr Clegg's clutches.

One thing appears to be clear from all the commentators and polls - that Gordon Brown's grip on power after last night's showing is less certain than when he went into the TV studios.

He actually performed ok and didn't drop the ball at any time.

But he failed to land a glove on Mr Cameron.

And his repeated and failed attempts to cosy up to Mr Clegg "I agree with Nick..." were so absurd they've now become a soundbite.

You can even buy a t-shirt with the phrase emblazoned on it.

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