

**BE A STOCK STAR!** You could win your share of **\$150,000** in cash and prizes **Register Now!**[Home](#) / [Opinion](#)

## Debate night in Canada

L. Ian Macdonald, National Post

Published: Friday, October 03, 2008

MONTREAL -Leaders' debates are usually framed with boxing metaphors, from knockouts to no decisions. But Wednesday night's French debate was more like a hockey game, with five players on the ice, four of them shooting on the goalie, Stephen Harper. He stopped most of their shots, but they all scored a point or two against him.

As predicted, Stephane Dion won just by showing up and exceeding expectations. Gilles Duceppe, true to his experienced debating form, had several good shifts on the ice and tangled with Harper in his crease. Jack Layton looked good on the ice, but he was playing out of position, insisting voters think of him as a prime minister. Elizabeth May won just by being at the game and by being better than expected in French.

Harper? He was just goaling, and he looked cool to the point of being disengaged, rather like Carey Price of the Habs on a bit of an off night. The Conservatives wanted Harper to project a calm demeanour, a prime ministerial air. "He was perfectly Zen," wrote Lysiane Gagnon in her widely read La Presse column yesterday, adding that Harper was "calm, reassuring, pleasant, above the fray. In short, he looked like a prime minister."

But as La Presse also reported in its main headline that there was "Heavy fire against Harper." Duceppe pounced on Harper's cultural cuts and kid-crime package, the first as undermining "the soul of Quebec," and the other as setting up a "university of crime" for young offenders who would be housed with adults.

Only two weeks ago, Duceppe had the air of a dispirited leader of a tired franchise, one that had lost its raison d'etre. Then Harper and the Conservatives gave it back to them, Harper with

his careless comment about "rich galas" on the same day as a free concert protesting cuts to cultural funding, and the Conservatives for not seeing that their crime package, a big hit in the rest of Canada, would play badly in Quebec

Piling on, Conservatives unveiled a mobile billboard outside Bloc headquarters in Duceppe's own riding, with the message that Quebecers had wasted hundreds of millions of dollars by electing Bloc members since 1990, with Michael Fortier from the unelected Senate as the messenger. How stupid was that?

### Related Topics

[Canadian Politics](#)[Politics](#)[Carey Price](#)[Elizabeth May](#)powered by 

### Story Tools

[Change font size](#)[Print this story](#)[E-Mail this story](#)

### Share This Story

[Facebook](#)[Digg](#)[Stumble Upon](#)[More](#)

Story tools presented by



It's for these reasons that the Tory trend line has turned south in the last two weeks, and that Duceppe was downright cocky on Wednesday night, reminding Harper that the Bloc had received a majority of Quebec seats in every election since 1993, and boldly predicting it would do so again on Oct. 14.

It's not just trash talk. The Bloc has rebounded to around 40% in most of the daily Quebec tracking polls (actually 42% in yesterday's Nanos poll) while the Conservatives have fallen off to the mid-20s. That would produce a Groundhog Day result, the same as 2006, with the Bloc winning at least 50 seats, most of them in the big battleground with the Conservatives off the island of Montreal.

Harper caught a big break on the morning of the French debate, when a CROP poll saw the Conservatives at 30%, only one point behind the Bloc, with the Liberals trailing badly at 16%, tied with the NDP. That would indicate a much more competitive race, and CROP has an enviable track record. But its poll of 1,000 Quebecers was taken over 10 nights ending on Sunday, and five of them were before the Conservatives got hit by the culture-crime combo.

Even so, Harper had one clear moment where he scored on Duceppe, a clean 30-second hit where he referred to the 2006 Quebecois nation resolution, which Duceppe opposed for two days in the House before finally coming around. As Harper relived the moment, Duceppe's discomfort was evident. His comeback was a lame line about getting the wrong wording from Harper's office, process stuff nobody cares about when such an important symbolic gesture was in the offing.

In sum, a tie game which Harper may have won by not losing. - L. Ian MacDonald is editor of Policy Options magazine.

[Get the National Post newspaper delivered to your home](#)

#### More From National Post

[The Liberals' unholy trinity in Quebec](#)

National Post - Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2008

[Taking a page from the popular Internet Movie Database, the National Post presents a Canadian Federal Political Leader Database](#)

National Post - Monday, Sept. 8, 2008

[Only Harper, Duceppe mattered](#)

National Post - Thursday, Oct. 2, 2008

[Protesting artists compare PM to Hitler](#)

National Post - Thursday, Aug. 28, 2008

[Nasty showdown between two undesirable leaders](#)

National Post - Saturday, Aug. 23, 2008

#### More From the Web

[Conservatives face defeat over economy: polls](#)

Yahoo! News - Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

[Taxpayers' group says Tory platform is 'cautious'](#)

CTV, Canada - Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

[Quote For The Day](#)

Globe and Mail, Canada - Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

[Is vote-splitting the way to go?](#)

P2Pnet - Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

[Smoked meat recalled in Que., Maritimes, and ...](#)

Victoria Times-Colonist - Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

[Economic turmoil could pull gas prices down](#)

The Telegram - Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

['Goose egg' not essential for ABC success: Williams](#)

CBC News, Canada - Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

[School won't drop Apple-like apple logo](#)

P2Pnet - Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2008

[Photo of the Day: What's in a Name? Stephen vs. Stephane](#)

TreeHugger - Saturday, Oct. 4, 2008



#### Ads by Google

**Harper lost the TV debate**  
He has no platform, and no plans,

**Harper's Extreme Makeover**  
Dress him up. See if he still puts

**Stephen Harper Yes or No?**  
1 Minute Poll