

# Jagmeet Singh has celebrity style, but does he have leadership substance?

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It's appropriate that Jagmeet Singh represents parts of both Mississauga and Brampton at Queen's Park.

He's always been a man with a foot in multiple camps.

When he came by The News one 2011 weekend after winning the Bramalea-Gore-Malton seat, he arrived in a bright red BMW M-coupe.

A stylish dresser whose turbans and Canadian-tailored suits display a crisp, colourful panache, Singh proved his green credentials by opening his trunk to reveal a fold-up bike that he jumps on whenever he gets the chance.

The story is full of cozy details, from his vegetarianism to his wrestling prowess in high school, his lack of time for dating, his enjoyment of Christmas despite his Sikh heritage ("any excuse to celebrate"), to his eventual desire for a little bungalow in a older neighbourhood with "lots of old trees, so I can hear the sounds of leaves crunching under my feet."

The man is a walking feature story with angles shooting off in all directions - the trilingual son of well-to-do Punjabi parents of an arranged marriage, a doctor and a teacher, who decided to have their family of four in Canada.

He attended an American private school before getting a law degree here. The prototypical rich boy with a school conscience became a criminal defence lawyer and community activist before politics.

Federal NDP leader Jack Layton called him "an incredible candidate" in announcing his nomination. His diverse resumé dripped Cabinet.

Maybe Layton instantly recognized a fellow charismatic.

It was Layton's vote-splitting magne-

tism that gave Stephen Harper a majority and a Tory sweep of Peel in that campaign. Singh barely lost to Bal Gosal, while relegating six-term Liberal Gurbax Singh Malhi to third. The NDP had never before topped 15 per cent in the riding.

The torch of "ethnic politics" had passed from its ESL roots to the Instagram GQ generation.

Now Singh wants Layton's old job.

The NDP, both provincially and federally, has been in identity crisis for some time, unable to reconcile its J.S. Woodsworth, M.J. Coldwell, T.C. Douglas social justice/ workers' party roots with its desire to win. It has abandoned principle at its peril. Letting Kathleen Wynne and Justin Trudeau outflank its left has proven disastrous.

Despite his red carpet resumé, we don't really know a lot about Jagmeet Singh's core political credo.

The Ontario deputy leader opposed police street checks, which he's experienced, and championed regulation to protect temporary and part-time workers.

Ottawa doesn't need another guy leading the league in press clippings and pre-game interviews who has no clue once he steps to the plate. "Potential" just means you haven't done anything yet.

However, there are good omens that Singh is the next-gen leader his party and country crave.

He makes a habit of firsts. First Peel NDP MPP, first turbaned MPP, and, perhaps, first federal leader of colour.

While he works at a blood sport full-time, he enjoys mixed martial arts on his own.

There once was a two-time Manitoba lightweight boxing champion who went on to pioneer a few uphill political battles.

His name was Tommy Douglas.



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