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Why Are We Still Talking About Sarah?

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I have to admit, I really thought this would all be over by now.

But there was Sarah Palin, influencing primary races. And this weekend, there she was again, the very special guest at Glenn Beck's revival, exhorting 90,000 angry white folks to honor the troops and take back the country.

Are we seeing the early waves of support for an authentic presidential possibility, with the right stuff to lead us out of the swamp? Even those most faithful to the warrior queen of the angry would be hard pressed to articulate policy positions that go much beyond: big government and snotty elitists -- bad; freedom and momma grizzlies -- good.

Is the attraction the fact that she is the closest thing the Republicans have to a rock star -- a lip-glossed alternative to the starchy white guys that have been the face of the party's candidacies? No doubt, Sarah Palin is fun. She is a reality show on a tour bus. She is a looker who can field-dress a moose, with enough family issues to fill a season; including -- and was there ever really any doubt about this -- a daughter who has just signed on to *Dancing With the Stars*.

There is some serious celebrity momentum going on here. Like Paris Hilton and the Kardashians before her, the Sarah Palin of bumper-sticker positions unintelligibly delivered has become famous for being famous. You might not know the policies. You might be a tad fuzzy on the legislative track record. But the brand identity of the high heels, glasses and swept up hairdo is as indelible as a bright red can of Coca-Cola.

And yet ...

Those like me who saw her as a future footnote, slated to fade like last year's *American Idol*, have to admit that even in a time and culture of drive-by celebrity, her brand has legs. She continues to be the spokes model for a swath of the population that isn't very happy about much of anything. As such, her approval isn't an endorsement in the political sense of policy and record. It's a personal warranty that this is one we can safely let into our club.

The dissection of the primaries has only begun. But a quick review shows that three candidates who earned her blessing won. While her true impact is already being debated (she also backed a number of losers) there is no doubt that she rides into a candidate's camp pulling a wagon load of media and money -- not to mention the opportunity to assure the conservative base: "Sarah likes me!"

What happens when the intramurals are behind us and her clout is tested in November? Will being the hottest thing at the Tea Party mean as much to the general electorate? Given searing voter anger; maybe yes. Given the news cycle's half-life of celebrity value; maybe no. But one thing is certain: she'll be there. And we'll be watching.