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KEVIN RUDD'S RETURN

86

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Expert's verdict: What Rudd is really saying



"The faux pout. You see this a lot in him. It's like he's perfected the gesture that he's been hurt."



"Let's all sing from my song sheet. I'm the man conducting the orchestra."



"He's going to bring people together. There's a lot of emotion here. He's obviously gone through so much to get back here."



"It's almost like, 'Let me bless you'. He's having so much fun. He's suffered from 'limelight deprivation' but it's over now."



"The Circus Master is back and he's controlling the rings. He likes to really show that he gets to choose who asks the question."



"The palms are up, he's showing you that 'I can handle anything, just give me a go'. The pursed lips are his way of saying, 'I'm holding back saying how I good I am.'"

Pictures: Gary Ramage

Body language speaks volumes

JOHN LEHMANN DISCOVERS HOW TO INTERPRET WHAT RUDD IS SAYING AND IF A LEOPARD CAN CHANGE SPOTS



Kevin Rudd wants us to believe again that he's just a nice bloke from Queensland who's here to help. The comeback prime minister was at pains yesterday, in his first major media conference, to convince his sceptical colleagues that the micro-managing, highly strung, ego-maniac of the

past has been buried. "I'm just a reasonable guy," he said at one point.

Looking at his watch as he arrived on time, the usually unpunctual Rudd bounced quickly into a mea culpa, promising he'd learnt the importance of "proper orderly consultation".

"Frankly, decision making is much better when it can be

made collegiately," he said, explaining that he had been trying to "stop banks falling down" in the bad old days.

Only the pressure-cooker demands of the days ahead will determine whether leopards really can change their spots but long-time Rudd observer Michael Kelly wasn't convinced yesterday.

Kelly, a Sydney-based body

language and speech expert, said Rudd's "utterly unshakeable belief in his own self" was on show again.

"He was a pig in mud," Kelly said. "You can see he has suffered from limelight-deprivation syndrome."

The nerdy gestures and folksy language were back on centre stage, reminding us that the Cult of Kevin has ultimately prevailed — as if it was ever in doubt.

"Look at his gestures and you can see the puppet master is back," said Kelly, who has studied and written about Rudd since his arrival as a shiny new Labor leader in late 2006. "To me, he seems fake — but to most busy people, who just see him for a TV grab here or there, he's very credible. They don't see the superficiality of it."

"He comes across as a statesman, and that's a problem for Tony Abbott because he doesn't — he's the boxer, chin out."

Well-connected Labor communications guru Adam Kilgour, a trusted adviser of former Victorian premier Steve Bracks, said Rudd would move quickly to exploit this advantage over Abbott by jumping on the regional stage, most likely with the mooted trip to Indonesia next week.

Kilgour, now the managing director of public affairs group Diplomacy, also suggested Rudd would use his "presidential authority" to differentiate himself from Abbott on "the austerity route".

"Rudd can show that he's not going to cut spending as deeply as the Liberals and this

will create an important point of difference," he said.

While Rudd is trying to project a business-friendly image, Kilgour said Rudd should also position himself as the friend of "the tradies".

"Rudd won the Howard battles in 2007 and Labor lost them in 2010. He needs to come up with some good incentives — possibly introduce a small business tax write-off for new vehicles, similar to the policy after the GFC. Those Hilux utes are now coming up to being five years old — such a policy would also support the car industry."

But the newly polished Rudd shouldn't remind voters of his earlier mistakes by talking too much about learning from the past.

"Actions speak louder than words," Kilgour said.