

the press conference with NOEL EDMONDS

Noel Edmonds and I last met in November 1986 when hod carrier Mike Lush tragically died while rehearsing a bungy jump for the *Late, Late Breakfast Show*. I was on my third or fourth shift for *The Sun* and was sent to doorstep “Mr TV” along with the rest of the pack. Through sheer journalistic brilliance, I got the only interview and it was the scoop of the day. (Well, I arrived late and bumped into him in his local restaurant. We reached an agreement.)

So, we are together again 20 years on and, disturbingly, Noel doesn’t look much different. He’s 57 now, but still has the slim figure, that bouffant of highlights and the sand-paper deep, geometrically clipped goatee. (These days that’s dyed, too, he happily admits.)

Although Noel looks the same, a lot has happened during those decades. His career went, then came back with *House Party*, then it went again. His 18-year marriage to Helen also went, as did the Devon estate. Thanks to the press, Noel’s life has appeared to have been in more awkward positions than a work-out given by a cross-dressing Pilates instructor.

But now Noel is back. His personal life has straightened out and he’s enjoying a relationship with a French woman he met while buying a house in the South of France. He is close to his four daughters — aged seven to 23 — and things are cordial with his ex. Work-wise, he has a runaway hit with *Deal Or No Deal*, which has put him back in the heaving bosom of Luvviedom. Even the press are — generally — loving him now. Hell, if you believe his concierge-style Cosmic Ordering service, Noel’s even got the bloody Universe onside.

Noel, it’s great that everything has worked out, but far be it for me to concentrate on all the positive stuff! Let’s go back to when it started to go wrong with you and the press. When and why?

Well, in the late ’90s, there was an inevitability that elements of the media wanted to cut me down. I mean, I had everything — the big country estate, the beautiful wife, lovely kids, and I am flying around in a helicopter. But it was the moment I saw a photograph of Alan Yentob and I, when I was dubbed the £10 million man — the highest paid person in TV — that I knew I was a marked man. Boy-oh-boy, was I asking for it with both barrels and I got it. I knew I was in for a battering, and it came quite quickly.

Garry Bushell [then TV critic on *The Sun*] almost



immediately turned on the show and started writing the most ridiculous, hurtful things. We had “Gotcha’d” him and he was not very happy about that. Also, when *House Party* was eventually axed [in 1999] it was clumsily handled by the BBC and I was very much left to the crocodiles. The show had simply come to the end of its run and I probably had. I was bloody tired.

I don’t want to come across as a whinger because there is no bitterness — not towards the BBC nor the press. I accept that if you attempt to stay in the public eye for as long as I did, it goes like that. I’d had a bloody good run — three decades with hit shows — so it was inevitable things would go wrong. If you stick your head up that far, you will cop a bullet.

You seemed to ignore some of the more sensational press in years gone by, but then came out fighting last year against *The People*, *Mail on Sunday* and *Daily Mail*. What changed?

“I don’t have to accept a malicious campaign. If you are going to write lies, I’ll use the law to do something about it”

Portrait
Phil Adams

I sued *The People*, who said I’d gone off to become a hermit. How pathetic was that? A double-page spread with my home in France — a picture of a pool where “lonely Noel has only one sun lounger”, the bedroom where “lonely Noel sleeps alone”. All total lies — and someone else’s house! They settled that one very quickly.

Then *The Mail on Sunday* said I had stolen somebody’s wife. I hadn’t. It was awful, to open this newspaper and be accused of doing that. It was factually inaccurate and so easy to prove that they caved in. Of course, they had to — I was going to take it all the way. When I read it, I felt absolutely dead inside. I was at Heathrow and I opened the paper and bang — double-page spread. *What!* And you see other people around you reading this stuff. I wanted to take hold of the public address system on the aircraft and explain that none of this is true.

There was a time when I thought it all came with the territory, but we live in a very different world now. This celebrity culture has been created. I left



by Rob McGibbon

NOEL'S NEWS SCHEDULE

Newspapers

I get *The Times* and *The Telegraph* each morning wherever I am. The *Mail*, *Express*, *Sun* and *Mirror* are in the dressing room at the studio and I flick through to keep up to speed. I get *The Guardian* on Mondays for the media section. They are spot on. I speed read more than anything and find the odd article I latch onto. I tend to read about the countryside and I am very interested in the energy debate.

On Sundays, I get *The Times* and the *Telegraph* and all the "Smutties", as I call them. I can remember sitting in bed on a Sunday morning and Helen was buried under the duvet. She was aware I had picked up one of the Smutties and had not turned the pages that much. "Is there much to read?" she asked. "Not half!" It was all about Frank Bough in a cocaine-fuelled orgy. It was such a shock to everybody, and from then on you had to read them because you never know who you are going to meet. I spared myself reading one of the worst stories about my marriage. Bits were read over the phone and that was enough.

Magazines

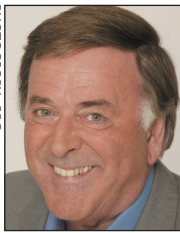
I am not a big book reader, but I am the Magazine King, me. I am the one at the airport with the biggest WHSmith bag full of different magazines. Certain ones I get on subscription. *The Week* is very clever and a really entertaining, quick read. I will lie in the

bath on a Saturday morning and read it in half an hour. I don't dabble in stocks and shares, but I find finance interesting and *Money Week* is fantastic. I also love cars [Noel recently sold his Aston Martin DB9 for a Range Rover Sport] and get *Auto Sport*, *Car Magazine* and *Top Gear*, all on subscription.

Television

While filming, I am back at the hotel by 11pm and I am so tired, I just go to bed. There's not a lot to watch on the telly these days. I have the Sky package in France and generally leave it with Sky News on, but I adore the fact that I can sit on the terrace and listen to Capital Radio's traffic reports about jams on the M25!

PHOTOGRAPH: BBC



Radio

Classic FM, I love, and have that running most of the time in the car or the house. I listen to Wogan in the morning — he is a genius.

Web

I don't really use the web much. I might use it to search for garden furniture, and I sold a car on eBay last year — my old 1988 Bentley. It was an MoT failure and needed 10 grand's worth of work. The bloke knew that, but still paid me a fortune — £6,000, I think. I'd never used eBay before, but it was great. I also have a website: www.noeledmonds.tv — which is currently being re-done.

the BBC as an entertainment presenter, but I am a "celebrity" now, which seems to be a signal to certain editors that you are fair game for anything. They don't seem to realise the responsibility they have, bearing in mind that the internet, and so many TV channels and radio feed off what they see in newspapers. One story is picked up everywhere and presented as fact. I have realised that everything about the media has changed and it can be hugely damaging to one's reputation, one's commercial position and, most importantly, to relationships with people you love if a newspaper prints something that is a complete and absolute lie.

There certainly seems to be a situation with you and the *Daily Mail*...

Yes and I am suing the *Mail* because they have been going for me for ages. If Paul Dacre is found floating in the Thames, I am the No.1 suspect! The *Mail* has attacked me through Alison Bowyer [a freelance journalist and author] who wrote an unauthorised biography about me [in 1999] which, looking back, I should have definitely taken action against. Instead, Virgin [Books], when I pointed out to them how inaccurate it was, decided not to print any more. She has just regurgitated some of the total lies that were in that book and the *Mail* ran that last year.

I have now got an action out against them for trying to say I am difficult to work with — which I am not; that we have tensions behind the scenes — which we haven't; that I had signed a new £3m

contract — I haven't; and that all I want to do is go back to the BBC — which I don't. All this came under the headline "Revenge Of Mr Blobby". Imagine how the bosses at Channel 4 feel — are they going to re-sign somebody who is apparently only using this show as a stepping-stone to the Beeb? There is the point at which you have to say, Enough. These things are very damaging.

I don't know why the *Mail* has to be so incredibly negative about everything. The lies and distortions that they were writing about me — *ugh!* It latches on to someone and clearly you are in the column marked "Target" and "Negative". It makes you want to stand on top of a mountain and shout out the truth.

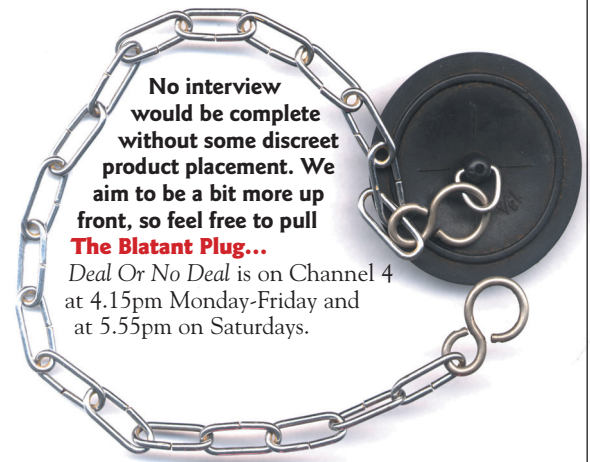
Why do think this has happened, why have they got it in for you?

I don't know what I did to give Dacre the right to clearly commission articles that set out to be destructive and malicious. As a very successful editor, I am troubled by his lack of respect for the truth. What makes me so angry is that it is so easy to verify facts. Paul Dacre — if you hate me this much, why the hell won't you at least treat me with respect and contact me to find out my side of things and possibly discover the truth. The only conclusion one can come to is that it stops a good story, because the truth is not as exciting as what he wishes to falsify and create.

I have never met him, but I wouldn't have a problem with that. I'd have a lunch with him. I would like to look him in the eye and find out if he realises the ramifications of the articles he runs and the pain he causes people, possibly for the rest of their lives. I would also be quite interested to hear his view as to why Noel Edmonds is a legitimate target. Mr Dacre, give me one good reason why, simply because I make telly programmes, that allows you to be that nasty.

I actually think they have picked the wrong target because, arguably, I currently have the most successful popular TV show and millions of people are not prepared to accept the *Mail*'s view of me. I wish the *Mail* had the courage to set the record straight, but they won't. They have offered me an interview, but no, I am bloody well going to sue them. It really is: See you in court. They have a number of days to retract and they are going to pay some serious damages.

Surely, being in showbiz is all about give and take with publicity. You've had decades of glowing puffs, so shouldn't you swallow



No interview would be complete without some discreet product placement. We aim to be a bit more up front, so feel free to pull The Blatant Plug...

Deal Or No Deal is on Channel 4 at 4.15pm Monday-Friday and at 5.55pm on Saturdays.

some bile and move on? The rest of the press are certainly on your side these days.

Yeah, absolutely. It goes both ways and I am very happy to play the game. The media have been great, fantastic, since I've been back. And I appreciate that. I like to think I have always played the game well. If you are newsworthy, newspapers want something and you need the oxygen of publicity. Sometimes the bad gas comes in and you live with that. If you expose yourself to people, you have got to accept they will come with an opinion, but when it comes to pure lies, nobody deserves that.

I get well paid, I live a fantastic lifestyle, millions of people would love to do what I do and no one is happier than me to be back. It is great being me at the moment. I am hugely successful and so bloody grateful and happy it's not true... [Yeah, yeah, Noel, easy does it]... what I really want to get over is that I am not trying to take all the plaudits and goodies of being famous, then whinge about the downside. I just want to be treated fairly. If you have criticisms, if you hate the show, or the way I look, fine, bring it on. What I don't have to accept is stuff like the *Mail* has been running. If you are going to write complete lies, I will use the law to do something about it.

But who wants to go to court and make lawyers wealthy, I don't. I am basically sending the message, "Guys, I am so contactable." I am not some Hollywood star who hides behind a row of publicists. Every newspaper has my mobile number and I can be contacted easily through several offices and various people, so there's no excuse.

The Mirror had a set of pictures of me and Helen the other week and were going to run a story that we were back together. They called and the situation was explained — that we are friendly and positive for the sake of our girls — nothing more. And they didn't run the story, and I appreciated that. That is the kind of relationship I want to have with the papers.

You've revealed how Cosmic Ordering has changed your life. If it's that effective, why don't you ask the cosmos to make Dacre all sweetness and light! But seriously, how did you feel about the way that issue was treated by the press?

It is a good indication of the very positive press I have had in the past few months. Yes, there were some raised eyebrows, but I think people realised that I am not the second David Icke. It is very difficult to knock somebody with a positive attitude. Things were wrong in my personal life and I took a decision to get a grip of it all — whether you call it Cosmic Ordering, or prayer — I just believe that if you can approach things in a positive frame of mind, then all of a sudden things improve, and it has worked for me. That is all I am saying. It is not magic dust and it doesn't mean you are away with the fairies.

As for the press, I do not want to turn into a litigation animal and I am certainly not saying I am up for a fight with any newspaper. Nobody needs that. It is a two-way thing. All I am saying is, if you think I have run off with somebody's wife, or that I have cut my house in two, or become a hermit, then ring and put the allegation to me. And let's save everyone a load of unnecessary aggravation.

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Noel Edmonds' FANTASY FLYERS

What would be the Fantasy Headline of the story you would most like to read?

"All Child Witnesses To Have Professional Care In Court". I head the NSPCC's appeal for care for children in court. Less than 4 per cent of the 30,000 children called as witnesses receive professional support. I am lobbying the Home Office to change this.

What would be the Fantasy Headline involving yourself?

"Noel To Replace Schumacher At Ferrari". I raced in the '70's, so why couldn't I be on the grid — it's all about positive thinking!

What would be the headline you most dread?

"Government To Cover West Country With Useless Wind Turbines". I'm chairman of the Renewable Energy Foundation and we have proved that turbines don't work.

What question would you never answer?

Will you marry me? I don't think I am going to get married again. Two is quite enough!

What headline would you like to appear on your obituary?

"Has he gone for good this time or is he planning another comeback?"