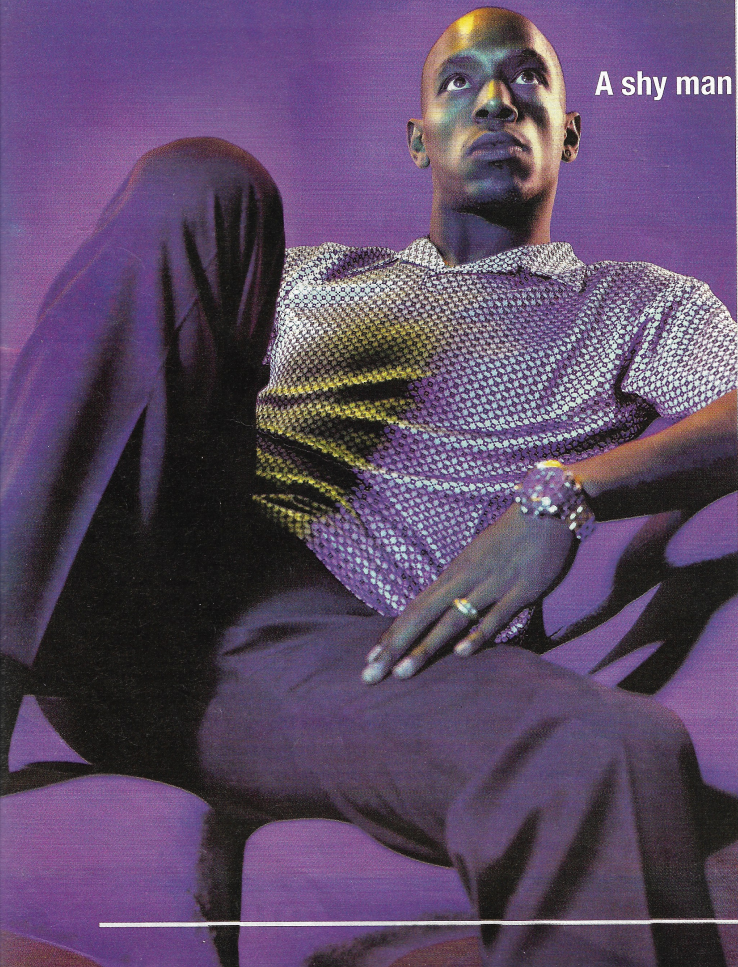


'I'M NEANDERTHAL NEW AGE MAN'

IN THE CHAIR WITH
IAN WRIGHT



A shy man who prays, believes in faith healing and changes nappies! Jane Dimond begins to wonder if she's really sitting next to that bad boy of football

FRIDAY NIGHT'S ALL WRIGHT
ITV/FRIDAY

Describe yourself?

A Whoah. I'm a really nice guy deep down but I'm the kind of person people don't know. They've got the concept of me that the media have packaged me as. The image I portray sometimes is a bit unfortunate.

Q What kind of image do you think you have?

A The image they try to portray is an aggressive one, mouthy, flash. But I know that the normal person I am is really quite humble, a little bit shy.

Q The media might try to portray you in a bad light, but they fail, don't they, because you're very popular?

A I think it's because I'm not pretending to be someone I'm not. I make mistakes and I also do good. When I've been wrong I've instantly said so, and when I've been right I've just tried to make sure I've fought my corner to the hilt. People can relate to that and that's why they like me a bit.

Q Are you more proud of your popularity as a person than your sporting achievements?

A Yes, I am. When you start out you want to win things and achieve things but, at the end of the day, in your little hour, sitting in your leisure time, you don't want to be thinking, 'I've got all these medals but people don't like me'. Sometimes you can sacrifice that for winning at all costs. What I believe now is, 'do the best you can' not 'you must win or else'.

Q You said just now that you're shy. People will find that surprising, Ian Wright, shy?

A I am with people I don't know. If I go into a room, I'm not very good at breaking the ice. Those times I'm very quiet, but after half an hour or so I can loosen up a bit, like a child really. When I was younger, with girlfriends, I would never be able to go up and give them the talk and say, 'the sun shines out of your eyes'.

Q But on your talk show you're so good at flirting, especially with women.

A That's the side of me that comes out when the camera comes on. But I'm shy. People can say things and it will really embarrass me and make me blush, especially women. If they compliment me, I'll say, 'Thanks' and have that little boy look. But if they start talking women's things I get really embarrassed and go, 'Oh my God! Yeah, anyway, what's the time?' I've got to go now!

Q Apparently 60 per cent of your chat show audience is female. Why is that?

A I don't know. I like the fact that everyone – men and women – can relate to me. I haven't got a problem with homosexuals. I can sit with anyone, gay, straight, I treat everyone the same.

Q You're quite traditional, an old-fashioned

bloke in many ways, like you didn't go to see your daughter Bobbi-Lee born did you?

A No I didn't, no way! (laughs, horrified at the thought).

Q But on the other hand you're this kind of New Age, spiritual guy who believes in faith healing etc. Maybe you're the perfect combination of cave man with New Age?

A Yeah, Neanderthal New Age man! I just try to be true to everything and be as normal as I can. I'm quite spiritual, I feel there's a higher force that guides things. I believe if you've got a lot of faith in yourself and faith in God and you keep that faith then things do happen for you at some stage. I feel I've been given a gift to play football and the gift of being able to have a conversation with somebody and bring out the best of them. Any glory I get, I give it to God. I pray and say, 'Thanks God, I know you're looking out for me.'

Q Do you ever have quiet days?

A I don't know how a quiet day would be! I've got some motorbikes now and I ride really late at night and it's great, a time I can reflect 'cos all you have to worry about is just riding. You're on your own, there's no phone, no noise. I try to do it every day, just to wind down.

Q Is there anything about yourself that you wish you could change?

A Perhaps my impatience and temper, but I've calmed down a lot in the last year or so – ever since I did my counselling sessions.

Q With Eileen Drewery? (The faith healer who worked with Glenn Hoddle and the England football team).

A No, with another lady (who doesn't want to be named), it was really good, really helped me and ever since I've had a different mindset. It made me realise that no matter how angry and impatient you might be, you've always got a fraction of a second to think about everything you're going to do and so you should be able to control it.

Q Why did you have counselling?

A I just wanted to find out more about myself. I'd never put myself in a position where I could speak to someone in an unbiased way about everything – things that were troubling me. When you do counselling sessions, you strip down to the bare core of who you are, if you're horrible and aggressive that will come out. That's how I know I'm a nice person. It taught me: 'I'm not a horrible person, so why should I want to make people see me as a horrible person?'

Q You went to faith-healer Eileen Drewery at the time of your infidelities and you said she helped you over that. How?

A It was things she was saying about being possessed by an outside force, that someone else could be influencing your behaviour through your aura. I found it hard to believe because I do believe everybody can say yes or no, this is right or wrong. If you don't feel guilty after doing something, then you

can say that something's possessing you. But if you do something like that and you feel guilty before, during and after then you know you're in control of your own feelings and actions.

Q So you feel guilty about your infidelities?

A Absolutely. But when you're doing something like that you're doing it because you're so wrapped up in yourself and that's what I was.

Q Eileen taught you not to be?

A No, at the end of the day my own beliefs made me realise being unfaithful was wrong and I dealt with it my own way. I must admit I got a lot of help from the other lady I saw because it was more factual, more: 'Don't give me that someone possessing you stuff, if you feel guilty about it you should be guilty enough to control it and not do it.'

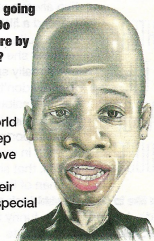
Q If you could wipe out anything in your life, would you?

A No, I've done some things that I wish I hadn't because I've hurt people, but I wouldn't change anything because everything I am now, everything people like about me, is because of how I've changed with the situations life has thrown at me. I've learnt from everything and hopefully I'll try not to make the same mistakes. I'm sure I will but hopefully then, well you just have to make sure you minimise them.

Q At the time of your infidelities you said that, 'being a man you're going to bend at some stage'. Do you believe that blokes are by nature not monogamous?

A It just seems really strange, the way God's done it – every animal species in the whole world apart from man can sleep with everybody else. I love to meet men who are completely faithful to their wives because they're special – it's not the natural instinct to be monogamous so it requires effort and dedication. A man might have the most beautiful wife in the world and she's so loyal, and he will still cheat on her and no one has got an explanation for that. Why do they do that? Men are unfaithful, then the woman leaves and then it's like someone's taken the blinkers off and you think, 'My God, what have I done? I had the woman of my dreams'. I wish I was in a position where I didn't have to be like that. I don't want it to come out like, 'I want more than one woman', but I just want to know, why are we the only ones who are supposed to be with one partner? Is it because we're the ones with intelligence, we can speak, we're evolved? It's the natural instinct of a male to stray, just like animals. And that's why women call us animals, maybe we are.

Q Is that why you've got your wife's name



'ANY GLORY I GET I GIVE IT TO GOD. I PRAY AND SAY: THANKS GOD, I KNOW YOU'RE LOOKING OUT FOR ME'

Illustration by Ashley Harman-Lloyd / Main picture by Celebrity Features

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tattooed on your arm – as a reminder of what you'd lose?

A No, I had it done for Debbie as a birthday present for her, that I'm always carrying her on my arm. I don't need a reminder of what I'd lose, I know how special Debbie is. On my other arm I've got the tattoo 'Let he without sin cast the first stone' because people are always judging other people but at some stage they've made mistakes too.

Q You said you couldn't cope without Debbie, what do you value most about her?

A Just she's a really great person and I'm very lucky to be with her and the beautiful kids she's brought me.

Q You've got a one-year-old baby girl, Bobbi-Lee. You already had four sons, how does it feel different being a daddy to a girl?

A You can be more kissy and cuddly, real close. I feel that much more

protective. It's really weird, a one-year-old and you're thinking what your daughter's boyfriends are going to be like. She is – all my kids are, and my wife – but my wife is especially the sunshine of my life. I've always always wanted a little girl. She's quite naughty – I think she knows she's really special to me. I don't make Debbie jealous but I just tell her the most important woman in my life is Bobbi, that she's the woman of the house!

Q Do you like to change Bobbi-Lee's nappies?

A Yes I do. I found it really funny at first because, being a girl, I felt quite embarrassed. But a couple of times Debbie wasn't there and I had to do it and now it's like, 'whack, whack, bang', it's done. I love to dress her. I get a real thrill out of seeing all my kids looking nice and Bobbi looking like a cute little girl with hats and things.

Q What do you want to be doing in 20 years' time?

A Nothing apart from relaxing, riding my bikes and making sure my family are okay. I'd like to be retired. It would be ideal if one of my children was doing something, like playing tennis, and I could just follow them round the world and devote my life to my kids.

Q How would you like people to remember you?

A As a normal working class guy who just done well and took the opportunities when they came.