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### Newspapers support recycling:

Recycled paper made up 80.6 per cent of the raw material for UK newspapers in 2006

## Give Murray a sporting chance



In his latest column on what the papers say, Cumbrian PR and media adviser **Alan Air** reflects on the negative perceptions surrounding tennis player Andy Murray

**N**ot since John McEnroe raged against the dying of a linesman's sight at Wimbledon 30 years ago – prompting the unforgettable *Daily Mail* headline 'The Shame of John McEnroe' – has a tennis player posed such problems for the British media.

The inescapable truth after his jaw-dropping run to the final of the US Open in raucous New York is that Andy Murray's on-court wizardry and silky-smooth shot-making is quite at odds with his humourless, foul-mouthed and – let's be frank – dreary Scottish personality.

Whilst the elegant tennis writers of the *Telegraph*, *Times* and *Guardian* patiently waited (in vain) for buttoned-up schoolboy Tim Henman to deliver the Grand Slam goods he was, at least, English, polite, impeccably bred and therefore slightly more difficult to blitzkrieg in print when he came up short.

Not so grubby-looking Murray. Bearing more than a passing resemblance to Plug of the Bash Street Kids, the British number one is a PR nightmare and his distrust and dislike of journalists and the whole media circus is palpable. Only consistent success on court can save him from ludicrously unfair and damning headlines from

journalists just itching to rip him to shreds.

I recall how after crashing out of the first round of the 2006 Australian Open he berated British reporters for breathlessly hyping his 'shock' exit, correctly insisting that as a young player just coming to terms with the demands of the professional tour the defeat was pretty routine. That journalists deliberately ignored the bleedingly obvious should have alerted Murray to their real agenda.

Sadly, in recent years sports writers have grown more partisan and vicious, probably as news desks realised the growing importance of the subject to readers. That so many millionaire athletes now enjoy superstar status on a par with pop singers merely cranks up the pressure on hacks to sensationalise their antics and to relentlessly dig the dirt.

That Murray either refuses play the slick media/PR game and has decided to let his tennis do the talking is an admirable but high-risk strategy in today's celebrity driven world. Unlike the attractive and eloquent Andre Agassi who charmed journalists while earning megabucks promoting luxury cars, watches and aftershave. Murray has no option but to keep racking up the

results to keep the media at bay. Despite his on-court brilliance, the reality of his raw personae means the moment his ranking starts falling the media rottweilers will attack and the only products he is ever likely to endorse are slug pellets.

### BIG BROTHER

The newspapers' relationship with Channel Four's reality show *Big Brother* is parasitical. In much the same way that oxpeckers cling to the underbellies of buffalo to gorge on ticks, the newspapers dutifully feed on BB's hyped excesses. Even the sniffy *Independent* joins in, although its reporting is sociological in tone (commentator Johann Hari bemoaning the housemates' lack of formal education) while on another planet *The Sun* urges well-stacked evictees like Rebecca to get 'em out for the lads. Of course, the end result is the same. Despite a slight dip in the numbers watching this year acres of precious publicity still leaves show makers Endemol laughing all the way to the bank.

### FLOOD FATIGUE?

While the Bihar floods in India displaced two million people and destroyed at least 250,000 homes,

most of the European and American TV networks focussed on the relative non-event of Hurricane Gustav in New Orleans. I wonder why? I shall stick to my initial hunch that the reason is flood fatigue in an increasingly watery world. I am quite sure it is not because most news gathering outfits have slashed their foreign news desks to the bone, or that Britney's latest breakdown is cheaper to cover and generates higher ratings. Or even that some TV station decision-makers hold negative perceptions of an untouchable, over-populated country which just happens to be home to people who are not quite like the rest of us.

### JOAN COLLINS

And finally... has the ever so respectable *Sunday Telegraph* gone completely berserk as it chases *Heat* readers and people who have *Daily Star* astrological predictions on speed dial? That actress Joan Collins, star of tawdry movie *The Bitch*, is now writing a column for a newspaper aimed at retired colonels in twilight homes is far more shocking than anything she ever did in a goods lift with Oliver Tobias.

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