

# Opinion & Analysis

## It's an unfair world – the reds have it

TONY ALLWRIGHT

### OPINION

Academics dress up inquiries into winning boxers and ladies in red as scientific research

**A**MONG THE numerous non-accomplishments of president-elect Barack Obama is his lack of authorship of a single academic work despite having been a law professor.

When I pointed this out on September 10th, Daragh McDowell berated me next day saying this was only because he was, in effect, too busy doing other things, as if ordinary professors have too much time on their hands. Yet what other universities appoint professors unless they have already accumulated a body of academic work, to which they are then expected to add?

Maybe Prof Obama could simply find nothing interesting to research. For it must sometimes be hard for professors and would-be professors to dream up worthy subjects to publish in academic journals. This might explain research undertaken in recent times by, for example, Russell Hill and Robert Barton of Durham University, Martin Attrill of Plymouth University, Andrew Elliot and Daniela Niesta of New York's University of Rochester. What they have in common is that they all conducted research into ... the colour red.

The brainboxes of Durham and Plymouth universities revealed that sportsmen clad in red tend to do better than those in other colours, whether in team sports such as rugby (think Munster) and football or in one-on-one combat sports.

The combat theory was tested at the Athens Olympics in 2004. Contestants in four combat sports – boxing, taekwondo, Graeco-Roman wrestling, and freestyle wrestling – were randomly assigned red or blue outfits.

In every case, those wearing red won significantly more fights. This academic conclusion enhanced the professorshipism of the authors by getting published in the much respected scientific journal *Nature*, twice.

For team sports, the academics selected professional soccer in England. Over thousands of league matches played from 1947 to 2003 between the country's top 68 clubs, teams with red strips (such as Manchester United or Liverpool) won the league 60 per cent of the time, compared with only 20 per cent for those in blue (such as Chelsea), despite more teams wearing blue. But their advantage would disappear when the red teams wore a different colour, such as for away games.

The learned gentlemen who came up with this will score their own professorial goals when their findings get published in the *Journal of Sports Sciences*.

Meanwhile, the Rochester geniuses looked at red from a different angle. How good is it as a man-magnet? Calling it a psychological experiment to make it sound important and scientific, they showed an assortment of lusty men photographs of women framed by a border of either red or white, and of women wearing

red clothes and then another colour.

In all cases, red did the trick – men love ladies in red. In red, the little mixxes were more likely to attract a good-looking guy, to receive an invitation and be treated to a more expensive date.

It might have been easier to simply ask Chris de Burgh about ladies in red, but I guess research is more fun if you dress up pretty girls in different colours and invite them on expensive dates.

Moreover, a crooner would not have enhanced their careers, whereas their findings were published recently as *Romantic Red: Red enhances men's attraction to women in the very*

*impressive-sounding, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. You can make your own judgment about the erudition of this periodical from some gems in the same edition: *What happens if we compare chopsticks with forks?*, *Two ways to be complex and why they matter*, and *Man, I feel like a woman*.

So why are men so turned on by red? When humans get angry their skin reddens due to increased blood flow, whereas with fear we blanch. Moreover, animal studies show that red in males is a signal of dominance.

Hence in human competitive situations, redness stimulates deep-rooted aggression and dominance, whereas non-red players are pale, trembling and defensive (I exaggerate).

As for the ladies, research shows that male primates are more attracted to females who put on a red display (hence those embarrassing rear ends). That's why female baboons and chimpanzees redden when nearing ovulation – to give the boys the come-on.

But now that monkeys have evolved into humans, it's sexy red dresses that the girls employ for the same purpose.

The research confirms what women have long suspected – in the sexual realm men are not the thoughtful sophisticates that they (we) imagine, but are consumed by primitive animal-like predilections.

Since the universities that unearthed all this wealth of information are largely bankrolled or subsidised by public funds, is it not heart-warming to learn in today's straitened times that they are winning such value for taxpayers' money?

Thanks to the academics' selfless research, we now know beyond all doubt that wearing red gives any male or female an unsporting opportunity to score, whether in games or love.

But this situation, like conservative talk radio in the US, is obviously unfair. The US Democrats are right; we need a "Fairness Doctrine" to cut back on redness.

So here is a suggestion for law professor Obama in his spare presidential time in order to plump up his empty professorial credentials. He should research the legal implications of allowing a red elite to continue selfishly to monopolise more than its fair share of red, with a view to spreading the wealth, sorry the redness, around.

Munster apart, this is surely hope and change we can all believe in.

Tony Allwright is an engineering and industrial safety consultant, and blogs on [www.tallrite.com/blog.htm](http://www.tallrite.com/blog.htm)