

THE  TIMES



Wednesday May 29 2013

The dilemma that drove me to New York

Louise Mensch on a
painful decision



Biker jackets, the summer must-have, by Laura Craik

Why a naked pitch invader will always have my support

Patrick Kidd



The stalker emerged from the North Stand at Twickenham on Sunday afternoon wearing nothing but a smile, and galloped away down the touchline. Showing a sidestep and a turn of speed that may well get him a trial for England, he evaded six stewards before diving like a dying swan under the goalposts at the opposite end.

There was some chuntering from grumpy commentators and the television cameras refused to show the streak (although you can now see the video online) but the crowd loved it. Not just them, either. Nigel Owens, one of the assistant referees, later tweeted: "Typical. Streaker on the pitch at Twickenham today and I had to follow play down my touch line and missed it all."

Barely an hour later, a dull evening in the cricket at Headingley was interrupted briefly by another lone invader. It was a rather half-arsed effort (not even that, since he removed his top and shoes but not his trousers) but people still cheered on the semi-streaker until he'd done a lap.

Like sunny summer days, we don't seem to get as many streakers as we once did. While too many could get tiresome, I always like to see one or two a summer — or even in the winter, when you really do have to (if you'll excuse me) admire their balls. I remember one Varsity match when

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Sweden, Canada and Norway come next in the survey based on such things as income levels, health, safety and housing. The United Kingdom comes tenth, our happiness levels probably boosted a notch by the knowledge

that we are ahead of France and Germany.

However, things could change in the next few months with the British and Irish Lions playing Australia at rugby and then England defending the Ashes. Let's see if Australia are still smiling come the end of the summer.



a female streaker emerged from the Cambridge section of the Twickenham crowd and ran towards the Oxford fans. Since this was in chilly mid-December, it seemed appropriate. Light blue when she started her run, she was almost certainly dark blue by the end.

It is 40 years since the word streaker was coined in this context, emerging out of a craze for naked running in American universities. The word had still not quite caught on when, in 1975, a merchant seaman with the improbable name of Michael Angelow ran on to the field at Lord's during a Test match and hurdled the stumps.

John Arlott, the commentator, described Angelow as "a freaker, not very shapely as it is masculine". Where modern commentators are obliged to call such invasions a disgrace, Arlott added: "This may well be his last public appearance — but what a splendid one." It was a sentiment shared by the crowd.

The only thing that I like to see more than a streaker is one getting clobbered by the stewards. Or, even better, being taken out at full canter by one of the players.

Five years ago, a naked invader ran on to the pitch in Brisbane during a cricket match between Australia and India. Unfortunately, Andrew Symonds, the batsman he ran towards, was built like a brick dunny and had been doing some pre-season training with a rugby league side.

As the streaker came close, Symonds dropped one shoulder and rammed into him, sending the naked man flying into the air. It was a more physical response than that of Greg Chappell, the former Australia captain, who once sent a streaker packing with a rap across the buttocks using his bat.

Some may call streakers selfish exhibitionists and the authorities have tried to clamp down on them, but a naked invader will always have my support. They liven up dull matches. It is, after all, rare that a streaker runs out when the sport is absorbing. Sarah Vine is away

Dimbleby's streak of revisionism

David Dimbleby's days in the Bullingdon Club in the 1960s may have been all tea parties and evenings of contract bridge, but he is being a little unfair to claim that the club's reputation for drunken chaos began when David Cameron and Boris Johnson were members.

The Bullingdon Club was founded in 1780, and was soon associated with raucous nights of mayhem. *The New York Times* reported in 1894 that after one club dinner the members became "hilarious", and "kept up their orgie [sic] until an early hour", breaking 468 windows in Christ Church.

Then there is its representation in *Decline and Fall*, Evelyn Waugh's novel written in 1928, 60 years before Cameron's wrecking days, which begins with the senior members of Scone College, Oxford, watching the misadventures of the thinly disguised Bollinger Club. They observe with glee, because of the fines they can impose on the repentant members once their hangovers have cleared.

"Oh, please God, make them attack the Chapel," one says, thinking of the port he will buy with the fines. Another observes that an unpopular student owns a grand piano and is told: "They'll enjoy smashing that."

Of course, this is all disgraceful, and students should not smash up pianos and break windows, but isn't it, like streaking, just a teensy bit of fun?

There was a

Louise Mensch saw her husband just two days a month when she was an MP. No wonder she had to move, she tells Tim Teeman

Her critics see her as an egotistical bighead promoting herself above all else. They won't be surprised to find that, in a documentary on Brian Johnson, lead singer of AC/DC, the last words are not about him but the presenter, "metal-head" Louise Mensch.

"She's straight-shooting, she could go back and run for prime minister. She'd get my vote," Johnson grins as he speaks of the controversial, telegenic former MP for Corby, who resigned her seat last August to move to New York to be with her second husband Peter Mensch, manager of Metallica and the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Criticism that she is a publicity courting dilettante is "water off a duck's back", Mensch says as we sit in a café near her Upper West Side townhouse. Mensch laughs that Johnson's tribute was affectionate. In fact, the whole documentary is an affectionate one, charting Johnson's rise from his working class Tyneside roots to rock stardom (and luxurious pad in Florida). Mensch is a genuinely enthusiastic guide and fan of both AC/DC and her much-adored heavy metal.

To underscore her metal credentials she indicates her all-black ensemble: a fitted Armani leather jacket, leggings and thigh-high Armani boots. She looks super-skinny but proffers the muffin she's eating as proof of a hearty appetite; her svelteness is a result of daily exercise — at 42 she boasts that her running pace is at the same level as a male British soldier in his early 30s. Her face is as unlined as you'd expect from the person who found "the best guy in the world" for the plastic surgery she had in 2011.

Mensch says New York is everything she expected: "Vibrant, full of clever, interesting people. The nexus of the business, architecture, arts, film and music world here is fantastic." So she doesn't see herself returning to British politics? Not even at No 10, as Johnson says? "That ship has sailed, hasn't it?" she laughs, a

non-denial masked by jest. "I still keep a hand in as a commentator. [She has a column in *The Sun on Sunday*.] I have to live in America. I had to move my children [three by first husband Anthony LoCicero, ages 9, 8 and 5], or spend another 13 years in Britain because of their schooling and be separated from Peter for that time."

Her voice rises. "It was impossible for my husband, who has children of his own, to move to Britain — and he runs a pretty large business out here. It kills me totally. You're looking at two choices: see out your term, which I desperately wanted to do, or be separated from your husband for 13 years until your youngest child is 18 years old.

"Sometimes I would see Peter for just two days a month. That just doesn't work. When Peter could come to London I was busy with parliamentary or constituency duties. The marriage wasn't in trouble, but that doesn't mean there wasn't a huge amount of pain and stress associated with being separated from your spouse. Part of the time I told myself I was a military wife. There are lots of people who sustain marriages who don't see their spouses for long periods of time, soldiers' spouses in particular."

To the consternation of many Tories, Mensch's seat fell to Labour. "I'm very sorry about that," she says, "but those closest to me in the party and the Prime Minister understood."

Now, 18 years after the publication of *Career Girls*, her first novel, she has returned to writing chick-lit, "even though I never left it, I've pretty much written one a year since I was 22". Except it's not chick-lit but "a contemporary feminist take on the retro Eighties blockbuster. There was a slight hiatus when I was in Parliament: even I couldn't ride that many horses at once."

During her two years as an MP, Mensch, who has attention deficit disorder, was drinking ten cups of tea a day and a glass of wine at night. "I didn't struggle with alcohol," she says, "and I was within recommended drinking limits, but it was a bad idea. I had disturbed sleep patterns.

"Wine o'clock" for women, which is popular in Britain but not New York, isn't good. I'm not a teetotaler.

I drink wine and saké when I go out. But now I don't say, "It's 7.30. I'm having a glass of wine like every working mum."

She hasn't found Manhattan mothers competitive. "I love the America of [Facebook chief] Sheryl Sandberg, where a woman is not judged to be less feminine

huge amount of pain and stress



because she's ambitious. 'Ambitious' is not as pejorative here as it is in Britain, particularly when applied to women. In Britain women are judged to be 'pretty', 'bossy' and 'shrill', whereas a man has 'drive' and 'tenacity'."

Mensch felt she was a target of that? "A little bit. Yes, I'm ambitious. So what? When people have strong opinions they arouse strong opinions. I'm proud of being authentic. It's why I got so many Twitter followers. I didn't toe the party line. I wasn't boring." Her sister once said Mensch "lives almost completely in my own head. That's true I think."

Is she an attention-seeker? Mensch rolls her eyes. "Unlike other politicians?" she says, alluding to "the pieces complaining about how ubiquitous I was. Well stop writing about me." Are men called "attention-seeking" as much

as women, she asks. She claims, again implausibly, to be "neutral" about fame: "The question was, 'What can I do with it?'. It gave me a certain amount of power. I was keen to establish Conservative feminism. I believe social liberalism and economic conservatism are the future of politics."

When Mensch gave up her seat, "it wasn't about spending time with my children, it was about physical separation from my husband, although there are many things you can say about being a mother in Parliament, which is organised in the most unbelievably sexist way. Because of the expenses scandal you can only have a one-bedroom flat in Central London, which family members cannot stay in." [Mensch means that the rent allowance — £20,000 a year, plus £2,500 for each

child — would not be enough to rent more than a small flat in central London.] "Say you're a mother from Stoke-on-Trent with three kids under five. You become an MP, but you won't be able to see your kids for four days a week. The rules freeze mothers out of Parliament."

Mensch grew up, with Tory parents, in Sussex. She "always" wanted to write, composing her first poem at 4. She thought about becoming a policeman, farmer ("until I realised it meant killing animals, then went off it"), and the Queen. "My mother would curtsy and say, 'Your fish fingers, your majesty.'" "Happy and withdrawn", she was a bookworm. "Even now I'm a solitary person: I'd rather be playing with my blog or reading."

Her love of metal began with Def

Leppard. At 16 she went to a Beastie Boys concert with "naked girls in cages and a giant inflatable penis". She dosed down on fellow fans' floors: "This generation doesn't have that feeling of community tribal-ness and rebellion that went with hard rock." Fellow Tories Priti Patel and John Whittingdale are metal fans: "At MPs' karaoke he did a version of (Deep Purple's) *Smoke on the Water*. You'd be surprised how far metal has infiltrated the Establishment."

In the early 2000s, Mensch had panic attacks, spurred by fears over mad cow disease. These ended in 2003. When she was 13st 2lb after the birth of her third child, Mensch felt she "lost" herself: "As a woman I had written myself off."

Walking led to running, then the gym. Today, she has a blog called *Unfashionista*, embracing the spirit-enhancing qualities of exercise, make-up and clothes. On it, she invokes "the Tao of Lipgloss". "I'm not saying you'll have low self-esteem if you don't wear make-up, but if women pay a little attention to their appearance it says you're worth bothering with." But then she claims to "hate all kinds" of beauty and clothes shopping ("I'm only wearing bronzer as blusher and eyeshadow today"), yet has her hair styled at top salon Louis Licari.

I had a procedure around the lower part of the face. It wasn't a facelift

As for her surgery: "I had a procedure around the lower face which I assume involved pulling the skin back. It wasn't a facelift." Does she have Botox? "I'm not answering that." No, her feminist principles didn't clash with having surgery, "because it's exercising choice". She is "pretty happy" with her face. "I wanted to do it as maintenance, something early so it stays that way." Will she have more? "I'm reasonably happy but I'll never say never."

Would Mensch like more children? "I'd love to have another child but we've got six between us. I'm 42. No matter how fast I run my ovaries are on a different clock." The drawback to being together full-time is that Peter says he never realised how right-wing she was ("he's a real leftie"), Mensch smiles. "I've always felt for [Speaker's wife] Sally Bercow: it's medieval to think a wife should echo her husband's views."

She is planning to do a documentary on feminism. "There's an overwhelming amount of online and offline misogyny, including Alastair Campbell tweeting I should be on Page 3. When did that become part of political discourse? In some ways women have advanced, but there's a hatred that wasn't there before. It's not casual misogyny but real hatred. We need Sheryl Sandberg to be our role model, not Britney Spears."

Does she miss anything about the UK? "Thatched cottages," Mensch says outside her very unthatched townhouse. But as two joggers go past and a siren wails, she doesn't look that nostalgic. **AC/DC's Brian Johnson: Rock Icon, Sky Arts, Saturday, 8pm**

Louise Mensch, above, in Manhattan, and, left, with her husband, rock band manager Peter Mensch