



JOHN BAILEY

the thinking angler

THIS WEEK: After a night in the bar with international football and entertainment legends, JB reflects on his (and angling's) inclusion in the thrilling Celtic Legends v Man Utd Legends televised charity match.

The day an angler played for MANCHESTER UNITED...

YOU'VE had a drink too many and you'll agree to anything. For me that meant playing for Manchester United Legends against Celtic in Glasgow – Keane, Strachan, McClair... and Bailey. Fishing and football have been my life for half a century, but was I insane?

The e-mails from pals said it all. 'Bailey, are you mad?' (Jackson).

'JB, what can go wrong, you ask? How about missing an open goal in front of 60,000 people and being seen as a wally for the rest of your life?' (Neil Steven).

'Bailey marking Larsson out of the game? I think not!' (Miller).

'Are you kidding me?' (Mail Editor Tim Knight).

As I slept, the nightmare flooded in pre-match: 50,000 Celtic supporters chanting, 'Bailey, Bailey, who

the hell's he?' All wearing so many replica shirts that I begin to look like Nelly the elephant.

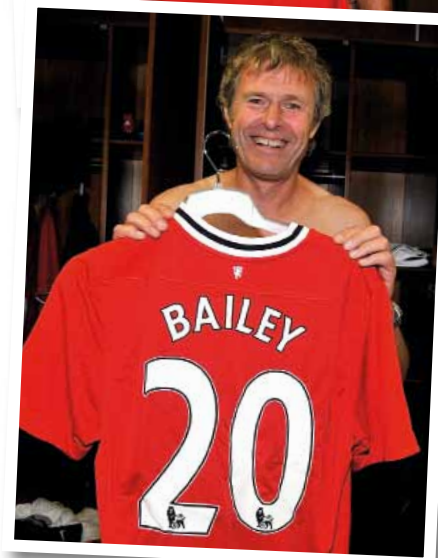
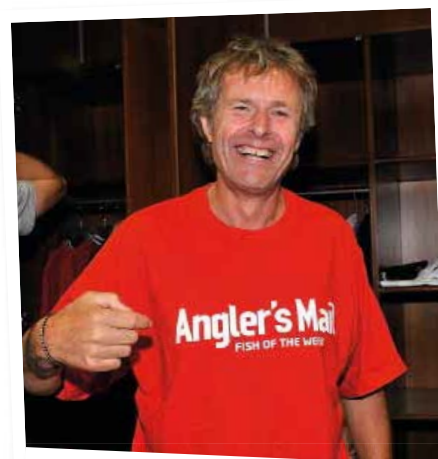
Training went no better. On the rec I stood on a wasps' nest and soon really did look like Nelly the elephant.

But you go for these things in life, proud to be an angler, landing the chance of a lifetime and proud to stand up for your sport.

Some of you perhaps saw the game live on ITV4 last Tuesday, but what you don't know is what it was like to be there, sweating in the red shirt.

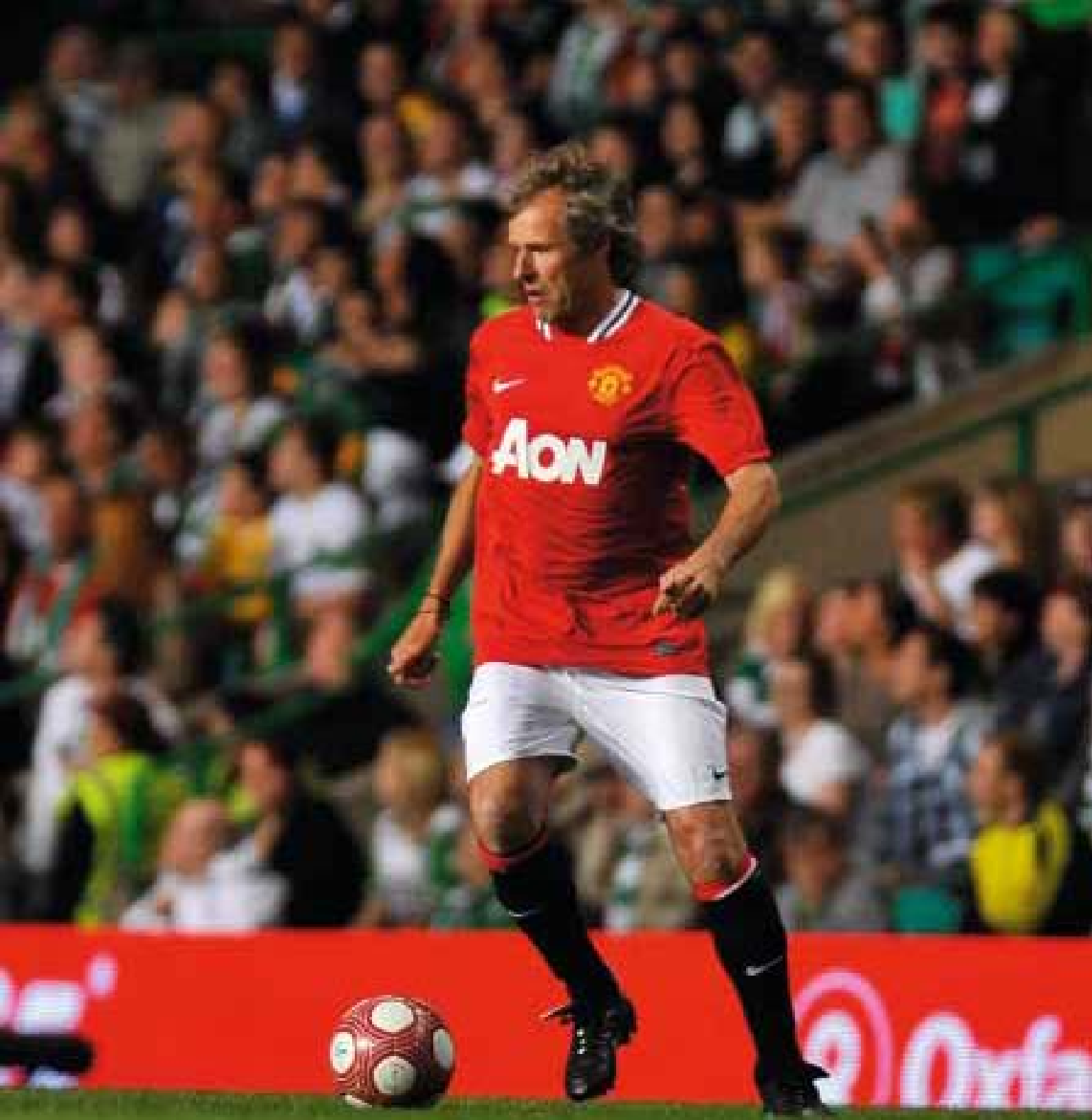
Perhaps we'll start on the team bus at 5pm driving to Celtic Park. Are there any anglers on board, I wonder? And could any of them give a maggot about me? I'm feeling a tad isolated, the first day at primary school coming to mind.

It's not bad at all though. Dion Dublin is great and



If the shirt fits – wear it! 50-something John goes from Angler's Mail hero to potential global football star in the colours of Man Utd. He turned down the chance to be a pro at Brentford FC when he left university, you know!





WE WANT BAILEY ON THE PITCH... and we got him. Here's proof of Manchester United and Angler's Mail's John Bailey starring in a match that was beamed live on TV all over the world.



'I'm in Angler's Mail, you know...' John impresses (left to right): ex players Gordon Strachan, Dion Dublin and Lou Macari, plus witty celebrity team-mates Angus Deayton and Patrick Kielty.

“We're 4-2 down with JB sent on to save the day.”

promises to look after me. We even talk mackerel fishing off the Isle of Wight.

Celtic's big John Hartson is nowhere near as terrifying as I was led to believe, and ex-England midfielder Neil Webb is all support.

At the stadium we are met by a wall of fans and suddenly it's like all the changing rooms I ever been in, only at a voltage level you wouldn't believe.

McClair, Keane, Yorke, Dublin, Strachan... Nigel Benn, Patrick Kielty, Richard Ashcroft, Angus Deayton... it's like wall-to-wall celebs. And, of course, a single angler.

All the fear begins to melt away. Keane and I are at neighbouring washbasins. 'Just enjoy it,' he says. 'It's easier than playing a big fish, I promise.'

Russell Watson sings Nessun Dorma and we're off. 45 minutes later we're 2-1 up and the changing room buzzes. I plead with Strachan to give me no more than ten minutes and I'm relieved as the second half sees Celtic at full bore. At one stage they have NINE internationals on the pitch and Larsson is giving goalkeeper Paddy a nightmare.

The crowd is bellowing sound like I've never experienced and we're 4-2 down with JB sent on to save the day.

I don't score a hat-trick and Larsson does get his third goal, but I don't make a total nobby of myself.

I manage two or three passes and a half decent tackle and suddenly the final whistle blows. We're doing a lap of honour (not sure about that in my case) and Dwight Yorke tells me to savour every second.

It's dead relaxed now in the player's bar, everyone basking in the glow of job well done. There are just about no egos to be seen, only a bunch of guys happy to chat.

Fishing crops up now and then. Most of them have fished and all want to do more. 'It's just life, you know,' says Dublin. 'It's pretty full on. I did enjoy those mackerel though.'

He's going to come up to Norfolk this winter and we've agreed to use the mackerel as deadbait and he can see what excitement is all about!

Keane who?

A friend promised £100 for charity if I grab Keane's nuts! 'Tell him to make that £1,000,' Roy growls.

Adrenalin equals money

FOOTBALL, tennis, rugby and F1 are the big earners. So do we portray fishing as gripping as it really is?

Think of the first run of a 30 lb carp hooked in the margins or a barbel with a strong current in its sails. Is the white-knuckle aspect of fishing ever portrayed?

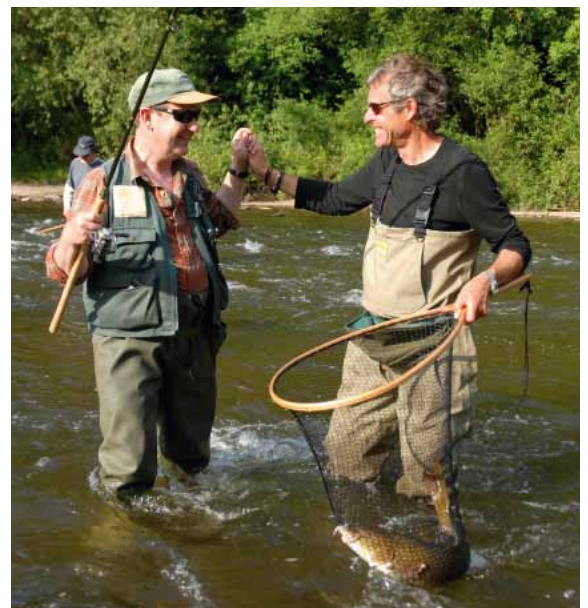
You are right to be gob-smacked over what Keane, Larsson and the rest can do. But is their skill intrinsically greater than trotting a float at 80 yards or putting a lead on the spot in the pitch black?

Once again, I don't think we make enough of what we're really good at as anglers.

■ Turn to p.19 to read photographer Ian Chapman's conclusions on angling's big football night.

Facts & Figures

- The game was planned originally for Celtic's young John Kennedy, forced out through injury, but he donated all the proceeds to Oxfam's East Africa appeal.
- A 55,000 crowd raised £600,000 with £100,000 to come from signed shirt auctions.
- Amidst an orgy of fan worship, I signed three Bailey books and four copies of Angler's Mail.



It was a pleasure to take to the field in front of 55,000 passionate spectators, but the quiet thrills of angling, like when this guiding customer landed a Wye barbel, are a match for any sport!



WATCH OUR VIDEO & MORE PHOTOS ONLINE!

More pix from John's big night can be seen on www.anglersmail.co.uk where there is also video to watch. **ANGLERSMAILTV** – our YouTube channel has loads of fishing videos, too.