

FINDING MR WRIGHT

Kasha Van Sant discovers that ex-Arsenal footballer and the man with the biggest smile on television has something up his sleeve to get families moving

We can all recall the days when we sulked about PE at school and tried every trick in the book when it came to skiing. When the closest we got to sport was Dickie Davis on a Saturday afternoon and moreover getting home to the sofa, TV and a fish finger sarnie was the prime motivation. Fast forward a few years some of us are still doing the same, with languishing gym memberships briefly resuscitated at New Year but now hopelessly flat lining. But according to Ian Wright, the man who dominated our screens with his skilful footwork on and off the pitch, it needn't be that way. With a new book on the shelves urging families to introduce fitness into their lives the easy way, Wright means business. The business of buoying the youth of today and giving them the drive for a successful future.

Having never met a Mr Right, nevermind the Mr Wright, I am not sure what to expect. Handshake, firm. Eyes twinkling. The smile, tucked away for later. This is serious Mr Wright and the minute he speaks I know he is passionate about this cause. We have all heard of personalities taking up the pen, but what is *Fitter Families* all about?

"I realised that it's really hard to keep kids interested in fitness if they haven't got the whole family unit behind them. Because when they go back home they get back into the old routine, they lose all of their energy. So we really need parents to participate a bit more." Is it an uphill struggle?

"It was an uphill struggle against the teachers and the parents because between them they have the kids for the most amount of time and you would've thought that children would get on better in the long run, but they don't." So what is the problem?

"They just blame each other. But at the



end of the day the parents spend the most time with their kids and they have the most influence. It's about the whole family unit, the parent or parents need to buy into what it's all about."

And what is that? "It's all about living your life normally but knowing that at some stage you've got to do some form of exercise. And you have to eat accordingly – that's a necessity." Ian's passion is tangible; he's aware this is a problem and like any parent he worries about the future of his children.

"Everybody worries about their kids, and in the current climate we're all worried about what's going to happen. But being somebody that is in the public eye I can do certain things."

There is no doubt that as a successful sportsman Wright can wield influence, but isn't fitness more ingrained into his psyche than it would be in most people's?

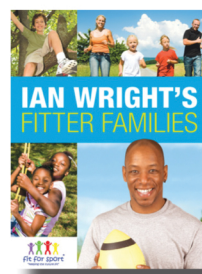
"No, because it's all about will power. When I was a kid I didn't know I was going to be a professional footballer, I knew that I could go run about in the park or whatever and as it has gone on my life has moved towards fitness. My life is essentially run by it."

Does he practice what he preaches with his own family? It appears so. Stacey 14, and Bobby 10, fluctuate between family bicycle rides, playing rugby and horse riding.

"We go on a bike ride or go to Hyde Park, we go to the pictures, we do things that keep you active without thinking that you're doing anything in particular. Stacey and I might even play golf and Bobby may go to a ballet class."

Listening to Ian Wright as he talks about his passions and the future, (golf; his "blinding" collection of hats; and his children who are his main focus), I can see how integral he could be to raising awareness and using himself as a role model, albeit a reluctant one. He is a busy man and the fact that he is willing to devote a large amount of time to meeting his public at book signings to promote *Fitter Families*, to the *TalkSport* radio show or even to the forthcoming *Sky 1* series about juvenile youth offenders, is commendable.

I find him straight talking, charming, serious and determined. What more could a girl want from Mr Right? ■



Copies of the *Fitter Families* (RRP £9.99) can be purchased from Waterstones, Amazon, Asda and WHSmith stores nationwide, as well as ordered from Fit for Sport directly by emailing booksales@fitforsport.co.uk