

Funny factor

Veteran rocker Chris Isaak thought James Blunt was the 'sad, romantic guy'. Blunt thought Isaak was dead.

SHANNON MOLLOY discovered the new *X Factor* judges are a hilarious pairing

BEFORE they met, Chris Isaak and James Blunt formed opinions of each other that weren't exactly flattering.

Veteran US rocker Isaak knew little of the British crooner, except that he had a string of hit songs about love and loss. "I thought, 'Oh, he's going to be the sad, romantic guy,'" Isaak says.

"I had the total wrong impression. He's hilarious – a real nut."

Blunt was surprised Isaak was on *The X Factor* judging panel.

"Before that, I actually thought he was dead," he jokes.

"I'm thrilled to know he's still kicking. He's great fun. I mean, I don't get any of his stories because they all happened in the 1920s, but he's a wonderful character."

The two new judges (they join Guy Sebastian, returning after a few years away, and stalwart Dannii Minogue) have surprised since day one.

Set insiders say the pair constantly ribbed each other during early filming, with hilarious results.

"We've gotten along incredibly well," Blunt says. "We take the p--- out of each other endlessly and I've thoroughly enjoyed that."

When it comes to humour, Blunt – the army captain-turned-singer whose debut hit *You're Beautiful* made him a global star – is something of a social media icon.

A few years ago, his label insisted he join Twitter. Discovering the awful things some people say about him and his music, Blunt started replying with witty, dry comebacks.

"It reminded me of being in the army where we constantly picked on each other, so I started laughing at people who took themselves so seriously," he says. "It's a strange thing some humans do from the anonymity of their bedrooms, probably with their trousers around their ankles, writing abusive things to people they've never met."

That sarcastic sense of humour is



MAKING THEIR MARK

Here's the scoop on three contestants who make their mark at early auditions.

GEORGIA DENTON: The crowd rises for the barely-teenage contestant's rendition of Kelly Clarkson's *Beautiful Disaster*.

MAMA JULZ: The Kiwi mother-of-three channels Tina Turner as she puts her spin on *Disco Inferno*.

JIMMY DAVIS: Hard to miss the curly red hair as he makes the leap from singing in his bedroom to the *X Factor* stage.

bound to win over viewers. And that's a good thing – securing him and Isaak for the show was no small feat.

"You don't just knock on the door, say g'day and get them to agree to do it," Seven's director of programming Brad Lyons laughs. "There are many, many conversations."

As the show enters its sixth season, Lyons says there's pressure to up the ante and ward off viewer fatigue.

Odd couple: James Blunt and Chris Isaak breathe new life into *The X Factor*.

"You've got to bring freshness and we certainly have. Straight off, we've got a new bunch of judges. Then there's a twist in boot camp."

But all the tricks in the book mean nothing without talent, which Isaak says the show has found.

"I walked in with a smug attitude – like, 'I've been in a band forever, these are young people with no idea,'" he says. "Then this 15-year-old girl walked out and just sang. She hit every note, shook the rafters, did a dance step and had people on their feet. I went back to my band and said, 'We've got to work harder. These kids are better than we are.'"

THE X FACTOR
SUNDAY, 7PM, SEVEN
(CONTINUES MONDAY-WEDNESDAY,
7.30PM; AND THURSDAY, 8PM)

EXPERIENCE MATTERS FOR FORMER STAR EALES

HE'S fronting his own show – *Life After Sport* – chronicling the lives of retired elite athletes when the cheering stops. But former Wallabies captain John Eales can't wait to add his voice to Fox Sports' commentary team in England for the Rugby World Cup.

When it comes to experience, there are few more qualified than Eales (below), who played in both Australia's World Cup-winning teams in 1991 and 1999.

Eales will feature in pre and post-match analysis for the duration of the tournament, which will also see the popular *Rugby HQ* produced from London.

From 6.30pm tomorrow, Fox Sports 2 is the home of this year's Rugby World Cup. It will feature each of the 48 games live.

Eales remembers the feeling of exhilaration and "utter relief" that came with a World Cup win and says it's not out of the question for the Wallabies this campaign.

"It's definitely do-able," he says.

"Our best performance can win us the World Cup, but it will be in the minutes we have off that we potentially miss out.

"Australia is in a particularly difficult pool – we play Fiji and Uruguay, then England and Wales. And we have to go in with the mentality you have to play each game like a final."

Eales says three players – Israel Folau, Michael Hooper and David Pocock – "are the three we can genuinely say are as good as anyone else in the world".

"If they are all out there, we can build a game around that," he says.

RUGBY WORLD CUP

OPENING CEREMONY, SATURDAY, FOX SPORTS 2, 4AM; OPENING GAME: ENGLAND v FIJI, SATURDAY, FOX SPORTS 2, 4.45AM

By Debbie Schipp

