

Nine to Noon

On June 28 Nine to Noon media critic Denis Welch let fly at the Sunday Star-Times labelling Jonathan Marshall the worst reporter in the country, and its most shameless.

He was actively encouraged by the host, who chimed in with “you’ve got New Zealand’s worst reporter for us, good”.

In truth – nothing in the critique was advanced as a justification for such a claim – probably because Welch cannot support it. Only a few weeks earlier Marshall had been a finalist in the country’s Qantas Media Awards; so clearly other people do not share Welch’s sentiments.

What sparked this outrageous outburst was the previous Sunday’s Star-Times headline around the drug charges faced by the daughter of Labour leader Phil Goff. Welch said it amounted to sewer journalism – referencing Edwards and his website – since it was lower than gutter journalism.

The fact that the article pointed out that Goff – who had campaigned in the past on hard-line drug policies – continued to deny his daughter’s involvement in drugs, and was questioning the credibility of the Australian judiciary by casting doubts on the incident, was omitted.

It is interesting to note that Radio New Zealand did not shy away from running the story itself, featuring it in a number of on-air bulletins. The incident was also widely reported in other publications.

In fairness to your presenter, it was evident by this point in Welch’s criticisms that she was becoming uncomfortable, and she did interject to ask about the role of senior newsroom executives such as editors, sub-editors and news editors.

Undeterred, Welch turned his attention to the new editor of the Sunday Star-Times David Kemeys, saying he was distressed he was continuing down a path of tabloid journalism.

David was on leave, and wasn’t even working on the edition Welch complained about. Your critic could have found that out with a phone-call. Such a call is the minimum standard of journalism expected, and one Jonathan would certainly not have fallen below.

The principles of the Broadcasting Standards Act demand fairness and balance. Quite how the Welch outburst met those most elementary of all standards escapes us.

The Star-Times is a newspaper with a fine tradition of quality journalism, and Jonathan has contributed to that. He did not deserve what he copped.

The paper accepts that it is always open to criticism, but does expect that criticism – particularly when it comes from once respected members of the profession – to meet the minimum standards of balance and fairness.

While Nine to Noon has at least acted professionally in allowing us to reply to the criticism, the Star-Times still expects an apology from Welch.