

I would do Conan's TV show again

Should I have known better? What do you think?

New York

Conan O'Brien's knockabout with me on his show recently has aroused much comment. Some beer-lovers think the tone of our encounter was unhelpful to the cause, and that I should have known better than to accept the invitation to appear. Should I? My hope, beyond promoting my new book, was to reach some of the hundreds of millions who think that beer begins with Bud and ends with Miller. If a small percentage of them learned that there is something other than standard light lager, I consider that an achievement. Those are people who do not normally buy my books, read my articles, log on to this site or attend my tutored tastings.

Late Night With Conan O'Brien is not the very biggest talk-show, but it is one of them, and has a huge audience. Television is by far the widest-reaching and most potent of media, but it is ephemeral in the extreme, and to watch it is a passive experience. In the few minutes at my disposal, and in the context of this particular show, it would have been ridiculous to have attempted a more serious discussion.

One viewer who logged on to this site, while wishing me well with my book, and "recognizing the impact you have had on the availability and appreciation of beer styles," reproached me for having dressed too casually. He thought "a more professorial British tweed look" would have been more appropriate. Another correspondent suggested that, in tasting a couple of beers with Conan, I should have "led him more firmly."

This is not the first time it has been suggested to me that British tweeds looked professorial, and I do find this an odd concern. I am British whatever I wear, but don't define myself by my nationality. Nor would not wish to pretend to be a professor. As it happens, I do often wear tweed, and was doing so that night, but had left off my jacket in the heat of the studio.

Should I have attempted a more serious line with Conan? He is far too experienced to be led anywhere he does not want to go. The show is in the business of entertainment, not information. I was left in no doubt about that, though (in answer to those who have asked) there was no rehearsal or prepping of exact questions.

Conan's great interest was in the perception of my job as a professional beer-taster. How many beers had I tasted in one day? "Sometimes a hundred." And today? "Only nine or ten...it was a slow day". Was I drunk? "You are the host, and I am your guest. That is a pretty rude question to ask." (I was joking...). I had with me a bottle of Boscos Flaming Stone Beer, which gave me the opportunity to indulge in double-entendres concerning Conan's having "hot rocks." He

responded by "threatening" me with a bottle of Old English 800. I described it as being full of sugar, the nastiest beer in America...and he became mildly earnest for a moment to say how much he had enjoyed my book.

Published: DEC 18, 1998

In: Beer Hunter Online