



Can Bryan do it?

A readable though heavily critical article on the Boro in the February issue of Goal was somewhat spoilt by the note at the end telling us that the author of the piece was a Newcastle fan.

However, he did raise some salient points. "When and why was it decided that Bryan Robson was a good manager, and why is it that our lowly position is seen as an aberration rather than the natural result of putting Robson in charge?"

Even given the writer's bias, these are fair questions in my view. Words cannot express how desperate we all are for Bryan to be successful at Boro. But until sustained success is achieved (and I'm not talking about merely retaining our Premiership place year in year out à la Southampton and Coventry) he knows as well as we do that he and Boro are very much 'on trial' in the top flight.

A world class player such as Robson does not necessarily automatically become a successful manager - look at the casualty list - Bobby Charlton, Peter Shilton, Bobby Moore and Alan Ball (say what you like, he was a fine player) spring immediately to mind.

In recent years I have found it increasingly puzzling why English football clubs are buying up continental players, and then sending them onto the training ground with an English coach who has little or no direct experience of how these guys want to play. If we want to be successful in Europe, it seems to me that we have only got half of the equation right in buying the right players, but giving them the wrong coaches; it's a bit like buying a fleet of Rolls Royce's when you've only got a motor bike licence. This is the main reason that I was licking my lips at the thought of Ruud Gullit taking over and developing our squad had Robson quit Boro for England last year (see *mss* 111).

The vision shown by Chelsea and Arsenal in this respect is to be applauded. Arsene Wenger has done to what is still essentially George

Graham's squad, the 1990's equivalent of what Jack Charlton did to Stan Anderson's lads. Both Arsenal and Chelsea now play open, intelligent football and we can eagerly anticipate seeing them in Europe next year, because both will surely qualify.

Steve Gibson on *Match Of The Day* said basically: 'The Boro squad is better than the league position would suggest, so changes have been made; the players are in no doubt as to what is expected of them.' These 'changes' were first implemented (successfully) in the Sheffield Wednesday match, which is the last league match played by Boro as this is being written.

However, if this isn't a turning point in form, then clearly relegation is going to be confirmed well before the end of the season.

If this is the case (and don't get me wrong,

Robbo feels the pressure

I'm not being a doom merchant, it's common sense and logic at play here) then as the players shake-up would have proven unsuccessful, then surely the fault is higher up the chain, which brings me back to Bryan Robson.

The problem would then be double edged, because if Robson goes, so will most of our foreigners and any realistic chance of a quick return to the Premiership. However, if he stays and we only lose a few players, what would the point be? Do Boro want to retain the services of a manager who, given the resources and players available, could go down in the record books as statistically the most unsuccessful Boro manager?

C'mon Bryan, where's Captain Marvel? The Boro needs him like never before.

PROGRAMME CELLAR

DECIDING to spend 'half an hour' looking through old football programmes to to clarify an argument or check a sad anorak statistic is a bit like telling your other half that you'll be back from the pub in an hour. The time just disappears.

I recently stumbled across a couple of old programmes that illustrate just how much the game has changed.

These days, when Boro are going through their seasonal bad run, (September-January)

Robbo's programme notes encourage the fans and players with buzz phrases such as 'everyone must pull together', 'one game at a time' and 'we must roll up our sleeves'. But this was not always the order of the day at Boro.

In 1965, after Boro had been

humbled 1-3 at Ayresome by Plymouth, the programme notes for the following game (an important FA Cup 5th round tie against Leicester), urged the players and fans to glory by commenting on the Plymouth game thus: "It is a pity that the talent on the field did not match the talent in the Directors' Box." Stunning, eh? Naturally, after such a vote of confidence, Boro were stuffed 0-3. It would be another 5 games before Boro won again, breaking a sequence of played 14, won 1, drawn 3. (Sounds familiar?)

Another quote from a 1968 *Football League Review* (if you're under 35 you won't know what that was) had Alan Hardaker showing why he is still, then as now, Secretary of the FA, with his incisive foresight: "Undersoil heating is not the answer to frozen-up pitches". Of course it isn't, Alan. What's needed is 100 local gadgie volunteers, some cocktail ice picks and a blow torch.

Even the Boro programme notes for the match against Charlton Athletic in March 1972 show how far football has come in 25 years: "It is the paying public who keep the game going, not the millions who watch the occasional match on TV". That is nowhere near as true now as it was then. Next season each Premier League club gets £9m TV money; Nationwide Division One clubs will receive £700,000. No wonder we're all so petrified of relegation.



You're cracking up...

THE tension of a Cup game against lower league opposition is simply not for me; I can't even listen to the radio while the match is still in progress. I just want the score in one hit, win lose or draw at 4.50pm. This way I might put a few more miles on my heart.

Therefore, I went to see Stevenage 'Burra', who were at home to Kidderminster on the day of the Hednesford game.

I thought it would keep my mind off the Boro game and make sure that the events at Riverside were out of my ears until after the final whistle.

So, The Stevenage game is about 20 minutes old, and the 6,500 capacity crowd are rather subdued, as Kidderminster have just gone 1-0 up. Above the disgruntled quiet around me, the shrill sound of my mobile phone ringing picks me out in the stand like a rabbit in a car's headlights. It's a few of my mates, bringing me the joyous news that Boro are 0-1 down. I had the last laugh. They could have saved 45p by telling me personally, as it turned out they were phoning from my mates mobile on the terrace on the other side of the pitch, where one of them had a radio glued to his ear!

Keogh's Korker

Against which club did John Hickton score his last league goal for Boro?

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