



Schwarzer's black mark

Boro's rise from bottom three to lower mid-table, however brief it may be, illustrates just how desperately keen all of the clubs outside the top ten appear to be to sample life in the Nationwide League.

The defeat at Upton Park was unfortunate, but does not constitute a crisis. Last season, it was quite different. The same game yielded the same result, but saw Boro propping up the Premiership. It was Bryan Robson's last game in sole control.

It must be hoped that the nature of the defeat helps to solve Steve McClaren's goalkeeper selection quandary. Mark Schwarzer's mistake gave West Ham a gift of a goal, and it is possible that this will signal the return of unlikely hero Mark Crossley. The 32-year-old performed superbly while standing in for the injured Schwarzer and

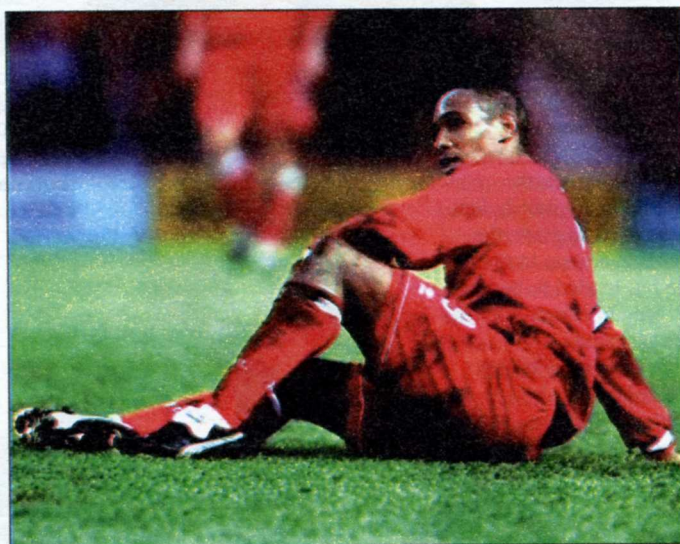
he would have been as disappointed as the fans when he was dropped on the Australian's return.

Indeed, on Schwarzer's comeback in the FA Cup tie against Blackburn he was booed by sections of the crowd. All things considered then, another good month. Ugo Ehiogu's unfortunate sending off at West Ham may have put paid to any chance of us clawing back a late equaliser, but Franck Queudrue was lucky not to be sent off against Fulham. In addition, Paul Ince will surely win the flukiest goal of the season

award for his divot-bouncing effort against Leeds.

Middlesbrough entered March knowing it was a month in which they could all but secure Premiership football next season, as they had a fair chance of winning nine points out of a possible 15. Fed on a champagne diet of high ambition for seven years and having to make do with the slops of relegation struggle, being mid-table and mediocre is the Boro definition of high ambition.

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Ince scored a lucky but important goal against Leeds

RESULTS

February 3
Charlton Athletic (h) Drew 0-0
(3-5-2): Crossley - Gavin, Southgate, Festa - Stockdale, Stamp, Ince, Greening, Queudrue - Whelan, Windass (Marinelli 63)
Booked: **Campbell**
Referee: **M Riley**
Attendance: **24,189**
Position: **16th**

February 9
Leeds United (h) Drew 2-2
(3-5-2): Crossley - Ehiogu, Southgate, Festa - Gavin (Mustoe 46), Stamp (Boksic 46), Ince, Greening (Windass 78), Queudrue - Whelan, Carbone
Scorers: **Ince 51, Windass 88**
Referee: **N Barry**
Attendance: **30,221**
Position: **16th**

February 19
Fulham (h) Won 2-1
(4-4-2): Schwarzer - Stockdale, Ehiogu, Southgate, Queudrue - Greening, Ince, Mustoe (Murphy 61), Whelan (Windass 70) - Carbone (Nemeth 70), Boksic
Scorers: **Boksic 27, Nemeth 77**
Booked: **Queudrue**
Referee: **D Gallagher**
Attendance: **26,235**
Position: **11th**

February 23
West Ham United (a) Lost 1-0
(4-4-2): Schwarzer - Stockdale, Ehiogu, Southgate, Queudrue - Greening (Nemeth 80), Mustoe (Windass 88), Ince, Whelan (Murphy 80) - Carbone, Boksic
Booked: **Ehiogu, Ince**
Sent off: **Ehiogu**
Referee: **C Foy**
Attendance: **35,420**
Position: **12th**



GOALS

Left-foot	2
Right-foot	1
Headed	1

FIXTURES

March 16	Liverpool	(h)
March 23	Man United	(a)
March 30	Tottenham H	(h)
April 1	Derby County	(a)
April 6	Aston Villa	(h)

CROWD SCENE

Season average **28,527 (14th)**

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opta PLAYER OF THE MONTH

	Index score
Paul Ince	1,069
Gianluca Festa	960
Mark Schwarzer	958
Franck Queudrue	875
Benito Carbone	821

He endured his usual warm welcome from West Ham fans at Upton Park, but otherwise February was a rewarding month for Ince. The midfielder's lucky goal in the 2-2 draw against Leeds United was probably the highlight

JUST FANCY STAT

- 34** Middlesbrough conceded more **corners** than any team in February
- 151** Boro made the most **clearances** in the Premiership
- 73** They also led the league in **fouls won**
- 2** **Red cards** for Ugo Ehiogu in as many visits to Upton Park, the home of West Ham United
- 32** Steve McClaren has fielded the most **players** in the Premiership this season

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