

IF any one player can truly be said to be the victim of the Ayresome Park 'boo boys' it is Alan Moody.

Moody was born in Middlesbrough and went to Park End School, then Langbaugh. He captained Middlesbrough Schools and played at Ibrox for England Schoolboys before being signed to Boro, firstly on Schoolboy forms then as an apprentice in August 1966. Along with the rest of the Middlesbrough Schools squad, he was a ball boy at the 1966 World Cup games at Ayresome Park and the Third/fourth place play off match at Wembley between Russia and Portugal. (A good one for you Boro quiz setters to fit in at some time). He signed professional for Middlesbrough in January 1968.

However, Moody, described by Harold Shepherdson as "A fully committed model professional for whom I have tremendous regard" fell foul of some elements of the Ayresome crowd, possibly because of his laid back, precision football, as opposed to the 'die for the Boro' aggression so often demanded of local lads. This is perhaps exemplified by the fact that in 551 professional games, he was never sent off.

Hounded out of his beloved Ayresome by the very people he wanted to please the most, Moody found his feet at Southend United, when he became their then record signing (a bank-busting £15,000) on 10th October, 1972. During eleven years loyal



Alan



service to Southend, he was virtually an ever present, and won the supporters Player of the Year award in 1975. He also captained the team to a Fourth Division Runners-up medal in 1978, followed by the Fourth Division Championship in 1981. In four years as Southend's penalty taker, he scored a very creditable 24 out of 28 attempts. In 1983 he became the first player to be awarded a testimonial year by Southend, during which a quite impressive 6,000 people (double Southend's normal League gate) packed Roots Hall to see his team take on West Ham United.

Alan Moody made 504 appearances for Southend (a club record), and is still regarded as something of an icon there, 15 years after retiring from the game. Granted, he was no Mogga or Willie Maddren, but he enjoyed a long and successful career at Southend, the club that saved his career from ruination at Middlesbrough, the only club he ever wanted to play for.

Despite his shabby treatment by the Ayresome Park crowd, his record shows that he finished on the winning side in exactly half of the 44 league appearances that he made for Boro. It is surely praiseworthy to achieve such an honourable record - especially given the pressure the crowd put him under. Speaking in 1983 about his departure from Boro he said: "I just couldn't take the abuse any more. It had eroded my confidence and was threatening to ruin my game."

Isn't it time for Boro fans to reconstruct a reputation?

Judge for yourself...

Being a Boro lad, I presume you grew up watching them from being a small boy?

My dad was a big Boro fan, so he'd been taking me along ever since I can remember. The first match I have any memory of at all was against Leeds at Ayresome, and I remember we were crammed into the middle of a load of Leeds fans. You wouldn't want to do that nowadays!

Did Boro spot you as a boy, or did you ask for a trial?

When I was with England Schoolboys, Raich Carter signed me on a schoolboy form – I was about 12 or 13 – and then when I left school, Shep (Harold Shepherdson) signed me as an apprentice.

Who were your role models in your apprentice and the following formative years?

Dickie Rooks was my idol – he'd do a slide tackle from ten yards and take players out like skittles!

What are your memories of Raich Carter?

It's a bit ironic that I started and finished my playing career under two managers who, in their



day were world class players that didn't make the grade as managers, although Raich, in fairness did have some success at Leeds, before he took over at Boro.

Raich was at Boro while I was serving my apprenticeship.

I was only a youngster and remember being in awe of this big man with silver hair. I read your interview with Stan Anderson, and he said it all: Raich expected players to be as good as he was, which is neither realistic or fair. Then, in my last year at Southend, Bobby Moore came in as manager. He was exactly the same – he expected us to be able to do what he could do. He was such a classy player though, and even then you could see it when he trained with us – he couldn't run by then, but he had a lovely touch.

You signed pro half way through the season following promotion from Division Three – did you get swept along on the same wave as all the rest of us – believing that Boro were destined to achieve great things under Stan?

Boro did so well under Stan, and being a Boro lad, I wanted to be part of any future success. At the beginning of each season all the players were thinking 'This is going to be our year'. Stan was a brilliant manager, but he didn't get the luck that we all need sometimes.

by Shaun Keogh

Mooddy



► **Didn't you pick up a bad injury in a reserve game at Boro?**

Yeah, we were playing a reserve match at Hutton Road against Leeds, and I went up for a fifty-fifty ball. I was knocked out cold in a clash of heads and woke up in hospital with a fractured skull!

You made your debut on your 18th Birthday (18th January 1969) and played in nine consecutive matches, of which Boro won five and lost once. It must have been a disappointment to then be dropped, presumably because Alex Smith was back to fitness?

Stan had a policy where he would put you in for a few games while you were on a high, and then he'd drop you for a few while you got your momentum back. If I remember rightly, Alex Smith wasn't playing too well, but I was doing good in the reserves, so Stan gave me my chance. I remember after my debut game against Millwall, Harry Cripps (*Millwall defender*) came up to me and said "Well done son – have a good career" which I thought was a nice touch, especially from someone like Harry, who had a fierce reputation!

Does anybody stick out in your memory as being a bit of a character in your time at Boro?

There were quite a few interesting personalities. I'll always remember Joe Laidlaw! He came into the dressing room one day, and when he stripped off, he was covered in love bites. You can imagine the stick he got!

Stan (Anderson) tells me that you were always a good player, but that the fans really got on your back and your youth and inexperience let it get to you and affect your game. Is that fair comment?

Yes it is. Eventually, the abuse I got from the crowd at Middlesbrough got to me, and I don't mind admitting it. My dad had been going to Boro home and away for years and years, so you can imagine how chuffed both he and I were when I got to the first team. But he stopped going because he'd get upset at hearing the stick I was getting from the people all around him.

“Nobby Stiles was so late in his tackles, because he was as blind as a bat. His glasses were like the bottom of milk bottles!”

The abuse got to me in lots of ways – I remember we were drawn in one of the cups against a lower league team (*possibly Oldham, League Cup second round, 8th September, 1970*) who, on paper we were always going to beat; I was down to be playing. Anyway, we used to go to Scarborough for a few days in the run up to these bigger games and on the way back, I was so nervous, that I made myself ill, and couldn't play. That's how the abuse affected me. It's no wonder that all of my best games for Boro were away from home! (*This is maybe borne out by the fact that Alan was substituted five times while at Boro, and four of these occasions were at Ayresome, where the crowd got to him the most*). I was a very shy lad, and didn't assert myself that well, and that was made worse by the stick that I was getting.

I was very upset at leaving Middlesbrough, because they were the only club I wanted to play for; It's my home team. But although I didn't want to leave, I never went back once I did. The last time I saw Ayresome Park was the day I left in 1972. I always wanted to go back with another team, but it never happened.

The signing of an old pair of legs in the form of Nobby must have been a blow, as you both wanted the number four shirt?

I'd never thought of that before, but you're right, we both wanted that shirt. I don't remember being bothered either way because I knew that Stan had a lot of confidence in me.

You could always understand why Nobby was so late in his tackles, because he was as blind as a bat. His glasses were like the bottom of milk bottles! But he was a good laugh to have around. He was an experienced pair of legs, but I don't think that it worked out as Stan envisaged.

What events stick out as highlights at Boro?

Without a doubt, it was the third round FA Cup games in 1970 against Manchester United. I was in the squad for the first game at Old Trafford, and we travelled down and stayed for a few days, if I remember rightly in the Piccadilly Hotel in Manchester. I wasn't expecting to play, but just



TODAY'S TEAMS

MIDDLESBROUGH

Colours: Red shirts. Red shorts with white stripe down side. Red stockings.

- 1—Willie WHIGHAM
- 2—Alec SMITH
- 3—Gordon JONES
- 4—Alan MOODY
- 5—Bill GATES
- 6—Frank SPRAGGON
- 7—Derrick DOWNING
- 8—Eric McMORDIE
- 9—Hugh McILMOYLE
- 10—John HICKTON
- 11—Joe LAIDLAW

MANCHESTER UNITED

Colours: White shirts. White shorts. White stockings.

- 1—Jimmy RIMMER
- 2—John FITZPATRICK
- 3—Tony DUNNE
- 4—Pat CRERAND
- 5—Ian URE
- 6—David SADLER
- 7—Willie MORGAN
- 8—Dennis LAW
- 9—Bobby CHARLTON
- 10—Brian KIDD
- 11—George BEST



Three-to-one against—and the odds are just too much for George Best as Middlesbrough's Alan Moody, Alec Smith and Bill Gates combine to clear the Manchester United man's header.

“Stan pulled me aside and said ‘I want you to play tomorrow and man mark George Best’

before the team talk the day before the game, Stan pulled me aside and said “I want you to play tomorrow and man mark George Best”. Of course, that was it, I was gone. I don't remember anything else he said; I honestly did not sleep a wink that night. Anyway, I had a great game, Bestie didn't get a look in; I don't think he even had a shot, and it ended 0-0.

I hit the post with one shot, and then late on in the game, the ball came over on my left hand side. Now, I can stand up on my left foot, but can't kick with it! I thought, ‘I've got to hit this somehow’. I'll always remember, I had a swing at it and completely missed the ball in front of nearly 50,000 people!

In the replay, Stan told me to just do the same job on Bestie, and we slaughtered them; we did play very well. Derek (Downing) and Hughie (McIlmoyle) scored two terrific goals. Those two were probably my best games for Boro. (Boro won the replay 2-1).

In the fourth round, we got stuffed at Everton. After the first half hour we were chasing ghosts. I remember Alan Ball actually sat on the ball at one point in the middle of the pitch, just taking the mick. One or two of our lads had a kick at him after that, but we didn't play at all well that day, they were by far the better team.

I also enjoyed the Anglo Italian games in 1970. We were in Rome for a week, which was great. I came on as sub against Roma and hit the post. We thought we were going to win the tournament, so when we were knocked out – without even losing a game – we were gutted on two fronts: one that we hadn't won the tournament, and two that it meant we had to come home early!

And your biggest disappointment?

My biggest disappointment at Middlesbrough was leaving, and a close second was that left foot shot at Man United! I don't hold any resentment for what happened to me at Boro though; it was a long while ago anyway. But I do wish that the crowd would have given me a chance; it was always my dream from a young lad to play for the Boro, but any player will tell you it's impossible to play your game when the crowd are on your back.

After six years at Boro, you went down the leagues to Southend – how did that come about?

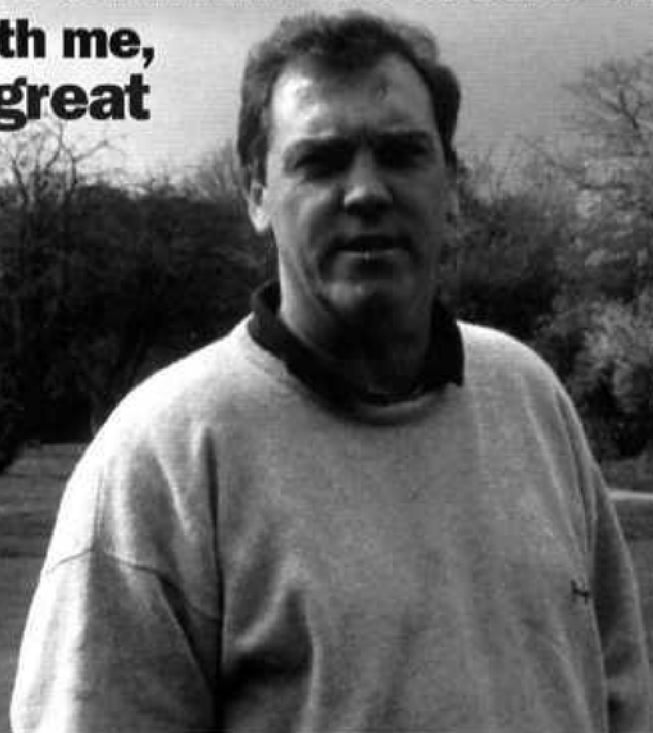
Stan called me in and said “I don't want you to go, but Southend have made an offer – it's up to you”. Initially when I went down for the interview I said no. But I thought about it for a few days, and on reflection, it seemed to be the best thing to do, for my Dad as much as anything, because as I said, he had stopped going to see the Boro which made us both very sad. I felt it would be better all round if I went away and proved myself elsewhere.

You had 11 years at Southend – did everything slot in for you there straight away?

I came down as a single lad, and it took me



“At Southend, I was a big fish in a small pool, the opposite to how I was at Boro. I got on with the crowd and they got on with me, which was a great help”



about nine months to settle down. Leaving Middlesbrough was a real wrench. My girlfriend lived in Stokesley, but then we got married and settled in the south.

Southend were always a decent Third Division side, but they had money and didn't want to spend it. We got promoted from the Fourth, and then straight away they sold three of our best players. They didn't want to pay out all of the money on wages and such that goes hand in hand with success. At Southend, I was a big fish in a small pool, which was the opposite to how I was at Boro. It gave me a feeling of security, and made me feel comfortable. The other thing was that I got on with the crowd and they got on with me, which was a great help.

How did Alan Foggon get on in his short stay at Southend?

When Alan came to Southend, he rattled the bar with a 30 yarder on his debut, but he was always struggling to get into the side because of his weight problems. It's a shame; he's good company and we had some great nights out together.

What were the highlights of your career at Southend?

Winning the Fourth Division Championship in 1981 and taking Liverpool to a cup replay at Anfield in 1979; we drew 0-0 at Southend, and got beat 3-0 at Anfield. After the game, we got a tremendous ovation from the Liverpool fans, and that memory will stay with me forever.

Southend is a bit remote – going to and coming home from away games must have been torture?

The travelling was awful; it took us two hours just to get to the A1! We played at Torquay one night, and because it was snowing, we were still trying to get home at four o'clock the next morning; absolute murder.

Initially at Southend, we travelled the night before a game. But in the later years when money was tight, we travelled on the morning of the game. We had to get to the ground for something like six in the morning, travel to the game all cramped up on a coach, and then go straight into the game. It was a bit of a culture shock compared to Boro, where we used to get a plane to places like Portsmouth.

You were 33 when you retired – was there any single thing that made up your mind or forced you to pack in?

No, not really. By then, I'd lost interest in the game; I probably spent too

long at Southend, looking back. Within a month of initially retiring, I played for a friend who had a club in Sweden, which rekindled my interest, so I came back and played for Southend until the end of the season when I packed up for good. At the time that I retired, there was only eight grounds out of the 92 in the league at that time that I'd never played at, so I was pleased with that too.

Did you make plans for a career after football?

No, I didn't want to go into coaching or management, so I pretty much did nothing for a year and went off the rails for a little bit while I sorted myself out.

If you had your career again, what if anything would you do differently?

(Long pause) If I had one failing, it was my lack of ambition. I'd loved to have been ambitious. If I had, I'm not being big headed or anything, but I would have played at a much higher level. But it just wasn't in me. However, I made a good living for 20-odd years doing something I loved, so I've got no complaints.

What do you think of the attitude of the southern press towards Middlesbrough?

I read something in the press – I think it was the *Daily Telegraph* – about Emerson moving to Boro. It showed a picture of the beach at Rio and next to it a picture of the ICI works with the caption "Would you rather live here – or here?" I went bloody mad. You've only got to turn the camera round a little bit, and instead of ICI you've got the Eston Hills and instead of the beach you've got homeless children living off rubbish tips. They haven't got a clue have they?

Do you actively support or go to watch any team these days?

No, but I'm still a Boro lad – I always look for the result, but my work doesn't allow me time off much at weekends to go to away games here in the south. (Alan works at a golf club). My family still live there, and my daughter is an accountant at ICI, so I am in touch, as it were. I used to know Steve Gibson very well. He was born two doors from our house in Park End, and when he was a lad and I was playing for the Boro, he used to come in and ask me for the match programmes!

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