



Shaun Keogh

A breed apart

The week that Andy Campbell signed for Cardiff City I phoned up Lennie Lawrence and was given permission to go to Ninian Park and take a few photos of the three former Boro employees that now have their mortgages paid by Sam Hamman – Lawrence, Campbell, and Graham Kavanagh.

Lennie agreed that we could do the photographs on the pitch, and as I waited, the first to arrive was Andy Campbell. He was a bit down because he had picked up a toe injury in training an hour before which he was worried would cost him his place at Colchester a few days later, but we made small talk. He was really missing being away from Boro, and spends as much time as he can getting back to his family – five hours each way. On the bright side, he loves being at Cardiff, because, as he said, he spent longer in the stand (on the subs bench, or simply not selected) at the Riverside than he ever did on the pitch. He had scored seven goals in only eight games as well, which helped Cardiff to the play-offs, and no doubt helped him to bond with the fans.

Although Kavanagh only made 32 Boro appearances, he cost nothing and the club got £500,000 when he went to Stoke City, so at the very least, that represents good business. Kav was brought to Boro by Lennie Lawrence and made his debut in October 1992. Never able to command a first team place, he was a named (but unplayed) substitute at the first game played at the Riverside in August 1995. The highlight of his Boro career was scoring the only goal of the game – a penalty – in the League match at Leeds during that first year in the Premiership under Bryan Robson. It may not sound terribly impressive, but at the time it was a goal that won Boro's first match in 14 League games. During this time only an additional three points had been won as Boro did not so much slip as plummet from fifth position just before Christmas to 13th when this victory was won in mid-March.

At the end of that season, he moved to Stoke City, where he spent five years before his move to Cardiff. Last season he made a major contribution with 13 league goals.

It is fair to say that had Lennie Lawrence not taken over at Cardiff back in February, they would not have made the play-offs. In the six games prior to his appointment, Cardiff had been beaten four times, and were looking set for a mid-table finish. However, in the last 13 League games of the season, City were unbeaten, taking 33 from a possible 39 points.

Lennie Lawrence did our club proud I always thought, especially when you consider that in the 134 League games he was in charge Boro won 191 points, and spent about a tenner on players along the way. Compare this to Bryan Robson's first 134 games in charge, during which slightly more than a tenner was spent for a return of 190 points. Granted, the Boro made some good money back on players signed and subsequently sold by Robson, but it's the results that matter, isn't it?

For me, the highest point during Lawrence's managerial reign was the nail-biter at Wolves in May 1992. Boro were 0-1 and a player down in a match they had to win to gain automatic promotion. The desired result was achieved with two goals in the last 20 minutes.



Picture: Shaun Keogh

The lowest point, however, was the following season in a Premier League match at Chelsea in April 1993. In second bottom place before the kick-off with seven games to play, relegation was all but confirmed for Boro. The Boro faithful were assembled on the open area behind the goal of the then undeveloped Stamford Bridge. Oh, and it was raining. Bloody miserable. We were hammered 0-4, and that flattered us.

Lennie and I discussed this match and he said the night before that match, the players did not get much sleep, as mysteriously, the fire alarms in the hotel went off in the middle of the night. Consequently, everybody spent two hours standing outside while the building was made safe. Just think, if it wasn't for that, the Boro might have got away with...er...0-3.

So, on my way from pitchside up through the players' tunnel, I notice the most extraordinary poster on the wall. Now, everybody is familiar with the daunting message to players about to embark through the players tunnel at Liverpool that "THIS IS ANFIELD". Enough to unsettle the opposition for the first few minutes of each half of the game, and to inspire the home players to reach new heights. I remain quite puzzled, however, by the poster at Cardiff. I am unsure as to the use, motivational or otherwise, of a poster detailing 'British Sheep Breeds', with handy photos of willing – sorry – smiling, woolly little fellas with great legs. It is the most bizarre thing that I have seen at a football ground, except Phil Whelan in a Boro shirt.

On the way out of Ninian Park, I bumped into Kav again, who was having trouble getting his kitbag into the back of his car. Not that his kit bag was particularly large, it's just that his boot was full of slabs of lager. I said he should get a bigger car or a smaller habit, and he assured me that it is only because he keeps winning the Carling player of the month award. What an awful life that lad is having....

Eagle eyed readers of this mag will have noticed the interview with David Armstrong which was published in the last issue. There was not enough space to mention the fact that I was actually at the match when Armstrong made his Boro debut at Blackpool in 1972.

My brother-in-law Vince and all three of his brothers made the trip that Easter weekend; we got on a coach from The White Rose, if memory serves. I was 12 years old, and to this day when I smell oranges I think of that coach trip because Vince's brother Brian, who I sat next to, was eating them for what seemed the entire journey. (All that vitamin C stood him in good stead, because Brian Henderson-Thynne was a well-known and respected footballer on the Middlesbrough amateur scene. He died during a match in Middlesbrough whilst playing for his team, St Mary's Old Boys two years ago at the age of 42.)

When we returned to our transport after the match, we noticed the bracing fresh air blowing down the coach. This was in the days long before the advent of air-conditioned coaches. Indeed, you had to pay an extra two quid for a coach with a heating system: it was another £2.50 for one that worked.

Everybody on board had miserable faces, to be expected after being tonked 1-3 with only six games to go to resurrect an increasingly desperate and ultimately unsuccessful promotion bid (again).

It was then that we saw the telltale sign of broken glass and on further inspection, a large dustbin lying beside the coach. Clearly, this was a friendly parting gesture from Blackpool fans. It was 1972 after all when violence was the rule rather the exception it thankfully is nowadays. As we were among the last people on the bus, we had the seats near to the new air conditioning system. If the misery of seeing Boro well beaten away from home was not enough, we had to endure a long, miserable, freezing trip back to Middlesbrough. Which is almost the exact reverse of what generally occurs nowadays for

MSSers. We make a long trip to see the Boro beaten at home, and then have to suffer the ignominy of a long, miserable trip back down south in the certain knowledge that a week of stick is in prospect from southern work colleagues.

At the MSS AGM, our Editor commented that one thing missing from our mag is poetry. Never afraid to rise to a challenge (hell, I even tried marriage once!) here is my tribute to our very own Corporal Marvel (third class) to the tune of The Eagles song, *Desperado*. Apologies to the under 35s who think that the title 'The Eagles' indicates a connection with Crystal Palace and that 'Desperado' is normally followed by the words 'Phil' and 'Whelan':

Bryan Robson
Why don't you come to your senses
You've had crappy defences
For so long now
You're in the drop zone
Three months into the season
The team that's been pleasing you
Has hurt you somehow

Don't you sign another striker now
He'll shaft you if he's able
You know a centre-back is always your best bet
Now some decent players might get you
To the top half of the table
But you only want the ones that you can't get

Bryan Robson
Your team ain't getting no younger
Their sheer lack of hunger...
(That's quite enough of that, thank you! Ed.) ■

Pele's shirt from the 1970 World Cup fetched £158,000 at an auction recently. No such luck at a similar event in the Potteries. A sportsman's evening was held to raise funds for a local hospice. Among the prizes was an authentic Port Vale player's shirt, fully signed by the Vale first team. It fetched £35. This got me thinking so I phoned the Port Vale club shop and asked how much a replica shirt was. I was told this item could be mine for only £39.99. I declined politely and sniggered, saying that the signed ones were a fiver cheaper

Main picture: Ex-Boro boys Andy Campbell, Lennie Lawrence and Graham Kavanagh say cheese for Shaun in the Cardiff sunshine. Below: Ninian Park's homage to Keith Lamb (geddit!?)

