



It's hell without Tel

Such are the fortunes of Middlesbrough, that if a fan at the end of his tether were to call The Samaritans, it is likely that the charitable organization would hang up the telephone on him.

Only three games into the new season, and Boro are back exactly where they were after Bryan Robson's *de facto* final game in charge — second from bottom. The only crumb of comfort to be drawn is that they are kept off of the bottom by Leicester City, who have contrived an even worse goal difference from playing one match fewer.

New boss Steve McClaren is still fielding what is essentially the side he inherited from Terry Venables, with the exception of his own signing, Gareth Southgate. Maybe the reason for the team's total lack of creativity is the fact that most of the players are now trying to adapt to the instructions of their third manager in nine months. Of course, a degree of sympathy is in order for McClaren — no manager would choose to follow Terry Venables, especially after all he achieved here last term.

When reading the new manager's comments in the press — all along the lines of "We know what we have to do", or "It was never going to happen overnight", Boro fans just shake their heads because they have heard it all before. These words, or combinations of them, have been trotted out by pretty much every

Boro manager since John Neal took over from Jack Charlton in 1978.

What this fan does not understand, is how is it that Terry Venables made it work overnight? No Boro fan expects the club to win the league, but most expect a solid back line, a creative and industrious midfield, and a goal in the opposition net now and again. A brief glance at Boro's August results makes it plain that none of these are in place at the moment, although Boro are enjoying long periods of

controlling the game through retaining possession — something that has not been seen by Boro fans since the club were chasing promotion from the Nationwide League.

To look on the bright side, given the grim state of our respective defences, there should be plenty of goals when Boro and Leicester meet later this month.

I imagine that there are an awful lot of hardly-used season tickets available at knock-down prices on Teesside at present.

SHAUN KEOGH
shaunkeogh@aol.com



Steve McClaren has only been Middlesbrough manager for a few weeks, but already the team has packed a lot of misery into a small space of time

FANTASY TIP

No points, no goals from three matches, with seven goals conceded. Save your money, even if it is of the Fantasy variety. See also Leicester City.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"In football two days is a long time and a week is a very long time"

Steve McClaren hopes for a swift turnaround in his side's fortunes