



THE RIVERDANCE

It's a little known fact that David Sullivan's *Sunday Sport* printed the famous spoof headline "NUMBER 9 BUS FOUND ON THE MOON" a few years ago in preference to the equally ridiculous "EURO BORO MOVE TO BRAND NEW ALL-SEATER STADIUM - TOP BRAZILIAN SIGNING IMMINENT" This was scrapped because the story about the bus was at least vaguely possible.

The only part of the 'Boro headline that was considered to carry any credibility was the implication of European football, but this was mostly on the strength of possible qualification for the Anglo Italian Cup, which rather muted the effect. And the last time that a Brazilian came to Middlesbrough was as a crew member of a visiting ship when the docks were open.

It's interesting that Juninho was welcomed to Teesside by a salsa band. Where were they dragged up from?

I can picture, about ten years ago, someone shuffling wearily out of Ayresome Park after yet

another depressing home defeat to the likes of Huddersfield or Carlisle. Instead of going home to his family's bosom, he found himself in an ever darker mood being drawn to the top of the Transporter and the end of his pain...

He surveyed the Teesside landscape. Chimneys. Cranes.

Clouds of smoke. Depressing, delapidated Victorian architecture and a town broken by harsh economic strife along with a football team about to plunge into the Third Division with financial disaster racing up behind in the fast lane.

As he stands at the edge of oblivion with a force six off the

Tees urging him off balance and stinging rain biting his face, he thinks: "What this town needs... is a SALSA BAND!!"

I can eventually come to terms with the fact that 'Boro have pulled off an unbelievably audacious coup in signing Juninho but a Salsa band? In Middlesbrough? Get real.

A taste of glory...

Stevenage Borough are holding their own very capably in the Conference, and they are only 12 miles away from me, so I braved a wet Monday night recently to see them win most convincingly (5-1) against Kettering Town.

Whilst scanning through the Kettering players named in the programme, I noticed among them one Ian Arnold, and a few bells rang. The notes confirmed that he was indeed the young ex-'Boro lad of the same name.

I managed to contact him and arranged a meeting after Kettering's next home match, against Slough, in which Arnold was named as substitute.

Ian Arnold made only three League and one cup appearance for Boro, all as substitute. However, he had worked his way up through the juniors and reserves, but, unable to command a first team place, he moved to Carlisle who came in for him following 'Boro's promotion season of 1991-92. He scored 11 goals in 47 league games for Carlisle, and was instrumental in getting them into the Division Three play-offs in 93-94, as he scored 4 goals in their last five games.

Following promotion, Carlisle brought in the more experienced Rod Thomas (ex-Watford) and ex-'Boro, Darlo, Barnsley, Forest, Oldham, Barnsley (again), Rotherham (loan), and Huddersfield (loan) loyal club servant David Currie, and Arnold was struggling to get his game.

After a loan period with Stalybridge Celtic where he apparently scored a very creditable 8 goals in only 10 games, Kettering Town approached Carlisle with a bid of £10,000, which was accepted in December 1994.

He struck up a good partnership with Ian Alford at Kettering, scoring 14 goals in his first 29 matches, including the first hat-trick by a Kettering player since 1991. During last season, he appeared for England Semi-pro, debuting against Wales. However, following

Ketterings' appointment of Gary Johnson (ex-Cambridge United) as manager at the beginning of this season, Arnold has found that he is not part of his new managers' jigsaw.

When I spoke to Arnold after the Slough game, he told me that he had just (as in five minutes ago) been told by Johnson that he was on the transfer list, so he wasn't in the best of spirits. I didn't probe; his thoughts were obviously elsewhere.

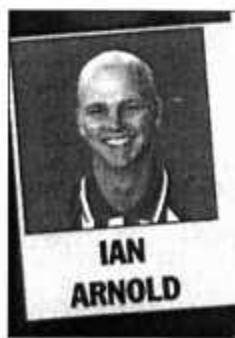
During his time at Kettering, Arnold has bumped into some other ex-'Boro players who are still slogging it out in the Conference - notably Peter Davenport, who is at Southport, and Trevor Senior (whose goal against Chelsea in 1988 was instrumental in 'Boros play-off success) who is now at Farnborough.

When and if he does move on I should think that he'll want to get a bit nearer his native Carlisle - from where, incredibly, he commutes to digs in Cambridge three times a week to fulfill his commitment to Kettering.

The moral of this story is that every one of us who follows 'Boro or football in general at one time thought we had what it takes to make it in the professional game. Most of us knew by our mid-teens that we were not going to make the

grade, and it is a hard enough pill to swallow, even at such a young age. But some get just a taste of glory (Arnold's 'Boro debut was in front of 18,000 at Ayresome, playing alongside Mogga, Bernie and Rippers in the 3-0 win over Newcastle in March 1991) before realisation dawns, by which time the feelings of hurt and rejection must make it very hard to take.

Ian Arnold's career as a professional footballer is by no means over; he is only 23 years old, and 32 goals in 69 games (Carlisle & Kettering combined) is not the record of a loser. But I certainly do not envy him the uncertainty and sheer grind he now faces.



IAN ARNOLD

Keogh's korker Boro have been featured three times on *News At Ten*, most recently to mark Juninho's introduction at Riverside. Name the two other occasions. *Answer on page 19*

"If only..."

"If only..." These were the first words we had to learn from the time that we became Boro fans. These words and our despairing natural cynicism to protect us from the disasters experienced when hopes were raised in the past should be packed away in the loft along with our Commodore 64's and our digital watches. These days are gone. The only time this year that I will consider gently mouthing those words is if Boro just miss out on qualifying for Europe. Now that's the sort of disappointment I can relish.

Close for...

Following the Alan Comfort interview in the last issue of **mss**, I note that he was partly responsible for some congestion at Brisbane Road on the opening day of the season. A bit of an interesting one this, because the problem was caused, not as is usual, by people trying to get out after ten minutes of the second half, but by people trying to get IN - before the kick-off, too. Honest.

The reason was that the Rev. Alan was officiating at the wedding of two O's fans on the pitch just before the game. The average gate at Orient (for whom I have a soft spot, due to family connections) is about 5,000. However, this unique occasion rocketed the gate to a most respectful 8,221, and the kick-off had to be delayed for ten minutes to get everyone into the ground safely.

If I was Barry Hearn, I'd farm all of Orient's players out to Barry Fry (I understand his first team squad is now as pitifully low as 45), offer Alan Comfort a retainer of twenty grand a year, and use Brisbane Road just for weddings.



HELLO GORDON...

The Leeds United team of 1974-75 were undoubtedly a bunch of hard men. Drooling desperadoes such as Joe Jordan, Norman Hunter and Terry Yorath sneer back at the club cameraman as they chew their allocated portion of broken glass. But who is that in the middle of the back row? Step (or skip) forward Boro reserve team coach, Gordon McQueen.

These days McQueen cuts a pretty fearsome figure himself. I'm just hoping that one of the Boro reserve team gets a copy of this magazine and puts a blow up of the photograph on the notice board at the Riverside...