



The fixtures are fixed

Well, the truth has to come out sooner or later, and now is as good a time as any. The mighty computer responsible for putting together the fixture lists was hacked into by a Boro fan's Commodore 64 machine (under 35s, ask your dad) while the matches for this season were being compiled. The cunning thinking behind this is that since Boro traditionally fall apart during December, why not give them the toughest run of games possible during this period? After all, if you are going to lose, you may as well lose to the best — or in the case of Newcastle, most in-form — teams in the country. The play



EMPICS

worked beautifully and, in fact, if there was any justice, Boro would have taken a point at Arsenal. However, because some Boro fans are still in rehab from celebrating the win at Highbury last season, an Arsenal win was allegedly ordered from the highest government department on the grounds of public health. Boro now

Gareth Southgate had a solid enough month despite Boro's four-game losing streak

have four more points than they had after the same number of games last season. Their performances this season suggest that they are likely to win more than the five they won after Christmas last year, especially as one of these is already in the bag. A better new year present than beating Everton could not be wished for. Therefore, barring a disaster, this writer really does not see relegation as a threat.

After last month's TFH, I received e-mails from Boro fans berating me for suggesting that Boro would do well to end the year with more than 21 points. The letters were particularly disparaging since by the end of the day that the TFH was issued, (December 8) Boro were sitting pretty with 19 points with a further five games (15 potential points) still to play in 2001. Granted, one of these was postponed, but after that it took until New Year's Day for the next points to be won. I just hate people who say "I told you so." But I told you so.

SHAUN KEOGH
shaunkeogh@aol.com

RESULTS

December 1
Blackburn Rovers (a) Won 1-0
(4-4-2): Crossley - Cooper, Southgate, Ehiogu, Queudrue (Gavin 60) - Marinelli (Wilson 77), Mustoe, Greening, Johnston - Boksic (Windass 86), Nemeth
Scorer: **Boksic** 45
Booked: **Cooper**
Referee: **B Knight**
Attendance: **23,849**
Position: **14th**

December 8
Liverpool (a) Lost 2-0
(4-4-2): Crossley (Beresford 19) - Cooper, Ehiogu, Southgate, Queudrue - Greening, Ince, Mustoe, Johnston (Wilson 46) - Nemeth (Ricard 46), Boksic
Booked: **Queudrue, Cooper**
Referee: **D Gallagher**
Attendance: **43,674**
Position: **15th**

December 15
Manchester United (h) Lost 1-0
(4-4-2): Crossley - Stockdale, Ehiogu, Southgate, Queudrue - Marinelli, Mustoe, Ince, Greening - Ricard (Whelan 64), Boksic
Booked: **Queudrue, Ince**
Referee: **D Elleray**
Attendance: **34,358**
Position: **16th**

December 26
Newcastle United (a) Lost 3-0
(4-4-1-1): Crossley - Stockdale, Ehiogu, Southgate, Queudrue - Greening, Ince, Mustoe, Whelan (Campbell 46) - Marinelli (Okon 81) - Boksic (Ricard 81)
Booked: **Ehiogu**
Referee: **M Halsey**
Attendance: **52,127**
Position: **16th**

December 29
Arsenal (a) Lost 2-1
(4-4-2): Crossley - Stockdale, Ehiogu (Cooper 59), Southgate, Queudrue - Marinelli (Johnston 69), Ince, Mustoe, Greening - Ricard, Whelan (Campbell 76)
Scorer: **Whelan** 22
Booked: **Greening, Ricard, Ince, Queudrue**
Referee: **A D'Urso**
Attendance: **37,948**
Position: **16th**

FIXTURES

Today: Fulham (a)
Jan 19: Bolton Wanderers (h)
Jan 29: Sunderland (a)
Feb 2: Charlton Athletic (h)

ATTENDANCES

Season's average: **29,580 (12th)**

opta
OPTA STATS

PLAYER OF THE MONTH

Index score

Robbie Mustoe	660
Gareth Southgate	650
Franck Queudrue	648
Ugo Ehiogu	630
Paul Ince	596

GOALS

Left-foot	0
Right-foot	2
Headed	0



JUST FANCY STAT

- 2** Middlesbrough scored **fewer goals** in December than any other team
- 26** **Shots attempted** by Steve McClaren's team in five games last month — fewer than any other Premiership side
- 16** **Tackles won** by Franck Queudrue, more than any of his team-mates
- 7** Alen Boksic's meagre **shot total** was still more than any of his fellow Middlesbrough players
- 142** Robbie Mustoe made more **successful passes** than any of his team-mates

WEBSITES

Official: www.mfc.co.uk Fansites: www.mfc.org.uk www.middlesbrough.mad.net

MOBILE TIMES SMS SERVICE Get Boro full-time scores, half-time scores and goal flashes sent directly to your mobile phone from *The Times*. Call 0870 900 8672 to register