



# Whelan meet again

**W**HEEELAN! A strange one is this for Teessiders. When Bryan Robson signed Noel Whelan in the summer of 2000, the name sent a shiver down the spine of Boro fans.

Memories were still fresh of one Phil Whelan, also signed by Robson. That Whelan was completely out of his depth in the top division seven seasons ago, and was unable to shake off the 'donkey' tag he quickly acquired. So hearing the Boro fans joyfully sing this name is quite bizarre. The last time it was said out loud at a Middlesbrough match it was through gritted teeth and usually preceded by an adjective beginning with the letter 'f'.

Noel Whelan has been at the Boro long enough to win a reputation (good or bad) but one rather important factor has impeded this. He has featured in so few

games, that nobody really knows how good he is. During last season, his first at the Riverside, he only started 13 games and failed to score, although in fairness he was not playing in the attacking role that he is currently filling.

This term, he has played eight league games and scored five goals. He is starting to look a snip at £2 million.

The drop kicking of Manchester United's FA Cup hopes into the cold waters of the Tees was given perspective by the tragic death that same evening of Colin Cooper's young son. For this

writer, the memory of that match will be forever tinged with sadness.

The win against Manchester United gave the players belief and confidence, which they took into the Sunderland game. Boro proceeded to complete the double over their close rivals in a game which could mark the turning point of their Premiership season. Sunderland's goal machine Kevin Phillips still holds the record of scoring against every Premiership club. Except Boro.

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Crossley has been solid at the back, but, unusually, Whelan is the name on most Middlesbrough fans' lips

**opta**  
opta stats

**PLAYER OF THE MONTH**

	Index score
Mark Crossley	1,289
Gareth Southgate	1,064
Paul Ince	1,008
Franck Queudrue	990
Gianluca Festa	853

Crossley, who spent 13 years at Nottingham Forest, has had limited first-team opportunities at the Riverside, but made the most of a sustained run in the team in January.

**opta**  
opta stats

**JUST FANCY STAT**

- 2** Clean sheets kept in January — best in the Premiership
- 30** Middlesbrough used more **players** last month than any other side
- 11-2** Noel Whelan had more **shots** and **goals** than any of his team-mates
- 11** **Premiership games** without more than one goal
- 7** If injury-hit Alen Boksic were paid in **minutes** for his January contribution, he would be out of pocket. Nevertheless, he has scored twice as many goals as any Middlesbrough player this season

### FIXTURES

January 1  
**Everton (h)** Won 1-0  
(4-4-2): Crossley - Stockdale, Festa, Southgate, Queudrue (Stamp 62) - Marinelli (Boksic 82), Ince, Mustoe, Greening (Gavin 46) - Ricard, Whelan  
Scorer: **Festa** 50  
Booked: **Gavin**  
Referee: **R Styles**  
Attendance: **27,463**  
Position: **16th**

January 12  
**Fulham (a)** Lost 2-1  
(4-4-2): Crossley - Stockdale, Festa, Southgate, Cooper - Marinelli (Nemeth 79), Ince, Mustoe, Greening (Windass 68) - Ricard (Stamp 51), Whelan  
Scorer: **Cooper** 8  
Booked: **Ince, Windass**  
Referee: **M Dean**  
Attendance: **18,975**  
Position: **17th**

January 19  
**Bolton Wanderers (h)** Drew 1-1  
(4-4-2): Crossley - Stockdale, Ehiogu, Southgate, Queudrue (Cooper 39) - Marinelli, Ince, Greening, Johnston (Mustoe 73) - Nemeth (Windass 60), Whelan  
Scorer: **Whelan** 38  
Booked: **Marinelli**  
Referee: **G Poll**  
Attendance: **26,104**  
Position: **18th**

**GOALS**

Left-foot	1
Right-foot	2
Headed	1

January 29  
**Sunderland (a)** Won 1-0  
(3-5-2): Crossley - Gavin, Southgate, Festa - Stockdale, Stamp (Mustoe), Ince, Greening, Queudrue - Whelan (Campbell 82), Windass (Gordon 55)  
Scorer: **Whelan** 14  
Booked: **Greening, Whelan**  
Sent off: **Festa**  
Referee: **P Durkin**  
Attendance: **44,579**  
Position: **14th**

### FIXTURES

Today  
**Leeds** (h)

February 23  
**West Ham United** (a)

March 2  
**Leicester City** (h)

March 6  
**Southampton** (a)

### CROWD SCENE

Season average **29,020 (14th)**

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