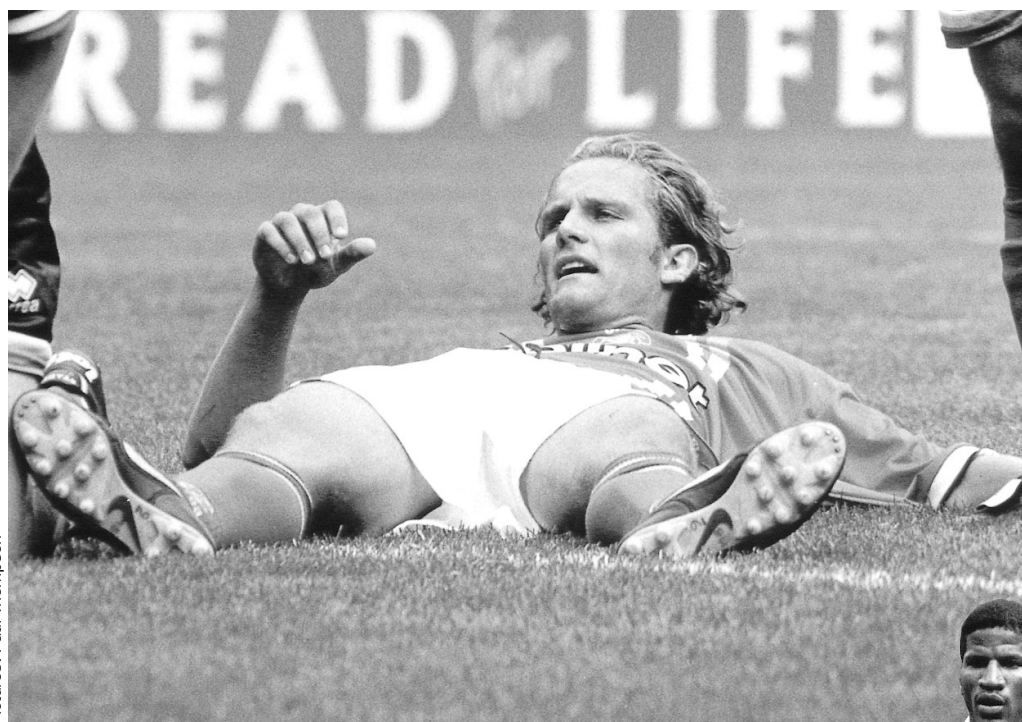


The club asked fans to name their favourite players from the Riverside's seven years – the 'Riverside Rovers'. **SHAUN KEOGH** had another idea...

WHAT ABOUT THE WORST?



Pictures: Paul Thompson

Far better to pick out the no-hopers that we have had to endure, to make up what I am calling the 'Riverside Bloaters'. Here's my selection; you will no doubt have your own favourite nightmare players and particular moments that they produced to make you want to bury them up to their necks in concrete. If you disagree with my choices, send me your choices.

1. Andy Dibble

Before Paul Readman points it out to me, Dibble would not technically be selected for this team, as he never got as far as playing at the Riverside. Made his Boro debut in what turned out to also be his penultimate game for the club. Dibble was brought in at short notice during a goalkeeper injury crisis, and Boro were top of the Nationwide Division 1 before this game (1st March 1998). The subsequent 0-4 defeat at Nottingham Forest was a shock to the system. Still, no pressure, debut nerves and all that. Dibble's opportunity to put things right came at QPR three days later. This time we lost 0-5.

As I recall, Julie Yates' son was inconsolable for weeks afterwards, he was the Boro mascot that night. Nine goals conceded in two games, more that Schwarzer had let in in the previous 10 League games. Nightmare.

2. Curtis Fleming

A controversial choice for some, but I always felt he was out of his depth in the Premier League, and was caught in possession and out of position too much.

3. Chris Morris

Actually, not that bad a player, even though he had seen better days before coming to Boro. However, he makes my selection for purely personal reasons. I interviewed Morris for **mss** 118 in 1997, and was subsequently on the guest list for the party immediately after his testimonial match a few days after the interview was published. He made it clear that he was not happy with the published article because I took the piss in a very gentle way about one of his business interests. I said if I intended to be nasty I would not have cut the quote by Jack Charlton which I used in the

interview. Jack said some very nice things about Chris, all of which I used but I cut off the last sentence, which is typical Jack: "Mind you, he can't pass for toffees."

4. Christian Karembeu

Can he pass it? No he can't. Nightmare. Massive salary. And we wonder where the money went?

5. Phil Whelan

Eeh-orr. Now at Southend. About two miles further east would be better, as I understand donkeys cannot swim. Who can forget his dreadful conduct and consequent sending off at Southampton in 1996? Nightmare.

6. Branco

Big bloke, big reputation, big punch (ask Bryan Robson), big salary. Made six full appearances for the Boro over a six month period (including three months close season). Finished on the winning side just once, drawing a salary of about £20,000 a week no doubt. And we wonder where the money went? Nightmare.

7. Gazza

Perhaps a bit contentious for the many Gazza fans out there, but he was a luxury we could not afford, either on or off the pitch. Cost over £3.45m, and we had to let him go on a free because that was all he was worth. Salary about £30,000 a week or more. And we wonder where the money went? Nightmare.

8. Paul Okon

Well out of his depth in the Premier. Last heard of at Watford.

9. Mikkel Beck (left)

Now, I know that I am on rather dodgy ground to be criticising anybody's haircut. But at least mine is more faded 1970s rock star than cross-dressing German lesbian. Beck could run a bit, but fell over at the merest hint of a tackle. Over-rated, no doubt on big salary. And we wonder where the money went?

10. Hamilton Ricard (left)

Yes, he did score goals, but nowhere near as many as a fit player in his position would have done. He was no team player either; never saw him tracking back because he can't run.

Poor first touch; not Premier League class at all.

11. Gary Pallister

OK, I know I am playing him well out of position, but it doesn't matter because he never played anyway. Why on earth did we pay £2.5m for a player who had a zero sell-on value and whose best years were well behind him? Oh, he was carrying a back injury too. We can't blame Gary for signing – he is a Boro lad coming home after a wonderful career, but really, what a waste of good money that could have been spent on someone a bit younger with a sell-on potential. Massive salary. And we wonder where the money went?

● shaunkeogh@aol.com

