



## Fangs for the memory!

**W**ith all of the hoo-har following Boro's signing of yet another World Cup winner in the form of our very own Osvaldo Giraldo, it was good to see another of Boro's World Cup winners resurface briefly in the form of Nobby Stiles, who normally plays a very low profile indeed.

Stiles was signed by Stan Anderson in May 1971, and his capture was one of several during Anderson's period who was seen as being the icing on the cake, the player who was going to help Boro make that leap into the top division. Other players set to carry the same tag were the wonderful Hughie McIlmoyle and John Craggs. Only Craggsie made it in the end.

Indeed, and this is absolutely true, I remember that such a coup for Boro was the signing of World Cup Winner Nobby, that it actually made the *News at Ten*.

Anyway, it seems that Nobby, who turned 60 in May has been in poor health, suffering a serious heart attack during the summer. However, Stiles was noted as a player for his uncompromising attitude and making the best of what he had. If he didn't get the ball, he got the man; not you understand because of any vicious intention. Oh no, Nobby's eyesight was so bad that he used to deliberately go for the space between the man and the ball; that way he had half a chance of getting something.

Speaking with my erstwhile *Times* colleague and fellow cockney git Danny Baker, Nobby, said that his heart attack "Could not have been better timed". This is because it happened at the outset of the World Cup. Now, Nobby is married to Johnny Giles' sister, and she hates football, so he isn't allowed to watch it at home.

So there was Nobby, in a private room in a hospital, TV remote in hand, enjoying what he described as "my best World Cup ever, or at least, the best one that I weren't playing in".

This got me thinking in a very cynical way that Nobby had perhaps exaggerated his heart attack symptoms because he knew that if he could get into hospital he could watch the World Cup in peace. It must have taken months of planning. Furthermore, if his wife's cooking is anywhere near as bad as my wife's was (Q: "I say darling, what is this unusual yet piquant sauce nestling beneath these undercooked chips?" A: "Lard") he will also have been grateful for the food.

**M**y light-hearted look at some of the Riverside's less celebrated players in the last issue really got some of you thinking – and talking, which was of course the intention. The magazine hit the streets in the days leading up to the opening of the season at Southampton, and I was colared by six or more different people before, during and after the game. The guy sitting next to me at the match waited until half-time before asking why did I have this player in instead of that player. (I can't remember the specifics) Later, as I was leaving the stadium Paul Readman and



Gerard Walker told me that the group travelling down on the train had a boisterous discussion about who should or should not have been on the list.

Paul had a fair point (as usual – the b\*\*\*\*\*) in asking how I could leave out Craig Liddle. Several people e-mailed to ask how I could possibly leave out Jon Gittens, who clearly made a few enemies. Well it's because the closest he got to showing his exquisite movement at the Riverside was when he was offered the job of hod carrier at the stadiums' construction. Allegedly. Still, at least the useless stone legged dinosaur scored a goal that helped Boro get promoted at Wolves in '92.

The most contentious player I listed was Curtis Fleming, and I openly admit I only put him in to be provocative; I wanted people to be a bit outraged and to respond, and that certainly worked. So – sorry, Curt. (This is where I put my hands in the air and turn my face to the side in an apologetic manner in the same way as Curt does when his planned precision pass into the box ends up in row ZZ)

Not suprisingly, the only choices that nobody objected to were Dibble, Branco and Whelan. (Put 'Ltd' after that lot and it could be a firm of solicitors). Anyway, all we need now is someone old enough to do a similar piece for the underperforming players who graced Ayresome. Anyone got Roy Chatto's number?

**I** was speaking to Ray Robertson again recently (he of the *Northern Echo*, not the *Sunday Sun* as I wrongly stated in a previous issue). He said that he was interested in Paul Thompson's interview with Kelham O'Hanlon in the last issue. It reminded Ray of a story doing the rounds when Kelham was playing for the Boro under Malcolm Allison. Apparently, Kelham received a so-called IRA death threat.

For those of us old enough to remember those times, this sort of thing would have had most people running for the nearest airport. However, Mal used it as a tool to ease pressure off Kelham at a time when the team were going through the eternal bad spell that lasted through all of Mal's cash-strapped reign at Ayresome. Apparently, at a post-match interview, Allison rounded on the IRA, blaming the death threat for Kelham's disappointing performance and a home defeat.

Now correct me if I am wrong, but is that the only excuse that Bryan Robson didn't use? ■

**Clearly, Mr Whelan is someone who likes to plan for the future. I was somewhere in the midlands when I saw this vehicle. Wonder if they offer a pony express service?**

**I am off to the States in the new year and have arranged to meet former Boro player David Chadwick in Atlanta. A virtual ever-present in the 1966-67 promotion season, he made his debut the same day as John O'Rourke, and left the club in 1970. If you would like to ask David any questions, please email me**

**Left: Nobby at Boro: get your teeth out for the lads**

