

Dedication

For my wife, Jennifer, who is my soulmate and best friend.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my wife, Jennifer, for her unwavering patience, and to my PA, Chris, for his constant, practical help.

In addition, I'd like to thank my long-term friend and former Middlesbrough striker, David Hodgson, for writing the Foreword for this book and former Boro goalkeeper Jim Platt for supplying the photograph for the back cover and for writing his 'Comment' piece.

I'd also like to say a massive thank you to a few special friends for their support along the way. Especially: Ian Carter, Roger Martin, Mark Forster, Stephen Lowson and John Gray.

All five of them have been with me through thick and thin, and for that I'm extremely grateful.

Foreword

By:

David Hodgson

To be asked to write the foreword for another incredible book by Paul Hodgson is a true privilege.

Having written so many definitive works on Darlington FC, Paul has now taken on the great challenge of exploring the deep-rooted connection between Darlington and Middlesbrough FC.

Countless players have made the journey along the A66 (the road that separates these towns) between these two clubs, both of which remain incredibly close to my heart.

Only Paul could weave together this history so effectively; this is truly a must-buy for both sets of fans.

Best wishes

David Hodgson

Former Middlesbrough player (twice) and Darlington Manager (three times).

Comment

By:

Jim Platt

I have known Paul for several years through my association with Darlington Football Club. Paul is an avid fan of The Quakers, having supported them through thick and thin times. Mostly the latter, I'm afraid.

I have to say. Paul also keeps a keen eye on Middlesbrough, up the road, and, without being disrespectful to Darlington, has a bigger profile. With this in mind, he has compiled his 10 most popular players from each decade, dating back to the 1970s.

Fans obviously have their own opinions on their favourite 10 players and, like me, would've picked some different ones.

However, at the end of the day, it is Paul's choice, and he has his own reasons for choosing the players he did.

I'm really pleased that he chose me as one of his favourite 10 from the 1970s. It is quite an honour!

I hope you enjoy the read and get lots of pleasure out of picking your own favourites after reading this book.

Best wishes

Jim Platt

Middlesbrough FC (1971-1983)

Introduction

I'm sure people's memories as Middlesbrough fans are filled with just as much drama and rollercoaster moments – your club more than most – and that are what I've tried to capture in this book, as well as the history of the club from the 1970s to 2019.

While most of the players you would expect to find in a collection such as this are indeed here, there are a few others that might evoke some raised eyebrows and a couple that might even raise the question, 'Why?' Well, there's a reason behind each one. Some may be more obvious than others.

In addition, reading the happenings from each decade will no doubt evoke some memories, some good, some bad, just like most football clubs up and down the country.

I hope you enjoy reading about a few players who might otherwise have been forgotten and confined to a stat in a history book.

I reckon the next few years will probably yield another forty or so new lads who could live happily in this book.

However, here are fifty that should certainly stick in my memory banks for one reason or another.

Enjoy the book, and many thanks for purchasing it.

Chapter One

A Brief History of the 1970s

Middlesbrough Football Club started the 1970s with many years of hope but also many letdowns. Since its start in 1876, the club had many ups and downs.

By the late 1960s, they were stuck in the Second Division. They had a history and big dreams, but they were inconsistent and had less money than other clubs.

Their stadium, Ayresome Park, was a very special place. The atmosphere gave the players a boost, helping them win many a game.

This made the difference between having a good week and a bad week for the fans who went to the games. Their football club was everything to them.

At the start of the 1970s, the club was stable and had many fans, but it was not strong enough to reach the top tier of English football.

The 1970/71 season showed this. They finished mid-table, not winning much but not losing many games either.

The team worked hard and played with grit, matching the local area's industrial roots. They were strong at home but often lost when playing away.

John Hickton was the star player. The rest of the team were hard workers but not famous stars.

This meant they lacked some magic, but they were reliable. The 1971/72 season was similar. They finished in the top half but were nowhere near promotion. They drew too many games and were still weak on the road.

During the 1972/73 season, the team did a lot better. The players were working better together.

The club did not change the whole team; instead, it focused on small improvements and a team identity based on hard work. Fans were frustrated but could see a plan starting to work.

Everything changed when Jack Charlton became the manager. He was a World Cup winner who brought authority and a clear goal. He believed in organisation and teamwork.

He made the defence very strong and used set pieces, such as corners, to score goals. Some people thought his style was too simple, but it worked perfectly.

In the 1973/74 season, Middlesbrough were the best team in the league.

They were consistent and hard to beat. Ayresome Park was a fortress, and they started winning away games too. The team won the Second Division by a wide margin and were promoted to the First Division.

The people of Teesside were very proud. The celebration was a victory for the whole town after years of waiting.

In the 1974/75 season, the team was back in the top league. Many thought they would struggle, but they were wrong.

They finished in seventh place, which was amazing for a new team. They were not scared of big clubs and earned respect across the country. Jack Charlton's style became the heart of the club.

The 1975/76 season was harder in the league, but the club won the Anglo-Scottish Cup. This was their first-ever professional trophy.

It proved they could win in big competitions and rewarded the loyal fans. For the rest of the 1970s, the club stayed in the First Division. They were not at the very top, but they were safe and respected.

Stuart Boam was a key leader during this time. As a strong defender and captain, he showed the loyalty and commitment that fans loved.

He helped keep the team together. The 1978/79 season followed this pattern of staying safe in the top league.

While they did not have much money to buy new stars, they remained a solid team.

Off the field, the 1970s were tough for the local area because of job losses and economic problems. The football club became a source of pride and a way for people to feel connected.

Going to games gave people a sense of belonging during hard times.

Looking back, the 1970s changed the club. They went from a middle-tier team to a respected top-flight club with a clear identity. This was thanks to the leadership of Jack Charlton and players like John Hickton and Stuart Boam.

They proved that hard work and unity could bring success to both the team and the community.

Chapter Two

Ten Memorable Players from the 1970s

David Armstrong.

David grew up in the north of England (Durham), which meant being part of a strong working-class culture where football was extremely important to everyone.

From a very young age, it was clear that he had a special talent for the game. He was not just a very skilful player; he also had a very strong mind for the game.

He understood where to stand and how to help his teammates. He was also very hardworking, a trait he kept throughout his entire life.

David was known for being very fit and playing in many games without ever getting injured during his best years, which earned him the nickname ‘Spike’.

He started his professional journey at Middlesbrough as a teenager. The midfielder joined the club as a schoolboy because they saw how much potential he had.

David signed his professional terms in 1971 when he was just 17 years old.

Even though he was very young, he still played with great skill and energy.

Armstrong made his first-team debut in April 1972. People watching the game noticed right away that he was very calm for a teenager.

Even at such a young age, he did not get nervous when playing against grown men who were much older and stronger than he was.

Although he was not a giant, he had excellent balance and could run for the full 90 minutes without getting fatigued.

During the early 1970s, Middlesbrough were a team that were trying to improve.

This began when the club hired Jack Charlton as manager.

Jack was a World Cup winner and a very strict leader. He built a team that was disciplined and hard to beat.

David was a perfect player for this system because he followed instructions and never stopped running.

Under Charlton, Middlesbrough won the Second Division title in 1974; the following season, they would be playing in the top tier of English football.

A highly respected memory of his time at Middlesbrough was his toughness and health.

He had a run of games that is almost impossible to comprehend today. David played in 305 consecutive league games. If you count cup games and other matches, he played 358 games for the club without missing a single one.

This is a record that people still talk about today because modern players often get injured or need to rest.

He stayed at the club for ten years in total. During that decade, he played 431 times and scored 77 goals. The Boro fans loved him due to his dedication to their club.

Armstrong was a complete midfielder who could do everything.

In football, some players prefer to attack, and some prefer to defend, but David was good at both. He could defend well by tackling and stopping the other team, and he could also score many goals by running into the box at the right time. He was very good at passing the ball accurately to the strikers.

Because he played so well for so long, he was finally selected for the England national team. This is the highest honour for any player.

He represented his country three times between 1980 and 1984. Although he did not play many games for his country, his

performances showed that he was one of the best players of his generation.

In 1981, his time at Middlesbrough came to an end. He moved to Southampton for a club-record fee of £600,000, a sizeable sum in those days.

Some people wondered if he could play as well for a new club after being at one place for so long, but he proved them wrong immediately. He did extremely well at Southampton, scoring 15 goals in his first season.

This was a great number of goals for a midfielder. He was playing in a very good team that included fellow internationals such as Kevin Keegan and Alan Ball.

He helped Southampton finish in second place in the league in 1984. They were chasing Liverpool for the title and came close to winning it. Finishing second was the highest the club had ever ended up in its history. David played a huge role in that success, providing leadership and experience.

The fans at the Dell, Southampton's old stadium, loved him for his work rate.

He was named Southampton's Player of the Season that year, which shows how much the club and its supporters respected him.

During his six years with the club on the south coast, he played 272 games and scored 71 goals. He was just as much a legend there as he was at Middlesbrough.

As he got older, David had to change how he played. He was not as fast, so he used his intelligence to stay in the right positions.

However, later in his career, he started to have serious problems with his ankles.

Years of playing every single game on hard pitches had started to take a toll on his body.

He joined AFC Bournemouth in 1987. He hoped to help the club with his vast experience, but sadly, his body would not let him.

He could only play nine games for his new club because of his injuries.

It was a sad way for his playing days to end. He had many operations to try to fix his ankles, but eventually, he had to accept the fact that his playing days were over.

He retired from professional football in 1988.

By the end of his amazing career, he had played nearly 600 league matches and scored over 100 goals.

After he finished playing, life was sometimes hard for him. It was difficult for footballers to find a job after they retired.

He did not become a big-time manager, but he stayed busy. He worked as a salesman for a while to support his family. He also worked as a community officer for football clubs such as Reading and AFC Bournemouth.

In these roles, he helped young people and local fans connect with their clubs.

He also found a new career in radio, working as a match commentator for Southampton games, where he used his deep knowledge of the game to explain what was happening to listeners.

He was very popular on the radio because he was honest and kind.

Armstrong even wrote a book about his life called *The Bald Facts*. In it, he talked about his career, his records, and the struggles he faced after football.

David was always a very humble man who did not act like a big star. He preferred to be around ordinary people and talk about football.

Sadly, David Armstrong died on August 21, 2022, at the age of 67.

When news of his death was announced, there was widespread sadness in the football world.

Middlesbrough and Southampton both held special tributes for him. Players wore black armbands, and fans clapped to show their respect.

Former teammates spoke about how he was the heartbeat of the team and a true professional. People at Middlesbrough, Southampton, and AFC Bournemouth remember him as a hard-working player who always gave his best for his team.

His legacy is one of being a true professional. He proved that if you work hard, take care of your body, and play for the team rather than yourself, you can achieve great things.

He is still remembered as one of the best players ever to wear the red shirt of Middlesbrough and the red-and-white stripes of Southampton.

Even though he is no longer with us, football fans in the places he played will never forget ‘Spike’ Armstrong and his incredible record of playing game after game without ever giving up. He was a man of the people and a true legend of the English game.

David Armstrong’s Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

From March 1972 until August 1980, David played in 305 consecutive league matches and 358 games in all competitions. Quite an achievement!

John Craggs

John Craggs was born in a small village named Flint Hill in County Durham in the North-East of England.

This part of England is famous for its deep love of football. From a very young age, John showed the traits that would make him a great professional footballer. He was very disciplined and determined. He also had a natural ability to defend.

When he played for his school teams and local park teams, he practised hard as a fullback. He learned that being a good defender is not just about being strong. It is also about where you stand on the pitch, when you choose to tackle, and how you think about the game.

Because he showed great promise, Newcastle United invited him to join their youth team.

This was the start of his long journey in professional football. In the middle of the 1960s.

Newcastle United had a very good environment for young players. There were many experienced older players who could teach the younger ones. John worked hard and made steady progress through

the ranks. He finally played his first game for the main team during the 1966/67 season.

Over the next five years, he played 52 league games for Newcastle United. He even managed to score one goal.

During this time, he also played in European competitions, including the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup. Even though there were many good defenders ahead of him in the squad, he used this time to learn. Over time, he built a reputation for being reliable and professional.

In 1971, John moved to Middlesbrough for a fee of £60,000, which was a lot of money at that time and was a record for Middlesbrough to pay for a player.

This move was the start of the most important part of his career. Middlesbrough wanted to return to the top tier in English football.

John immediately became their regular right back. He was very solid at defending, but he also went forward to help the attackers when he could.

Fans liked him because he always seemed to be in the right place at the right time. He was very fit and played almost every single game. For the next eleven years, he was the heart of the Middlesbrough defence. He helped them play in both the Second Division and the First Division.

One of the best moments in his time at Middlesbrough was during the 1973/74 season.

The team played incredibly well and won the Second Division title by an incredible 15 points.

John was a huge part of that success. Because he was so reliable, the rest of the team felt safe and stable. He did not score many goals, but he had a very long throw-in that helped the team attack.

The fans admired him because he was consistent every single week. He became a symbol of what a professional footballer should be like.

By the time he left Middlesbrough, John had played 409 league games and scored 12 goals. If you count all the different cup games, he played 488 times for the club.

This made him one of the club's most prolific players in history.

He stayed at the top for a long time because he could adapt. Even when the managers changed, John kept working hard. He understood how to use his body to stop opponents and how to find space to help his teammates. Craggs was a very intelligent player who knew how to handle the pressure of the 1970s and 1980s.

John was also very well-liked because he was part of the local community. He lived in the Teesside area and lived a quiet, modest life. The fans saw him as one of their own. They respected his skill on the pitch but also his loyalty to the region.

In 1982, Middlesbrough gave him a testimonial match to mark his 12 years of service. They played against his old team, Newcastle United. It was a perfect way to celebrate everything he had done for the club.

After leaving Middlesbrough, John returned to Newcastle United for a short time. He played twelve games during the 1982/83 season.

By this time, he was an older player with a lot of wisdom. He was valued for his ability to lead the younger players and show them how to behave.

His second stint at Newcastle United allowed him to look back on how far he had come. He had started there as a nervous teenager and returned as a proven professional.

After Newcastle, he moved to Darlington.

He spent the last two years of his playing career there. Even though he was getting older, he was still very reliable.

John played 54 league games for Darlington. He helped the team stay calm during difficult matches. While he was at Darlington, he began learning to be a coach.

He became a player-coach under Cyril Knowles, who was the manager at that time, spending much of his time talking to the younger defenders.

He taught them about where to stand on the pitch and how to stay focused. Craggs also used his years of experience to show them how to progress from junior player to senior professional.

John took his coaching duties very seriously. He didn't just stand on the sidelines. He joined in with the training drills and showed the players exactly what to do.

This helped him develop his own ideas about how football should be played. He worked closely with Cyril Knowles to plan how the defence should work.

This time at Darlington was very important for him because it taught him how to lead people using words and teaching, not just by playing well.

At the end of the 1984/85 season, Cyril and John led The Quakers to promotion to the old Third Division. Quite an achievement for a team that had mainly struggled for many years.

When he finally stopped playing, John stayed in coaching for a while longer.

He went to work at Hartlepool United. He again worked with Cyril Knowles.

His job was to strengthen the defence and help the young players improve.

He attended tactical meetings and shared the secrets he had learned over twenty years of playing.

However, coaching in the lower leagues was a very hard job. Often, managers would lose their jobs or the clubs would run out of money. John realised that coaching did not offer much security for his future.

Because of this, he decided to leave professional football to find a more stable job.

Even after he stopped working in football every day, John stayed close to the sport.

He continued to live and work in the Teesside area. He took jobs in businesses where he could still talk to fans.

In addition, he often went to charity events and played in matches for former players.

He also kept in touch with his old teammates and the supporters who remembered him from his best years.

His life after football was very much like his life as a player. He was hardworking, humble, and grounded.

John Craggs has a great legacy in North East football. As a player, he was the kind of person every manager wanted in their team. He was

disciplined and never let his teammates down. At Middlesbrough, he is remembered as a legend.

Whilst at Darlington and Hartlepool, he is remembered as a kind mentor.

He was loyal to his clubs and loved his community. His story shows that you do not need to be a superstar to be a hero.

By being consistent and professional, he earned the respect of thousands of people. John left a mark on the sport that will last for a long time.

People in the North East will always remember him for his hundreds of games and the help he gave to the next generation of players.

John Craggs' Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Playing a major role in Middlesbrough winning the Second Division title in the 1973/74 season.

Alan Foggon

Alan Foggon was born in West Pelton, County Durham, a small mining village in the north-east of England, where football was a central part of everyday life.

From an early age, he displayed speed, energy, and a natural ability to take on defenders, traits that marked him out as a promising young forward.

Football was woven into his childhood, and he often played on local streets, in school teams, and on village pitches, developing the confidence, fitness, and competitive instinct that would carry him into a professional career.

His upbringing in a working-class community instilled a sense of resilience and determination, qualities that would prove essential

throughout his career, especially as he faced the pressures and uncertainties of professional football.

Foggon's professional journey began when he joined Newcastle United as an apprentice.

He quickly rose through the club's youth and reserve teams, impressing with his pace, skill, and eagerness to score goals.

Alan made his first-team debut in February 1968 at the age of 17, coming on as a substitute in a First Division match against Arsenal.

This early exposure to top-flight football allowed him to learn from seasoned professionals while testing himself against some of the strongest defenders in the country. He was often deployed as an outside left or inside forward, roles that maximised his acceleration and ability to take on opponents directly.

His direct style of play earned him the nickname 'The White Tornado' from Newcastle United coach Joe Harvey, reflecting both his speed and the way he could disrupt defences with rapid, unpredictable runs.

During his time at Newcastle United, he scored 14 goals in 61 league appearances, a respectable return for a young player in a highly competitive first team.

One of the highlights of his Newcastle United career came in the 1969 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup, when he scored a crucial goal in the second leg of the final after coming off the bench.

Although his initial shot was saved, he reacted quickly to convert the rebound, contributing to Newcastle United's aggregate victory and giving him early experience of performing under pressure on a European stage.

Despite these successes, opportunities at Newcastle United were limited as new players arrived and competition for forward positions intensified.

Seeking regular first-team football, Foggon signed for Cardiff City in August 1971.

The move was motivated by the chance to play consistently, but his time in Wales was challenging. He made 17 league appearances but scored only once, and he struggled to adapt to the team's style and the reserve league system, which he found uninspiring.

Homesickness and a desire to return closer to home added to his difficulties, leaving him in a period of frustration until Middlesbrough came calling. Cardiff City accepted a transfer offer from the North-East-based club, and Foggon seized the opportunity to return to his roots and revive his career.

Joining Middlesbrough in late 1972 proved to be the turning point in Foggon's professional life.

The club, managed by Jack Charlton, was ambitious and eager to secure promotion from the Second Division. Foggon quickly established himself as a key member of the squad, impressing supporters with his pace, directness, and eye for goal.

He played predominantly as a forward, either leading the line or operating from the wings, and his ability to take on defenders, create space, and finish chances made him a vital component of Middlesbrough's attacking strategy.

During the 1973/74 season, Foggon contributed 19 goals in 41 appearances, finishing among the team's top scorers and playing a pivotal role in securing the Second Division title.

His speed and willingness to challenge defenders stretched opposing defences, creating scoring opportunities not only for himself but also for his teammates.

Foggon's impact at Middlesbrough extended beyond statistics. He was known for his work rate, always pressing defenders and tracking back when necessary, and his commitment inspired both teammates and fans.

His ability to score crucial goals in tight matches helped Middlesbrough maintain momentum throughout the season, and he became a consistent performer who could influence games at key moments. In addition to his league contributions, Foggon played in

cup competitions, where his pace and clever movement often unsettled opponents unprepared for his direct approach. Middlesbrough's promotion to the First Division marked the culmination of this successful period, and Foggon's performances were widely celebrated as part of the team's resurgence to the top tier.

Following promotion, Foggon continued to play an important role in Middlesbrough's First Division campaigns.

He faced the challenge of adapting to stronger defences and a higher pace of play, yet he retained his ability to score and create chances.

In the 1974/75 season, he again finished among the club's leading scorers, demonstrating that his effectiveness was not limited to the Second Division.

Over the course of his Middlesbrough career, Foggon made 115 league appearances and scored 45 goals, cementing his reputation as a dynamic, committed, and reliable forward.

Supporters remember him for his willingness to run at defenders, his ability to change the course of a match with a single decisive movement, and his infectious enthusiasm on the pitch.

After leaving Middlesbrough in 1976, Foggon's career took on a more nomadic aspect.

He spent part of the summer playing in the North American Soccer League, featuring for the Hartford Bicentennials and Rochester Lancers. In the NASL, he made 19 appearances for Hartford, scoring four goals, and seven appearances for Rochester.

These experiences exposed him to a different style of football and a unique sporting culture in the United States, broadening his understanding of the game and demonstrating his adaptability as a player willing to embrace challenges abroad.

Later in 1976, Foggon joined Manchester United, a significant step for the club's prestige.

However, his time at Old Trafford proved difficult. He made only three league appearances and failed to score, struggling to secure a regular role in a team already featuring established forwards. Factors including the competition for places, differences in tactical approaches, and a period of inconsistent form contributed to his limited impact.

His tenure at Manchester United was short-lived, and he moved on to Sunderland later that year.

Joining Sunderland made Foggon one of the few players to have represented all three of the North East's major professional clubs: Newcastle United, Middlesbrough, and Sunderland. This distinction highlighted both his regional roots and the high regard in which he was held across the area's football community. At Sunderland, he made eight league appearances but struggled to reproduce the goal-scoring form that had marked his Middlesbrough years.

After Sunderland, he continued his career with lower-division and non-league clubs, including Southend United, where he made 22 appearances, and a loan spell at Hartlepool United, where he scored two goals in 18 appearances.

He later played for non-league sides such as Consett and Whitley Bay before retiring from senior football.

Foggon's career is notable not only for the clubs he played for but also for the resilience and adaptability he displayed throughout. He achieved peak performance at Middlesbrough, contributing to the club's promotion to the First Division and becoming a firm favourite, yet he also navigated challenges at other clubs and even abroad, demonstrating a professional commitment to the game even when circumstances were difficult.

His style, defined by speed, directness, and an instinct for goal, made him a distinctive figure in the English leagues during the 1970s.

After retiring from football, Foggon remained in the North-East and worked in the security industry and the pub trade, including running establishments in South Shields and Spennymoor.

Alan Foggon's career is remembered for its highs and lows, but particularly for the impact he made at Middlesbrough.

He demonstrated how pace, determination, and a willingness to take on defenders could influence games and secure promotions. He remains a notable figure in North-East football history, celebrated for his contributions on the pitch and his enduring connection to the local communities.

Alan Foggon's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring 19 goals in season 1973/74.

John Hickton

John Hickton was born in Brimington, near Chesterfield, a small town steeped in football tradition and working-class values.

From an early age, he displayed a natural affinity for the game, spending countless hours kicking a ball around streets, local parks, and schoolyards.

Football was more than a pastime in Brimington; it was a central part of community life, and young John absorbed the sport's culture as much as its skills.

He developed a combination of physical strength, balance, and determination that would become hallmarks of his style, along with a keen eye for goal and an instinctive understanding of positioning.

His early coaches quickly noticed his potential, particularly John's ability to dominate in aerial challenges and hold up the ball under pressure, attributes that would later define him as a centre-forward.

Hickton's formal football education began when he joined Sheffield Wednesday as a youth player.

The club had a tradition of nurturing young talent, and Hickton quickly adapted to the rigours of professional training.

He progressed steadily through the reserves, demonstrating not only technical ability but also a work ethic that set him apart.

He made his first-team debut in March 1964 at the age of 19 in a First Division fixture against Aston Villa, coming on as a substitute. This marked the start of his professional career in England's top flight.

Over the next three seasons with Sheffield Wednesday, he accumulated more than 50 league appearances and scored 21 goals.

His style of play combined physicality with poise, allowing him to both outmuscle defenders and finish with precision. During this time, he also gained valuable experience in matches that required both technical skill and tactical awareness, traits that would become critical in his later career.

In 1966, Middlesbrough, then competing in the Third Division and seeking ambitious players to aid in their resurgence, signed Hickton.

The club recognised his potential to provide goals, leadership, and consistency in attack.

They had recently suffered relegation and were looking for players who could not only score but also inspire the fanbase and rejuvenate the team.

Hickton quickly established himself as a central figure. His first season at the club saw him adapt to the physicality of Third Division football while maintaining his composure and clinical finishing. He scored regularly, contributing significantly to Middlesbrough's immediate aim of promotion. His physical strength allowed him to hold up play, while his movement off the ball created space for teammates, a dual threat that made him a constant concern for opposition defenders.

The 1966/67 season was transformative for both Middlesbrough and Hickton.

Under manager Stan Anderson, the team secured promotion to the Second Division, a success to which Hickton contributed.

His ability to score in crucial matches helped the team amass the points necessary to finish at the top of the table.

By this point, he was becoming known for his consistency, scoring not only in winning efforts but also in matches where the team struggled.

His goals often broke deadlocks or secured valuable points, demonstrating a maturity in decision-making and composure in front of goal that belied his relatively young age.

Fans quickly recognised his importance and began to see him as a cornerstone of the club's attacking strategy.

As Middlesbrough settled into the Second Division, Hickton's reputation grew. He adapted seamlessly to a higher standard of play, continuing to score regularly while becoming more involved in the build-up.

His partnership with fellow forwards became central to the club's approach, and his understanding with midfielders and wingers helped unlock opposition defences.

Hickton's combination of power, aerial dominance, and positional awareness made him a complete centre-forward in the eyes of both fans and teammates. He developed a knack for scoring not only from open play but also from set pieces, becoming a consistent threat during corners, free-kicks, and penalties.

The 1970/71 season marked the beginning of Hickton's most prolific period. He scored 25 goals in all competitions, making him one of the most feared forwards in the division. Middlesbrough, motivated by a blend of tactical discipline and attacking flair, relied heavily on his ability to convert chances. Hickton's physical presence allowed the team to play a more direct style when required, while his technical skills enabled him to participate in intricate passing sequences.

This versatility enabled him to influence games in multiple ways. In several key matches that season, Hickton's goals proved decisive, including a memorable brace against Fulham in a 3–2 victory, in

which he scored both goals in the final 20 minutes, demonstrating his clutch ability and composure under pressure.

During the early 1970s, Hickton's influence at Middlesbrough continued to grow. He consistently ranked among the club's top scorers, and his style matured into a balance of raw power and intelligent movement.

The 1973/74 season was particularly historic for Middlesbrough. Hickton was central to everything, scoring 19 goals and creating numerous opportunities for teammates, which went a long way to securing promotion to the First Division.

His performances throughout the season demonstrated leadership, consistency, and the ability to do well against tough opposition.

In addition to league games, Hickton also made significant contributions in cup competitions, scoring decisive goals in early FA Cup rounds that allowed Middlesbrough to advance further than expected and gave fans memorable moments to celebrate.

Once promoted, Middlesbrough faced the challenge of competing in the First Division, a step up in quality and intensity. Hickton adapted impressively, using his experience and physical attributes to maintain his scoring form against stronger defences.

He became a figure of reliability, consistently delivering goals and guiding younger teammates through the pressures of top-flight football.

His ability to combine with wingers, coordinate with midfield runners, and create space for himself meant he remained an attacking focal point even as the tactical landscape evolved.

One notable performance during this period was against Derby County, where Hickton scored a decisive goal in a 3–2 victory, showcasing his timing, positioning, and finishing ability.

Such performances further cemented his status among the supporters and marked him as one of the most influential forwards in Middlesbrough's history.

Throughout the mid-1970s, Hickton remained a prolific scorer. He regularly contributed 20 or more goals in a season, ensuring Middlesbrough remained competitive in the First Division.

His style of play evolved to accommodate the greater tactical demands of the highest level, but his core attributes — strength, aerial dominance, positional intelligence, and composure — remained unchanged.

Eventually, he became a mentor to younger forwards. His influence extended beyond the pitch, as he became a respected voice in the dressing room, helping instil a professional ethos in the squad.

During this period, Hickton also contributed significantly to Middlesbrough's cup runs.

In FA Cup and League Cup competitions, he was frequently the player capable of turning a match with a single moment of skill or instinctive positioning.

Fans remember his ability to score critical goals against higher-ranked teams, often in challenging away fixtures. His knack for finding space in crowded penalty areas, combined with a fearless approach to contact with defenders, ensured that he remained a constant threat throughout his career.

By the late 1970s, Hickton had become a legend at Middlesbrough. Across his 12-year tenure at the club, he made nearly 500 first-team appearances and scored 192 goals, a memorable achievement.

This remarkable consistency over more than a decade demonstrates not only his skill but also his durability and commitment. He earned the admiration of teammates, managers, and supporters alike, becoming a symbol of the club during a transformative period in its history.

In addition to his on-field exploits, Hickton's professionalism set a standard for others. He was known for his disciplined lifestyle, meticulous preparation, and commitment to training, all of which contributed to his longevity.

Younger players looked up to him for guidance, and he became a mentor to those learning the rigours of professional football. His ability to combine mentorship with personal performance underscored his value to the club beyond mere statistics.

Hickton's career also included brief stints away from Middlesbrough. He spent time on loan at Hull City in the late 1970s, making several appearances and scoring once.

This period reflected the natural progression of a player entering the final stages of his career, but he continued to demonstrate the qualities that had defined him for over a decade: determination, intelligent movement, and finishing ability.

Later, he had a brief stint in the North American Soccer League with the Fort Lauderdale Strikers, scoring once in three appearances.

This experience exposed him to international football and different tactical approaches, broadening his understanding of the game while allowing him to continue playing competitively.

After retiring from active play, Hickton remained connected to football and Middlesbrough.

He frequently attended club reunions, supporter events, and anniversaries, sharing insights from his career and reconnecting with fans who remembered his remarkable contributions. His legacy was celebrated not only by statistics but also by the cultural and emotional impact he had on the Middlesbrough community. Fans often cited his loyalty, consistency, and the excitement he brought to matches as defining aspects of his time at the club.

To sum up, John Hickton's career spans the full spectrum of what it meant to be a professional footballer in England from the 1960s to the late 1970s.

John Hickton's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring 25 goals in season 1970/71.

Gordon Jones

Gordon Jones (now sadly no longer with us) was born in Sedgefield, County Durham.

He started his footballing career as a young boy in Middlesbrough's youth system and worked very hard to become a star for the senior team.

He played during a period when the club was rapidly growing and changing, and he was someone everyone could depend on.

In football, Jones played as a left-back. His main job was to stop the wingers from the opposing team from getting past him, but he also had to help his own team get forward down their left side.

He was very good at this because he was very fit and could get up and down the wing with ease.

Gordon knew exactly where to stand on the pitch to stop the ball from getting past him, due to his tactical know-how.

Because he was so consistent, he became a leader for the club throughout the 1960s and the early 1970s.

He played his first game for the Middlesbrough first team in the early 1960s. He did such a good job that he quickly became a regular starter.

Gordon stayed with the club for over ten years. During that period, he played an incredible number of matches. He played 457 league games and 527 games in total for Middlesbrough before leaving the club.

This showed how much the managers trusted him to be in the team every week.

When Jones first started playing, Middlesbrough was trying to build a better team.

They wanted players who were skilled but also very loyal to the club. As a young defender, Jones was excellent at reading the game, as mentioned above.

He was great at making tackles and staying focused during the whole game. Jones rarely made mistakes that put his team in danger of conceding a goal, which was a valuable skill.

As he got older, he also started helping with the attack. He could send very accurate passes and crosses into the middle of the field to help his teammates score goals.

One of the best moments in his career happened during the 1966/67 season.

In that campaign, Middlesbrough won promotion from the Third Division. This was a major achievement for the club and all its supporters.

Jones played a huge part in that success because he was so steady in defence. He contributed to the team winning many important points during the season, and everyone praised him for his hard work.

At around this time, people began to see him as a leader who could guide the younger players.

For many years after that, Jones remained the main left-back for the team. He was very tough when facing an opponent one-on-one. He was also very good at seeing danger early and stopping it at its source.

Because he was so fit, he could run all over the pitch for ninety minutes. He liked to help with attacking (also mentioned previously), but he always made sure his defensive work was his priority.

This balance made him very valuable as Middlesbrough played against teams in higher leagues.

His consistency was truly amazing. For more than a decade, he showed up for every training session and every match with a professional attitude. He loved the club and worked very hard to make it successful. Because of this, he was named the Middlesbrough Player of the Year twice.

The first time was in 1966/67, and the second time was in 1970/71. Winning this award twice shows how much the fans loved and respected him.

He was a steady person in the team, even when the club changed managers or tactics. He also rarely got injured, which is another reason why he was able to play so many games.

While many defenders focus solely on stopping the other team, Jones also helped his team initiate their own attacks. He was very good at crossing the ball from the left side, which created many chances for the strikers. He did not score many goals himself—in fact, he scored only five league goals for Middlesbrough—but he was very important in starting play from the back of the field.

He knew exactly when to stay back and defend and when it was safe to run forward. Managers and other players really appreciated this about him.

Even though he was one of the best defenders in the country, Jones never got to play for the full England national team. He did play for the England under-23 team.

Back then, there were many great players competing for a spot in the England team, so it was very hard to get picked.

Even though he never got a full cap for his country, he was still considered a top player by everyone in the football world. Middlesbrough fans certainly thought he was good enough for any team.

In 1972, Jones finally left Middlesbrough and moved to play for Darlington.

Even though he was at a new club, he brought the same level of hard work and leadership.

He played 85 league games for Darlington over three seasons and scored five goals.

Jones was an older, more experienced player by then, so he helped the younger players at Feethams. He taught them how to organise the defence and how to be professional. He was a very calm person on the pitch and talked to his teammates to help them stay in the right positions.

During his time at Darlington, people liked him for his skill and for how he helped others. The club became better because he was there to lead the defence.

Darlington did not get promoted while he was there, but he helped make the team much more solid.

He was a great example for the young players to follow if they wanted to have a long career in the game.

After he retired, Jones stayed close to the sport and to Middlesbrough. He joined the Middlesbrough Former Players Association. He would often attend meetings, fan events, and club anniversaries.

These visits showed that he still had a very strong bond with the club and its supporters. Fans who were old enough to remember him playing would always speak to him with great love and respect. He also attended many community events, where he would share stories about his time as a player. He became a symbol of loyalty and what it means to stay with a club for a long time.

In his private life, Jones was known for being a very humble and down-to-earth person. He did not seek out fame or attention. He was just as steady and reliable off the pitch as he was on it. People remembered him for his fair play and the professional way he acted. He was a true gentleman of the game.

When he passed away at age 82, many people in the football world sent messages of sympathy. Middlesbrough fans, in particular, remembered his amazing record and the way he helped the club during successful seasons. His legacy lives on in the record books, thanks to the hundreds of games he played. He also left a legacy in the culture of the clubs he played for, showing that hard work and loyalty are very important.

The story of Gordon Jones is a great example of a different time in football.

It was a time when players often stayed at one club for most of their lives and became a big part of the local community. By playing

nearly 500 games for Middlesbrough and then serving Darlington so well, he showed how much he loved the game. He will always be remembered as a consistent, tough, and leadership-driven defender. His name will always have a special place in the history of football in the North East of England.

Note from Author: I was lucky enough to meet Gordon when I was a little boy, and he was at Darlington.

I never forgot the kindness he showed towards me.

Gordon Jones' Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Making a total of 527 appearances in just over a decade for Middlesbrough.

Willie Maddren

Willie Maddren (once again no longer with us) was a man who became a true hero to football fans in the North-East of England.

He was born in Billingham, in the Tees Valley. Growing up in this part of the country meant that football was a huge part of his life from a very early age.

In the community where he lived, almost everyone followed the local teams, and playing football was what most young boys dreamed of doing.

Willie was no different. He loved the game and spent much of his time practicing and playing with his friends.

It was clear early on that he had a special talent for the sport. He was naturally strong and fast, but he was also very smart when he had the ball at his feet. Because he had so much ability, scouts from Middlesbrough Football Club quickly spotted him.

He joined the Middlesbrough youth team in 1968. At first, the coaches put him in the forward position because he was good at attacking.

However, as he grew and learned more about the professional game, the coaches realised that his skills were best suited to defending. He was very good at jumping to head the ball, and could read the game extremely well.

Because of these skills, they moved him to the centre of the defence. Willie took to this new position like a duck to water.

His debut for the first team was in April 1969 against Bury. It was a very exciting start to his career. He managed to score a goal, which made the occasion very memorable; interestingly, he also broke his nose!

This showed everyone right away that Willie was a brave player who was willing to get hurt if it meant helping his team win. Even though he had a rough start with his injury, the fans and the manager could see that he was going to be a star.

As the years went by, Willie became a permanent part of the Middlesbrough team.

By the early 1970s, he was one of the first names on the team sheet.

In 1971, the manager at the time, Stan Anderson, signed another defender named Stuart Boam. The two of them started playing together in the middle of the defence.

They became a famous pair. Boam was very strong and enjoyed the physical side of the game, while Willie was calm and relied on his brain to stop attacks. Together, they made it very difficult for any other team to get past them. They gave the whole team a sense of safety and leadership.

During this time, Middlesbrough was trying very hard to move up to the top tier of English football.

In 1973, Jack Charlton became the manager. He quickly noticed how good Maddren and Boam were and made them the heart of his team.

Under Charlton's leadership, the 1973/74 season became one of the best years in the history of the club. Middlesbrough did not just win promotion; they dominated the league.

That season, the defence was nearly perfect. They conceded only 30 goals in 42 games and kept 25 clean sheets.

Willie was a huge reason for this success. He was calm under pressure and could pass the ball out from the back to start new attacks for his own team.

The fans loved him because he was a local boy who had helped bring the club back to the top league. He had become a true legend in the eyes of the people on Teesside.

Playing in the First Division was much harder because the opponents were more skilful and the games were faster. However, Willie handled the step up with no problems at all.

He played nearly 300 league games for Middlesbrough and even scored 19 goals.

He was especially dangerous during corner kicks because he was so good at heading the ball. He also became a leader on the pitch.

When things were going badly or the other team was attacking frequently, Willie would stay calm and help his teammates stay focused.

Many people felt that Willie was good enough to play for the England national team.

He did play for the England under-23 team five times, which showed that the national coaches were watching him. However, he never got the chance to play for the senior England team.

During the 1970s, England had many world-class defenders, so the competition was very tough. Even though he never earned that international cap, he was still respected by his fellow players and the fans who saw him every week as one of the best defenders in the country.

Unfortunately, injuries began to affect Willie toward the end of the 1970s. He had very bad problems with his knees. In those days, medical science was not as advanced as it is today, and knee injuries were very hard to fix.

Willie tried his best to keep playing, often doing so in great pain because he did not want to let the club down. He eventually had an operation to try to fix his knee, but it did not work.

He played his last game for Middlesbrough in September 1977. He was only 26 years old.

This is very young for a football player to retire. Usually, players can keep going until their 30s.

It was a very sad moment for Willie and for the fans when he had to retire in 1979 after an unsuccessful operation.

Even though he could no longer play, Willie did not want to leave football or Middlesbrough.

A few years later, in 1982, he became the club's new physiotherapist. Because he had suffered so much with his own injuries, he was very good at understanding what the players were going through. He became a very important behind-the-scenes member of the staff.

In 1984, the club was going through a very difficult time. They were losing games and had very little money. The manager was sacked, and for a short time, Jack Charlton came back to help. Maddren became his assistant.

Together, they managed to stop the team from being relegated.

At the end of that season, the club owners decided to make Willie the full-time manager.

It was an almost impossible job as the club still had no money to buy new players, and the stadium needed repairs.

As a manager, Willie showed the same determination he had as a player. He had to rely on many young players because he could not afford to buy many players at all.

He was very good at spotting talent in young people. He gave chances to players like Colin Cooper and Stuart Ripley, who both went on to have great careers. He also made a very smart signing when he brought in a striker named Bernie Slaven. Bernie became a huge star for Middlesbrough and scored many goals.

Willie worked very hard to keep the club alive at a time when it nearly went out of business.

Eventually, the pressure of the financial problems became too much, and he was replaced as manager in 1986. Even though he was let go, the work he did to find and train young players helped the club be successful in the years that followed.

After he left management, Willie opened a sports shop and spent more time with his family.

Sadly, in 1995, he received some terrible news. He was diagnosed with motor neurone disease. This is a very serious illness that causes the body's muscles to weaken over time. It is a very difficult thing for anyone to deal with, especially someone who had been an athlete like Willie.

Instead of giving up, Willie showed incredible courage. He decided to use his fame to help others with the same disease. He wrote a book about his life, titled 'Extra Time', and organised many events to raise money for research into the illness.

He raised more than £200,000, a huge sum. Even as he got weaker, he stayed positive and continued to visit the stadium to see the fans and his old friends. His bravery inspired everyone who knew him.

Willie Maddren died in August 2000. He was only 49 years old. People from all over the football world sent messages expressing their respect for him. He is remembered as one of the greatest players Middlesbrough ever had, but also as a man who faced a terrible illness with a brave heart. To the people of Teesside, he was more than just a football player; he was one of their own, making them proud.

His name is still mentioned with great respect at the stadium today, and his life remains a story of loyalty, hard work, and great courage.

He gave everything he had to his club and his community, both on and off the pitch.

He remains an example of how a person can be a hero through their actions and their spirit.

Willie Maddren's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Being part of the Middlesbrough defence that kept 25 clean sheets in the league in season 1973/74.

David Mills

David Mills began his professional football career with Middlesbrough, a club where he would eventually become a legend.

Born in Whitby, he joined the team as a young player in the late 1960s. He started as an apprentice, working hard behind the scenes before finally making his first-team debut in 1968.

In those early years, he was still learning his trade, but it was clear to everyone at the club that he possessed a level of technical skill rare for a young player at the time.

His career really began to take off when Jack Charlton was appointed as the manager in 1973. Charlton was a very strict and organised leader who changed the way the whole club operated. Under his guidance, Mills became one of the club's most important players.

During the 1973/74 season, the team was unstoppable, as mentioned earlier in this book.

Mills played a huge role in this success, appearing in almost every game and providing the creative spark that the team needed to break down opponents.

One of the things that made Mills so special was his versatility. While he often wore a high number on his back, he was not a traditional striker who just stayed in the penalty area. He was an intelligent player who could drop deep into the midfield to collect the

ball or drift out to the wings. He had a great understanding with the legendary striker John Hickton.

While Hickton was famous for his power and strength, Mills was the one who used his vision to provide the passes and crosses. He was also very good at making late runs into the box to score goals himself.

When Middlesbrough moved up to the First Division, many people wondered if Mills could handle the step up to the highest level. He proved his critics wrong immediately.

Throughout the mid-1970s, he was one of the most consistent performers in the top flight. In 1975, he was part of the side that won the Anglo-Scottish Cup, the club's first piece of silverware in many years.

By the time he left Middlesbrough in 1979, he had played over 300 matches and had scored nearly 100 goals.

In early 1979, the football world was shocked when West Bromwich Albion paid £516,000 to sign Mills.

This was a huge moment in sports history because it was the first time an English club had ever paid more than half a £500,000 for a single player.

Suddenly, Mills was the most expensive footballer in Britain. While this was a great honour, it also brought a huge amount of pressure.

Every time he stepped onto the pitch, people expected him to be a superstar because of the price tag.

The move to West Bromwich Albion did not go as smoothly as he had hoped.

He joined a team that was already full of famous players like Bryan Robson and Cyrille Regis.

However, the style of play was different from what he was used to at Middlesbrough. He also suffered several injuries that made it hard for him to get a long run in the starting lineup.

Because the transfer fee was so high, the media and fans were often critical of him if he did not score or play perfectly. It was a difficult time for him personally, and he struggled to find the same joy and form he had shown earlier in his career.

After three years at West Bromwich Albion, Mills moved to Newcastle United in 1982. This move was a chance for a fresh start closer to his roots in the North East.

There, he played under manager Arthur Cox and alongside great players like Kevin Keegan. He showed glimpses of his old self, using his intelligence and experience to help the team.

He was well-liked by the fans at St James' Park because he worked hard and still had the technical skill to create chances.

His journey then took him to Sheffield Wednesday for a short period.

In 1984, he actually returned to Middlesbrough for a brief second spell.

It was a sentimental move that allowed him to play for his beloved hometown club once more before his professional career at the highest level came to an end.

He eventually finished his playing days at Darlington, where he helped the younger players understand the professional standards required to succeed.

When he finally retired from playing, Mills did not walk away from football. Instead, he transitioned into a highly successful career as a scout. He became one of the most respected scouts in the country, working for many years as the chief scout at Newcastle United.

Later, he worked for Leicester City during a very successful period for them.

Mills is remembered as a graceful player who made history with a record transfer fee, but also as a man who dedicated his entire life to the sport he loved.

David Mills' Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Helping Middlesbrough win promotion to the First Division in the season 1973/74.

Bobby Murdoch

Bobby Murdoch was born in Rutherglen, Scotland, close to Glasgow.

People in that area really loved their football. Even when Bobby was a small boy playing in local parks and school teams, those who saw him could tell he was special. He was very smart when he had the ball at his feet, and his great technical skills made him stand out from all the other children his age.

When he became a teenager, he started playing for a junior team named Cambuslang Rangers.

This was a very tough league where people played hard, and playing against older, stronger men helped Bobby become a much better, more confident player.

In October 1959, he was signed by Celtic.

At the start of his time at Parkhead, the coaches put him in attacking positions.

He played as an inside forward or on the wing because he was good at moving forward and scoring.

However, in 1965, Jock Stein became manager of the club.

Stein was a very smart coach, and he saw that Bobby had a special gift. He noticed that he was excellent at passing the ball and understanding how the whole game worked.

Because of this, the manager moved Bobby into the middle of the field to play as a central midfielder.

This change turned out to be the most important moment in his career. In the middle of the pitch, Bobby could control how fast or slow the game went and help both the defenders and the attackers.

Murdoch became a very important part of Celtic's most successful period in history. He was one of the legendary 'Lisbon Lions'. This was the name given to the Celtic team that won the European Cup in 1967. They won the trophy by beating Inter Milan in Lisbon.

This was a historic moment because Celtic were the first British club to win the trophy. Bobby was the heart and soul of that winning team.

During his time at Celtic, he won eight Scottish league titles, four Scottish Cups, and five League Cups. Murdoch was famous for his calm style and his ability to make perfect passes that other players could not even imagine.

Bobby played for the Scotland national team 12 times and scored some important goals.

People who watched him play admired how he never seemed to get worried or stressed, even in very big and important matches with thousands of fans watching.

By the start of the 1970s, Bobby had won almost everything a player could win in Scotland. He decided that he wanted a new challenge and wanted to try playing in England.

In 1973, he signed for Middlesbrough. Interestingly, Bobby was Jack Charlton's first signing.

Bobby brought a lot of experience and leadership to the team. Middlesbrough were playing in the Second Division at the time, and

Bobby helped them become a much better team very quickly. He was like a teacher on the pitch, helping the younger players learn to be professionals and win games.

One of the young players he helped a lot was Graeme Souness, who later became a world-famous star and a great manager himself.

With Bobby controlling the midfield, Middlesbrough had a wonderful season in 1973/74.

Bobby played more than 125 games for Middlesbrough before he finally retired in 1976.

After he retired, Bobby did not want to leave the world of football, so he started a new job coaching the youth teams at Middlesbrough.

He used everything he had learned during his long career to help young boys improve their skills.

Many of the young players he coached went on to have very successful careers because of the advice and help he gave them.

In July 1981, Bobby was appointed manager of Middlesbrough.

This was a very difficult time for the football club because it had little money to sign new players.

Bobby tried to use the same smart tactics he had learned from Jock Stein at Celtic many years earlier.

He wanted his team to be very organised and good at keeping the ball. He had some good wins against teams like Birmingham City and Sunderland, but it was very hard to keep the team winning consistently because the club was struggling financially.

Some of the best players had to be sold just to keep the club going.

Eventually, because the results were not good enough, Bobby was sacked as manager in September 1982.

The years after he left football were quite difficult for Bobby. He had some health problems, especially with his hips, due to all the running he had done as a player.

Murdoch also had some struggles with alcohol and found it hard to adjust to life without a job in football.

He tried to run a pub, but that business did not go well.

Even though he had these hard times, the fans never forgot what a great man he was.

Supporters of both Celtic and Middlesbrough still loved him and treated him like a hero whenever they saw him in public.

He would often attend special events to talk to fans and celebrate the rich history of the teams he had played for.

Bobby passed away on 15 May 2001 after he had a stroke. He was only 56 years old, which is still quite young. His death was very sad news for everyone who loved football in Scotland and England.

People from all over the world sent messages of respect and love for him.

His old teammates and managers spoke about how intelligent and kind he was as a person.

They remembered him as a great leader and a gifted player who made the game of football look very easy and beautiful.

Today, he is still remembered as one of the best midfielders to ever play the game in Britain.

He was a true legend who will never be forgotten by those who love the game.

Bobby Murdoch's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Bobby has the distinction of being Jack Charlton's first signing.

Jim Platt

Born in Northern Ireland, Jim's professional journey really began when he signed a contract to play for Middlesbrough in the early 1970s.

The club's management team knew he had the potential to become a top goalkeeper.

They brought him into the team at a time when Middlesbrough was trying to become one of the best clubs in the country. Jim did not have to wait long to play for the first team. He quickly showed everyone how good he was and soon became the club's main goalkeeper. For the next ten years, he was the person everyone counted on.

He played 481 league games for Middlesbrough, which is an incredible number. Very few players in the history of the club have played that many matches. This shows that he was very consistent and

rarely got injured. Year after year, he was there, keeping goal and being consistently reliable.

One of the best times in his career was the 1973/74 season, when Middlesbrough clinched promotion to the First Division.

Jim was a huge part of that success. His excellent goalkeeping ability stopped many other teams from scoring, enabling his team to win or draw many games that they otherwise would have lost.

Having a steady, reliable goalkeeper is crucial for a winning team, and Jim provided exactly what Middlesbrough needed to reach the top.

While he was at Middlesbrough, Jim also played for a few other teams on short-term loans.

During the 1978/79 season, he played for Hartlepool United and Cardiff City.

These loan spells were good for him because they gave him the chance to play first-team football even when times were changing at Middlesbrough.

Playing for different teams helped him learn how to work with new defenders and keep his skills sharp. Jim was a very professional player, so he was able to fit into these new teams very quickly and do a great job for them.

Jim also had a very proud career playing for his home country, Northern Ireland.

While he was playing, Northern Ireland had some very famous goalkeepers, including Pat Jennings, who is considered one of the best goalkeepers in the world.

Even though he had to compete with such great players, Jim still managed to play 23 times for Northern Ireland between 1976 and 1986. Playing for your country is a huge honour, and it is much harder than playing for a club because you are playing against the best players from all over the world. He was always ready when his country needed him.

He was part of the Northern Ireland squads for the World Cup finals in 1982 (he played against Austria, 2-2 draw) and 1986. His teammates and the fans respected him because they knew he was a professional who was always prepared to help.

When Jim finally retired from football in the middle of the 1980s, he did not want to leave the sport behind.

Jim wanted to use everything he had learned to help other players. He decided to become a manager and a coach.

His first job as a manager was with Ballymena United in Northern Ireland. He was a player-manager there.

This was a very hard job because he had to think about his own game while also making decisions for the other players. He worked very hard and learned a lot about leading a team from the sidelines.

After his time at Ballymena United, Jim became the manager of Coleraine. He stayed there from 1985 to 1991, and these were among his most successful years as a boss.

He led them to considerable success in the Irish League. One of his biggest achievements was taking the team into European competitions three times. This was a very big deal for a club like Coleraine.

Playing in the UEFA Cup meant they got to face teams from other European countries. It was an exciting time for the players and the fans.

Jim was also known for being very good at giving young players a chance to play in the main team. He believed that young talent was important to the club's future.

Even after he left Coleraine, people still talked about the good work he had done there.

Later, Jim moved to Ballyclare Comrades for a season. He continued to learn more about being a manager, especially how to run a club with limited funds.

This experience made him a better leader because he had to be very creative with the players at his disposal.

Then, Jim's career took him to a completely different country. He went to Sweden to manage Assyriska.

Moving to a new country was a big challenge. He had to learn about a different culture and a different way of playing football. He also had to deal with people speaking a different language.

This time in Sweden helped him understand that football is played in many different ways around the world.

Eventually, Jim came back to England to continue his work as a manager.

In 1995, he became the manager of Darlington. At first, he shared the job with David Hodgson, but later he took charge himself.

Darlington had little money to spend on new players, but Jim did a fantastic job.

In the 1995/96 season, he led Darlington all the way to the play-off final at Wembley Stadium.

Even though they just missed out on winning against Plymouth Argyle, it was a huge achievement for Jim and the club. It showed he could build a strong, winning team without spending millions of pounds.

After he left Darlington, he managed Gateshead for a short time. By this time, he had managed teams at many different levels of football, from small local clubs to teams playing in Europe.

When he decided to stop being a full-time manager, he still stayed very busy in the football world.

He became a coach at the Middlesbrough Football Community Centre.

Jim also worked at private football schools in the area. He loved sharing his passion for the game with the next generation of players.

The former goalkeeper also remained a very important person at Middlesbrough Football Club. He worked at the stadium on match days, welcoming guests and telling stories about his time as a player.

The fans loved seeing him because he was a true legend of the club. He also became the secretary of the Middlesbrough Former Players Association. This is a group that helps old players stay in touch with each other and with the club. Jim wanted to make sure the club's history and the people who played there were never forgotten.

Jim Platt did not just care about football; he also cared about the community.

In 2019, he was elected as a local councillor for Middlesbrough.

He wanted to give back to the place where he had spent most of his life. Just like in football, he worked hard and was dedicated to helping others.

The life of Jim Platt is a story of hard work and perseverance. He spent nearly twelve years as the goalkeeper for Middlesbrough and played for his country in the World Cup. He managed teams in Northern Ireland, Sweden, and England, always striving to help his players improve.

Whether he was stopping a penalty, coaching a young child, or helping his local community as a councillor, Jim always showed professionalism and kindness. He has left a very big mark on the world of football and on the towns where he lived and worked. He will always be remembered as a great sportsman and a dedicated leader.

Jim Platt's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Making 481 Football League appearances for Middlesbrough. Something he looks back on with pride.

Graeme Souness

Graeme Souness was born in Edinburgh. He grew up in a place where almost everyone loved football.

Even when he was very young, Graeme was great at the sport. He was a tough player who worked hard, but he was also very smart and good with the ball.

He started his professional career at Middlesbrough (he was an apprentice at Tottenham Hotspur and was loaned out to Montreal Olympique in the North American Soccer League – Middlesbrough paid Spurs £30,000 for him) in the early 1970s.

Souness became an important player for the team in no time at all. He showed everyone that he was a leader and could control how the game was played from the middle of the field.

His excellent form at Middlesbrough attracted the attention of the bigger clubs.

In 1978, he moved to Liverpool for a fee of £352,000, a record fee between two English clubs at that time.

Graeme became one of the best players of his era. He was famous for his strong tackles and powerful shots. Souness was the heart of a Liverpool team that won many trophies.

During his time there, they won several league titles and three European Cups in 1978, 1981, and 1984. He was such a natural leader that he eventually became the team captain.

He also played for his country on more than 50 occasions. He was selected for both the 1978 and 1982 World Cups.

His teammates and fans valued him because he never gave up and always fought hard to win.

His career as a manager began when he returned to Scotland to lead Glasgow Rangers as player/manager.

He changed the way the club operated by making it more professional and signing highly talented players. Because of his leadership, Rangers became the best team in Scotland and won many trophies.

Later, he moved back to England to manage Liverpool. He also coached in Turkey with Galatasaray and led other English teams, including Southampton and Newcastle United.

As a boss, he was very strict and always expected his players to work as hard as he had when he played.

Graeme Souness is remembered as a person who always wanted to win. Whether he was playing on the field or coaching on the sidelines, he was a strong leader.

He left a lasting mark on every club he worked for and remains a famous figure in football history.

Graeme Souness' Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring his first Middlesbrough goal in season 1973/74 during a 3-0 home victory over Preston North End.

Chapter Three

A Brief History of the 1980s

The 1980s for Middlesbrough Football Club started like a very sad story and ended like a miracle.

It was a time when the club saw the very best and the very worst of the sport.

They felt the pain of losing their place in the top leagues, the fear of their stadium being locked up, the terror of the club almost closing forever, and finally the joy of winning and moving back up to the top.

To understand how important this time was, you have to look at how the club fell apart and how it was saved in a way that seemed almost impossible.

In 1980, the club was respected in the First Division, but the foundation was starting to rot.

The first major problem occurred in 1981, when the manager, John Neal, left for Chelsea. He had kept the club steady. When he left, a famous former player, Bobby Murdoch, took over. Even though he was a great player, he lacked managerial experience and struggled to lead the team.

At the same time, the local financial situation was worsening.

The steel and chemical factories were the lifeblood of the town, but they were closing down or losing business.

This meant that fewer people had money to buy tickets to see the games at Ayresome Park.

By the 1981/1982 season, the situation on the pitch was very bad. The club had to sell its best players, like Craig Johnston and David Armstrong, just to pay its bills.

These players were the heart of the team, and without them, the team could not create chances or win games.

These sales were not made to improve the team; they were desperate moves to keep the club from drowning in debt.

Middlesbrough finished at the bottom of the First Division that year, winning only eight games.

This was a huge blow to the town's pride, but it was also a financial disaster.

Losing their spot in the top league meant they earned less from television and had fewer fans at the games. The club entered the Second Division in 1982 with a deep sense of worry that lasted for four years.

In the middle of the decade, the club changed managers many times, but no one could stop the decline. Malcolm Allison was brought in to bring some excitement, but he was a flashy manager at a club so poor it could barely afford new kits for the players. After him came Willie Maddren.

He was an honest man who loved the club, but he watched a disaster unfold in slow motion.

By 1985, the club was losing thousands of pounds every single week.

In the 1985/1986 season, the team fell into the Third Division. This was only the second time in history they had been that low. This was the lowest point of all. The club owed more than two million pounds. Because they were now in the third league, the banks and the taxman decided to take action to recover their money.

In May 1986, the club officially went into liquidation. This was not just a normal money problem where you keep playing. The gates of Ayresome Park were actually locked with heavy padlocks by the people responsible for the debt.

All the workers and the players were sacked. For a few months during the summer of 1986, Middlesbrough Football Club did not exist as a legal company.

This was when Steve Gibson, a young man on the board who was from the local area, became a hero. He worked with a group of other businesspeople to start a race against time.

The Football League told them they had a deadline. If the club could not prove it had enough money by a certain date in August, it would be kicked out of the league forever, and its history would be erased.

The meetings to save the club were very stressful and went down to the very last minutes. With only ten minutes left before the deadline, the papers were signed, and a new company was formed. Because they were still locked out of their own stadium, the team had to play its first home game of the 1986/1987 season at Hartlepool United's stadium.

During this period, a group of players known as the Class of 86 rose to the challenge.

Most of them were young men from the local area who stayed with the club even though they did not know if they would ever get paid.

They were led by manager Bruce Rioch and his assistant Colin Todd. This team became a symbol of how the town refused to give up. Tony Mowbray was the captain and the leader. Next to him was Gary Pallister, who would later become a very famous defender, and Bernie Slaven, a striker from Scotland who became a fan favourite.

The 1986/1987 season in the Third Division was amazing. The players felt like the whole world was against them, so they played with extra hunger.

They played a style of football that involved a lot of running and putting pressure on the other teams.

They were much better than the other clubs in that league. They finished in second place and moved straight back up to the Second Division. But they did not stop there.

In the 1987/1988 season, the team surprised everyone by playing even better. The season ended with a very exciting two-game final against Chelsea.

Middlesbrough won the first game at home.

Even though they lost the away second game, they won the tie overall.

In just two years, the club had gone from nearly being gone forever to being back in the top tier of English football.

The final year of the 1980s brought the club back to reality.

The First Division was very competitive, and the squad was too small to keep up with the big teams.

Even though they played with a lot of heart, they were relegated on the last day of the season. Shortly after that, they sold defender Gary Pallister to Manchester United for a record fee.

This gave the club the financial safety it had needed for a long time.

As the decade ended, Middlesbrough was no longer the dying club it had been in 1986.

It was now a stable, hungry club with a strong system for training young players. Steve Gibson was now the owner, and he would go on to make the club even bigger in the years that followed.

The 1980s remain the most important decade in the club's history. It was a time when the community saved the team, and the team gave the people something to believe in again. If you look closely at how they played,

Bruce Rioch changed how the team thought. He knew his young players were not as big or strong as older players, so he made sure they were the fittest team in the league.

He found players that other clubs did not want.

Bernie Slaven is the best example of this. He scored many goals in Scotland, but no one in England noticed him until Middlesbrough took a chance on him.

His goals were like money that helped buy the club's way out of the lower leagues.

The fans were also a huge part of this story. When the club was closed, the fans started groups to raise money and sign petitions. This was when the modern Boro fan was born: loyal, tough, and deeply connected to the club.

The Spirit of 86 is not just a phrase; it is a way of thinking that the club still uses. It means that no matter how bad things look, if the community stays together, it can survive.

This decade transformed the club from a falling building into a modern, strong powerhouse. It set the stage for the move to a brand-new stadium and the arrival of world-famous stars in the 1990s.

The way the club was reborn behind the scenes was just as important as the wins on the field.

Steve Gibson brought a way of managing money that had been missing for years.

He knew that to survive for a long time, the club needed a good business plan.

This led to every part of the club becoming more professional. The youth academy started producing many talented players who either played for the first team or were sold to help the club make money.

The 1980s were a critical time that burned away the old, lazy ways and left behind a club that was lean and proud of its local roots.

Even though they lost their place in the top tier in 1989, it was not as much of a disaster as it had been in 1982.

The club now had the right people and the right spirit to bounce back.

The decade did more than just provide football matches; it showed how a club can be the heartbeat of a town.

Matches like the win over AFC Bournemouth or the draw in Hartlepool were not just about points. They were about the right to exist.

Every goal and every tackle was a statement that the club would not be silenced.

By 1989, the fans knew they had already survived the worst possible storm. They never forgot the summer when they almost lost everything.

The 1980s were a story of a club being saved and reborn, and it remains the most dramatic chapter in the history of the Boro.

Chapter Four

Ten Memorable Players from the 1980s

Colin Cooper

Cooper started his professional life at Middlesbrough during one of the club's toughest times.

In the middle of the 1980s, the team was struggling with massive debt and nearly went out of existence.

Even as a young centre-back, Cooper played with a level of maturity and calmness that was rare for someone his age.

He was not the type of defender who relied on being overly aggressive or just being faster and stronger than everyone else.

Instead, he was excellent at reading the game. He knew how to stay in the right position, keep the defence organised, and stay cool under pressure.

Because he was so good at anticipating what would happen next and making smart decisions, he earned a permanent spot in the defence and gained the trust of his managers and teammates.

During his first years at Middlesbrough, Cooper played many games in the lower divisions of English football. These leagues were very physical and tough, requiring a lot of mental strength and resilience. Playing in such a competitive, intense environment helped him develop a strong professional attitude and sharpen his instincts as a defender.

This early period of his life laid the foundation for a long career built on dependability and an understanding of the game's tactical side.

In 1991, Cooper moved to Millwall. There, he continued to grow as a player in another very competitive league. He earned a reputation as a disciplined and solid central defender who could handle physical strikers and stay focused throughout a long, gruelling season.

The hard-working culture at Millwall helped him further refine his skills and prepared him for the move to the top tier of English football.

That big move came in 1993, when he signed for Nottingham Forest, then managed by Frank Clark. This transfer brought him into the Premier League, where he played for a team competing at the very top of the table.

At Forest, he became a key part of the defence, bringing his trademark calmness, strength in the air, and ability to organise the players around him.

His time at Nottingham Forest was the peak of his playing days. He was a starter for the team that finished in an impressive third place in the Premier League during the 1994/95 season. This achievement meant the club qualified for European competition. Playing against the best teams and most famous players in the country, Cooper proved he belonged at the highest level.

His ability to stay composed on the ball and his disciplined positioning were major reasons for the team's success.

He also played a part in the club's journey in the UEFA Cup during the following season, where Nottingham Forest reached the quarter-finals.

Playing in Europe allowed Cooper to see different styles of football and face international opponents, which gave him a much broader understanding of the game.

These experiences made him an even more adaptable and intelligent defender. Throughout his years at Forest, he was highly respected for his leadership and professional behaviour. While he was

not always the player receiving the most attention in the news, his teammates and coaches valued him for his consistency and reliability. His presence gave the team balance, allowing the attacking players to play freely because they knew the defence was stable.

It was during his time at the City Ground that Cooper won two England caps, against Sweden and Brazil in 1995.

In 2000, Cooper returned to Middlesbrough, to the club where he had started his journey.

This second stint happened during a new era for the club under manager Bryan Robson. At that time, Middlesbrough were trying to become a major force in the Premier League. The club was spending money on high-quality players and trying to build a squad capable of challenging the best teams in England and Europe.

Cooper brought his years of Premier League and European experience back home. He provided leadership and tactical knowledge to the dressing room.

Although he did not play in every match due to injuries and competition from other players, his influence remained very strong.

He mentored the younger players, ensured everyone worked hard in training, and helped maintain a professional culture at the club. Middlesbrough was changing into a more ambitious team, and Cooper's steady presence helped the squad through that transition.

Even when he was not on the pitch, he was a respected figure and a reliable option whenever the manager needed him.

In 2003, Cooper joined Sunderland. Even though he was in his mid-thirties by then, he continued to play at a high level. His time there was brief, but it showed he had the longevity and fitness to remain competitive in the Premier League for nearly 20 years.

Shortly after his time at Sunderland, he decided to retire from professional football.

After retiring, Cooper moved into coaching and returned once again to Middlesbrough to join the backroom staff.

He worked closely with manager Steve McClaren during what turned out to be the most successful period in the club's modern history.

As a coach, Cooper was known for his deep tactical understanding, especially in organising a defence. He had a calm and methodical way of working with players that people respected.

During this time, Middlesbrough achieved things it had never done before.

The club won the League Cup in 2004, which was the first major trophy the team had ever won. This was a massive moment for the fans and the club. Cooper played an important behind-the-scenes role, helping with tactical plans and developing the players throughout that winning season.

He was also part of the coaching team that led Middlesbrough to the UEFA Cup final in 2006.

That European run was one of the most exciting chapters in the club's history, involving incredible comebacks and victories over famous European teams. Cooper's training and preparation for matches were part of what enabled the club to compete so well on the international stage.

Because he was known as a hardworking and knowledgeable professional, Cooper eventually moved into management. He took on leadership roles at clubs that were facing difficult challenges.

In 2014, he was named the manager of Hartlepool United. This was a tough job because the club had very little money and was under a lot of pressure in the lower divisions. There, Cooper tried to build a competitive team despite having the aforementioned financial restrictions.

He focused on organisation and discipline, trying to make the team hard to beat.

However, the job was very difficult because the squad was small and the league was very tough.

While there were some good moments, the results were not consistent, and he eventually left the role.

Even so, the experience taught him a lot about the reality of managing a club on a tight budget.

In 2016, Cooper became the manager of Bradford City, a club with a large group of passionate fans and big goals. He arrived during a time of change and was asked to make the team's performances more stable and consistent in League One.

He focused on improving the defence and bringing more discipline to the squad. He wanted the team to be structured in both attack and defence.

Unfortunately, the results did not turn out as well as everyone had hoped, and his time at the club was short because the leadership decided to go in a different direction.

Throughout his time as a manager, Cooper demonstrated his commitment to professionalism and to helping players improve. While his spells at Hartlepool United and Bradford City were short and challenging, they showed he was willing to take on difficult roles.

Managing at that level required him to balance many tasks, including tactics, signing new players, keeping the team's spirits up, and dealing with the club owners. This gave him a much wider view of how football works beyond just playing or coaching.

Over his long career in football, Colin Cooper has been recognised as a thoughtful and experienced person. Having played in the lower leagues, the Premier League, and Europe, he gained a wealth of knowledge about tactics, leadership, and team building.

His legacy is strongest at Middlesbrough. He is remembered there as a player who helped the club survive a dark era and as a coach who helped them during their golden years of winning trophies.

Colin Cooper's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Playing a huge part in helping Middlesbrough gain two successive promotions from Division Three to Division One.

Gary Hamilton

Hamilton started his professional football journey with Middlesbrough, joining the club's youth system before moving up into the senior team.

His development happened during a very difficult time for the club.

As mentioned many times in this book, in those years, Middlesbrough faced significant financial uncertainty and pressure on the pitch.

Because the club was struggling financially, there were more opportunities for young local players to get into the team. Hamilton took full advantage of this chance to make a name for himself in the first team.

He made his senior debut in the early 1980s and gradually began playing more often as a midfielder. Hamilton was not the kind of player who performed flashy skills or scored a huge number of goals.

Instead, he built his reputation on working hard, following tactical instructions, and being a player the manager could always count on.

His job on the field usually involved helping both the defence and the attack. He covered a lot of ground and helped make sure the midfield stayed organised and strong.

As Middlesbrough played in the lower divisions and sought stability, Hamilton became part of a core group of players who helped the club rebuild. The mid-1980s were a very rocky time, including 1986, when the club almost went out of business.

The team had to be resilient, and they relied heavily on local players who were truly committed to the badge.

Hamilton's work ethic and his loyalty made him a very important person to have in the squad during those years.

Throughout his time at Middlesbrough, Hamilton showed he could play several different roles in midfield. He could play in the centre to help out with defensive duties when the team was under pressure, or he could move forward to help connect the midfield with the strikers.

Because he was good at following orders and playing at a consistent level, he earned a lot of trust from his managers and his teammates.

Hamilton was part of Middlesbrough teams that competed in the Third and Second Divisions as the club tried to climb back up the English football leagues.

These seasons were very physically demanding and required a lot of mental toughness. The matches were intense, and the playing conditions were often quite difficult. Hamilton's willingness to fight for the ball, run back to help the defence, and contribute wherever he was needed made him perfect for the tough world of lower-division football.

Even though he was not usually the player who got the headlines in the newspapers, Hamilton's value was in how reliable he was.

Managers knew they could depend on him to stay disciplined, cover open spaces, and provide balance to the team. He was the type of player whose impact was quiet but crucial to keeping the team's structure together.

Over time, Hamilton became a well-known member of the Middlesbrough squad and played a large number of league games.

Being a local boy playing for his hometown team helped him form a strong bond with the supporters. This connection made him a respected professional who represented the spirit of the club during some of its hardest years.

As Middlesbrough began to improve and bring in new players, the competition for a starting spot in the team became much tougher. Hamilton's role started to change as the squad evolved and younger or

more specialised players arrived. Even so, he remained a dependable player whenever called upon, and he always maintained a professional attitude.

After he left Middlesbrough, Hamilton continued his career with Darlington.

He brought a lot of experience and leadership to his new team. Moving to Feethams allowed him to keep playing competitive football while staying in the same region where he had spent his whole life and career.

At Darlington, Hamilton showed the same qualities that had defined his years at Middlesbrough. He provided midfield stability, helped younger players develop, and used his years of experience to help the club compete.

While The Quakers were not playing at the same high level as Middlesbrough, Hamilton's presence gave the squad maturity and reliability.

He eventually retired from professional football after a career built on steady work rather than big trophies or fame.

His years as a player represented the reality for many professional footballers who give everything to the game through hard work and teamwork rather than seeking the spotlight.

Even though Gary Hamilton did not play for his country or win major trophies, his career is important because of his loyalty to Middlesbrough during a massive transition period. Players like him are often the backbone of a football club. They provide a sense of continuity and a strong work ethic that helps the team's culture stay healthy.

In the history of Middlesbrough, Hamilton represents a group of players who kept the club going and kept it grounded when money was tight. The mid-to-late 1980s were pivotal years that shaped the club's future, and the contributions of reliable squad members like him played a big part in the club's survival during those tough times.

Hamilton's style of play was very practical. He focused on the basic parts of the game, such as staying in the right position, supporting his teammates, and listening to the manager's tactics.

He did not have many spectacular moments, but he provided the steady performances that allowed the more creative players on the team to express themselves and take risks.

His career also shows how important local talent is in English football, especially during times when clubs cannot afford to buy expensive players and must rely on their own youth systems. As a player born in Middlesbrough and a Middlesbrough player, Hamilton was a symbol of the club's link to the local community.

After he retired, Hamilton mostly stayed away from the public eye. He did not go into high-profile coaching or television work like some other former players.

Because of this, his legacy lives on in the memories of the fans who saw him play and who respected his dedication and effort on the pitch.

For Middlesbrough fans who know the club's history, Gary Hamilton is remembered as a hard-working midfielder who served the team well during some of its most challenging seasons.

His career might not be filled with medals, but it is a great example of professionalism, resilience, and a total commitment to the team.

Gary Hamilton's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring the winning goal in the 1987/88 Second Division Play-Off Semi-Final 2nd leg against Bradford City.

David Hodgson

David Hodgson began his professional football journey in the mid-1970s.

He joined Middlesbrough as an apprentice in 1976, a move that proved to be a turning point for his development as a young player.

During this time, he moved through the youth ranks alongside his close friend Mark Proctor.

The two young men were mentored by Harold Shepherson, a highly respected figure at the club who had previously worked as a trainer for the England national team under the famous manager Sir Alf Ramsey.

His hard work paid off when he made his first-team debut for Middlesbrough on September 23, 1978.

It was a challenging introduction to professional football, as the match was away against Nottingham Forest at the City Ground. At that time, Forest were the reigning league champions, which created a very high-pressure atmosphere for a young debutant. Despite the stakes, the game ended in a 2-2 draw. Hodgson quickly won over the supporters at Ayresome Park.

The fans loved his incredible speed and the high energy he brought to every match. In his first full season, 1978/79, he played 19 league games and scored his first goal for the club.

He soon established himself as a regular starter on a talented team that also featured Craig Johnston

The 1979/80 season was statistically the best of his time at Middlesbrough. He played in 40 First Division matches and scored seven goals.

He remained a major threat to opposing defences over the next two years, playing both as a winger and a striker. He made 32 appearances in the 1980/1981 season and another 34 in 1981/1982.

By the time he decided to leave the club in August 1982, he had played 125 league matches and scored 16 goals. When counting cup competitions as well, his total was around 140 games and 20 goals.

His strong performances at the club level also led to international recognition. He was called up to the England Under-21 squad and was a key member of the team that won the UEFA European Under-21 Championship in 1982.

In August 1982, Hodgson took a massive step forward in his career by signing for Liverpool for £450,000. By making this move, he followed the same path as his former Middlesbrough teammates, Graeme Souness and Craig Johnston.

His first appearance for Liverpool came at Wembley Stadium during the Charity Shield against Tottenham Hotspur, where he came on as a substitute for the legendary Kenny Dalglish. A week later, he made his league debut in a 2-0 victory over West Bromwich Albion.

His career at Anfield started perfectly. In his first six games, he scored four goals, including a goal against Arsenal at Highbury and two goals during an exciting 4-3 win against Nottingham Forest.

However, playing for one of the best teams in the world meant there was huge competition for a starting spot. During the 1982/1983 season, he played 37 games and scored nine goals.

This contribution was enough to earn him a First Division winner's medal.

Unfortunately, his time on the pitch began to drop after that. When Liverpool signed Michael Robinson from Brighton & Hove Albion in 1983, Hodgson found himself further down the list of preferred players.

In the 1983/84 season, he was mostly used as a substitute and only appeared in five league games. Even though he wasn't playing as much, he was still part of a very successful squad that won a historic treble: the league title, the League Cup, and the European Cup. He received a European Cup winner's medal after Liverpool beat Roma in the final, even though he did not actually play in that specific game.

Frustrated by the lack of playing time under manager Joe Fagan, Hodgson asked to leave the club.

In August 1984, he signed for Sunderland for £125,000. This move brought him back to the North East of England.

During his first season, he played 27 league games and scored four goals. He played an important role in helping the team reach the 1985 Milk Cup Final, though they lost to Norwich City.

Things became more difficult afterwards as Sunderland was relegated to the Second Division. Hodgson's influence on the team began to fade, and after playing 40 league games for the club, he was given a free transfer in 1986.

He had a very short stay at Norwich City, where he played six games and scored once. In early 1987, he returned to Middlesbrough on loan. This second stint at his first club was not very successful; it lasted only two games and ended poorly when he received a red card in a match against Oldham Athletic.

Looking for a fresh start away from English football, Hodgson moved to Spain to join Xerez CD in the second division for the 1987/88 season. He played 14 league games in Spain but failed to score a goal.

David returned to England the following year to play for Sheffield Wednesday, where he made 11 appearances and scored one goal during the 1988/1989 season.

The final stage of his playing career involved extensive travelling. He moved to Japan to play for Mazda, the club now known as Sanfrecce Hiroshima.

After his time in Asia, he moved to France for a more stable period with FC Metz. He stayed there for two years, from 1990 to 1992, making 38 appearances and showing he could still play at a high level in the French top league. He finally retired from professional football in 1992 after playing just three games for Swansea City.

Once his playing days were over, Hodgson developed into a very good manager.

He became closely associated with Darlington, a club where he would eventually serve as manager over three separate periods. His first spell was quite short and took place in 1995. He returned in 1996 and led the club through a successful, stable era.

The highlight of this period was taking the team to Wembley for the Division Three play-off final in 2000, though they lost a close game to Peterborough United (1-0).

After taking a break from football, he came back for a third time in 2003. Across his three different stints as manager, he led the team for over 400 matches. His time at Darlington finally ended in October 2006 when he was sacked following a change in the club's ownership.

In the years after he ceased managing, Hodgson remained involved in the sports industry. He took on the role of director of sport for BHP Sport and also worked as a football scout, using his many connections and years of experience to identify new talent.

In 2004, he published his autobiography titled 'Three Times a Quaker', which detailed his life and his special connection to Darlington.

Although his career took him to many different places across Europe and Asia, football fans in the North East of England remember him most for two things: being an incredibly fast forward for Middlesbrough and a dedicated, long-serving leader for Darlington.

David Hodgson's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring three goals in a 4-1 home victory against Tottenham Hotspur in the season 1980/81.

Craig Johnston

Craig Johnston was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, to parents who were from Australia.

He spent his childhood growing up in New South Wales, Australia. When he was 15 years old, Johnston decided to take a big risk to follow his dream of playing football. He wrote letters to many English football clubs to request a trial.

Of all the clubs he contacted, Middlesbrough was the only one to reply with a yes. To pay for his flight and travel expenses to England, his parents made the huge sacrifice of selling the family home. He arrived in England and joined Middlesbrough as an apprentice in 1975.

His time at the club started very poorly. The manager at the time, Jack Charlton, reportedly told Johnston that he was the worst player he had ever seen and even suggested that he should just go back home to Australia.

Most people would have given up after hearing that from a legend, but Johnston refused to leave. He stayed in England and spent hours practising on his own in the club's car park with a ball to improve his skills.

His determination eventually paid off when a new manager, John Neal, took over from Charlton.

Johnston finally made his first-team debut for Middlesbrough on February 4, 1978. He was 17 years old at the time, and the team won the match 2-1 against Birmingham City.

Later that same season, he scored his first league goal in a game against West Ham United. Over the next few years, he became known as a very hard-working and talented player who could play in the midfield or on the wing.

His big break came during the 1979/80 season, when he played 30 league matches and scored five goals. The following year, he did even better, scoring 10 goals in 27 league games.

By the time he left Middlesbrough, he had played 64 league matches and scored 16 goals, catching the eye of the biggest clubs in the country.

In April 1981, he joined Liverpool for a transfer fee of £650,000.

He made his debut for the team on August 29, 1981, in a 1-0 loss to Wolverhampton Wanderers. At first, it was hard for him to get a regular spot in the starting lineup.

However, the Liverpool fans soon came to love him for how hard he worked and how much energy he brought to the pitch.

They gave him the nickname Skippy. He helped the team win the First Division title in the 1981/82 season by playing 18 league games and scoring six goals.

During the 1982/83 season, Johnston became a much more important player for the squad.

He played in 46 matches across all different competitions and scored 10 goals.

His efforts helped Liverpool win the league title again and also the League Cup. One of his highlights that year was scoring in the League Cup semi-final against Burnley. The following season, 1983/84, proved to be one of the greatest in the club's history. Johnston played 52 games as Liverpool achieved a historic treble.

They won the league title, the League Cup, and the European Cup. He also played in the European Cup final against Roma in Italy, coming on as a substitute in a game that Liverpool eventually won on penalties.

After a short period where he played fewer games under manager Joe Fagan, Johnston's career picked up again when Kenny Dalglish became the player-manager.

The 1985/1986 season was his busiest and most successful. He played in 61 matches and scored 10 goals. That season ended with Liverpool winning both the league title and the FA Cup.

Johnston became a hero to the fans when he scored the second goal in the FA Cup final at Wembley Stadium, helping Liverpool beat their local rivals, Everton, 3-1.

Johnston remained a regular player for the next two seasons. He won another league title in the 1987/88 season, playing 30 league games and scoring five goals.

Unfortunately, his football career ended very suddenly and unexpectedly when he was only 27 years old.

Straight after the 1988 FA Cup final, which Liverpool lost to Wimbledon, he announced his retirement from professional football.

He made this difficult choice because he wanted to go back to Australia to look after his sister, Faye.

She had been seriously injured in an accident that caused a brain injury, and he felt he needed to be there for his family.

Even though he retired at a young age, Johnston's record at Liverpool was excellent. He played 271 games for the club and scored 40 goals. During his time there, he won five league titles, one FA Cup, two League Cups, and one European Cup.

On the international stage, he played twice for the England Under-21 team in 1980 and 1981, but he never played a senior match for either England or Australia.

Graig Johnston's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring 10 goals in 27 league games in season 1980/81.

Tony Mowbray

Tony Mowbray is a name synonymous with resilience, leadership, and a deep-seated passion for football.

His journey in the professional ranks began at Middlesbrough, a club that would define much of his early life and legacy.

Joining as a young apprentice, he worked his way through the ranks until he was ready for the big stage. That moment arrived on September 8, 1982, when an 18-year-old Mowbray stepped onto the pitch to make his first-team debut against Newcastle United. The match ended in a hard-fought draw, but for the young defender, it was the start of something much larger.

He quickly became a fixture in the Middlesbrough defence, providing stability during a period of immense uncertainty and institutional chaos.

By the time he was 22, Mowbray had shown such natural authority that he was appointed club captain.

This was not an easy time to lead. In 1986, Middlesbrough was pushed to the absolute brink of existence.

Amidst this existential crisis, Mowbray became the emotional heartbeat of the team.

He led a squad composed largely of local players through a miraculous recovery.

Under his captaincy, they rose from the depths of the Third Division to secure back-to-back promotions, remarkably reaching the First Division by 1988.

This period set his status as a Teesside legend in stone. It also inspired one of the most famous quotes in English football from his manager, Bruce Rioch, who remarked that if he had to fly to the moon, Mowbray would be the man he would take with him.

This sentiment eventually provided the title for the popular Middlesbrough fanzine, 'Fly Me to the Moon'.

During his first stint with the club, he played 348 league games, scored 26 goals, and was named Player of the Year twice.

In late 1991, a new chapter began when Mowbray moved north to join the Scottish giants, Celtic. The transfer fee was a significant £1,000,000, reflecting the value placed on his experience and leadership.

Celtic were a club undergoing change, and they looked to Mowbray to provide a steady hand in the dressing room. He made a winning start in a victory against Aberdeen, and although his time in Glasgow was frequently interrupted by nagging injuries, his influence was profound.

Perhaps his most lasting contribution to the club was introducing the huddle.

During a pre-season tour in 1995, Mowbray suggested that the players should link arms in a circle before kick-off to show unity and solidarity during a difficult time for the squad.

This simple gesture evolved into a hallowed Celtic tradition that continues to this day. By the time he left Glasgow, he had made 78

league appearances and scored six goals, leaving behind a legacy that went far beyond his statistics on the pitch.

The final stage of his playing days took place in East Anglia with Ipswich Town. Signing for £300,000 in 1995, Mowbray once again found himself in a leadership role, eventually taking the captain's armband.

His career ended in the most cinematic way possible during the 2000 Division One play-off final at Wembley Stadium. Facing Barnsley, Mowbray rose to score a crucial equalising goal in a match that Ipswich eventually won four to two.

This victory secured the club's promotion to the Premier League. It was a poetic finish; the match was his first ever appearance at Wembley and his very last game as a professional footballer.

He retired having played over 550 league matches, a testament to his durability and professional standards.

Transitioning from the pitch to the dugout happened almost immediately. He remained at Ipswich Town to learn the ropes of coaching and even stepped in as a caretaker manager for a short period in 2002.

His first real opportunity to lead a club on his own terms came in 2004 when he was appointed manager of Hibernian in the Scottish Premier League.

He was an instant success, bringing a fresh perspective and an attacking philosophy to the team.

In his very first season, he was recognised as the Scottish Football Writers' Association Manager of the Year.

Under his guidance, Hibernian became a consistent force, finishing in the top four in consecutive seasons and earning the right to compete in European competitions.

His success in Scotland caught the attention of West Bromwich Albion, who appointed him as their manager in October 2006.

At his new club, Mowbray truly began to refine his signature style of play. He insisted on an attractive, expansive brand of football that delighted the fans and eventually led the team to the Championship title in the 2007/08 season.

His peers recognised his achievements by naming him the LMA Manager of the Year. While the following season ended in relegation from the Premier League, his reputation as a principled and talented coach remained intact. This led to a high-profile return to Celtic in June 2009, this time as manager.

However, the homecoming was difficult. Football can be unforgiving, and after only nine months and a series of disappointing results, he was dismissed from the post.

Mowbray soon returned to where it all began, taking over as manager at Middlesbrough in 2010.

The club faced significant financial constraints, and Mowbray worked tirelessly for three years to stabilise the institution and keep it competitive in the Championship. After leaving Middlesbrough in 2013, he had a brief spell with Coventry City before joining Blackburn Rovers.

His time at Ewood Park was a period of sustained rebuilding. He successfully guided the club back to the Championship after their promotion from League One in 2018 and spent five years turning them into a stable, competitive side once again.

In the summer of 2022, a new challenge arose at Sunderland. Taking over a newly promoted side, Mowbray defied expectations by leading them into the Championship play-offs in his very first season, proving once again his ability to get the best out of his players.

His most recent role was at Birmingham City, where he took the helm in January 2024.

Unfortunately, his time there was cut short by personal health challenges. In February 2024, he was forced to step away from his duties to undergo medical treatment. By May of that year, it was

confirmed that he would officially step down to focus entirely on his recovery and rehabilitation following surgery.

Throughout a managerial career spanning more than 850 matches, Tony Mowbray has remained one of the most respected figures in British football. He is known not just for his tactical mind or his eye for young talent, but for his character.

He has navigated the highs of promotion and the lows of dismissal with the same level of honesty, humility, and dignity. Whether as a rock at the back for Middlesbrough or a calming influence on the touchline, Mowbray's contribution to the sport is defined by a deep sense of integrity and a lifelong commitment to the game he loves.

Tony Mowbray's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Winning Middlesbrough's Player of the Year in 1985.

Heini Otto

Otto was a footballer defined by his remarkable ball control and durability, which made him a favourite among supporters in both the Netherlands and England.

The midfielder began his journey in his hometown with FC Amsterdam in 1974.

He stepped into the professional spotlight on September 15, 1974, making his debut as a substitute in a match against HFC Haarlem.

His early years were marked by a rapid promotion into the first team, where he quickly became an essential component of the midfield.

During his three-season stay with FC Amsterdam, Otto earned invaluable experience on the European stage.

The club enjoyed a spirited run in the UEFA Cup, where they managed to upset continental heavyweights such as Inter Milan and Fortuna Düsseldorf.

However, their journey was eventually halted in the quarter-finals by 1. FC Köln, those high-stakes matches established Otto as a player capable of competing with the best in Europe.

By the time he decided it was time for a new challenge in 1977, he had represented his hometown club in 124 league matches and contributed 18 goals.

His next move took him to FC Twente, a club facing the difficult task of replacing the influential Arnold Mühren, who had recently departed for English football.

Otto stepped into the void with confidence, further polishing his reputation as one of the most reliable and creative midfielders in the Dutch Eredivisie.

His four years at Twente were productive and filled with highlights, including more European competition against sides like Manchester City.

He also played a key role in helping the team reach the KNVB Cup final in 1979, though they ultimately finished as runners-up to Ajax.

He left Twente in 1981, having made 90 league appearances and scored 13 times.

The summer of that year marked a turning point in his career when he travelled across the North Sea for a trial with Middlesbrough.

The manager at the time, Bobby Murdoch, was quickly convinced of the Dutchman's quality during pre-season friendlies.

Middlesbrough paid approximately €261,000 to bring him to Teesside on a two-year contract, and Otto wasted no time in repaying that faith.

He scored on his First Division debut against Tottenham Hotspur at Ayresome Park on August 29, 1981, instantly endearing himself to the local fans.

While the season was a difficult one for the club, ending in relegation to the Second Division, Otto was a bright spark, finishing the campaign as the team's joint top scorer with five goals.

It was in the Second Division that Otto truly attained legendary status at Middlesbrough. He set a club record for outfield players by making 155 consecutive appearances between 1982 and 1985.

In an era where physical demands were high and medical recovery was basic, missing only two games out of a possible 189 over four years was a staggering feat of professionalism.

Despite the club's financial struggles and its inability to return to the top flight during his stay, Otto's tireless work ethic and humble attitude made him one of the most respected foreign imports in the club's history.

He eventually moved on in May 1985 after rejecting a contract extension, much to the disappointment of the Middlesbrough supporters.

Returning to the Netherlands, Otto joined ADO Den Haag, a move that marked the start of a highly successful final chapter of his playing days.

He immediately helped the club win the Eerste Divisie title in his first season, securing a return to the top flight.

Otto spent seven seasons with the club, evolving into a vital senior figure who guided younger players with his vast experience. Even as he aged, his productivity did not wane.

During the 1988/89 season, he topped the club's scoring charts with 17 goals as they fought for promotion.

He remained a regular starter well into his late thirties, finally hanging up his boots in July 1992 at the age of 37 after a final appearance against Go Ahead Eagles.

His total record for ADO Den Haag included 241 league appearances and 49 goals.

On the international stage, Otto's talent was recognised by the Dutch national team.

He earned his first senior cap on May 30, 1975, in a friendly against Yugoslavia, when he entered the match as a second-half

substitute. He was also honoured with a place in the Netherlands squad for the 1980 European Championship in Italy, and while he did not get onto the pitch during the tournament, being selected for such a prestigious squad spoke volumes about his standing. Additionally, he represented his country at the Under-23 level on seven occasions.

After retiring, Otto did not step away from the sport. He transitioned into coaching and administration, beginning his second career at ADO Den Haag as a coach and executive before moving to the Ajax youth academy in 1994.

His tactical intelligence led to a promotion to assistant manager of the Ajax first team in 1997, where he worked alongside Morten Olsen and later Jan Wouters.

During this period, he was part of the staff that guided Ajax to an Eredivisie title and two KNVB Cup victories. After serving as the manager of HFC Haarlem from 2000 to 2002, he returned to Ajax in a specialised role as a coordination and technical coach, a position he has held for over two decades.

Heini Otto's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring on his debut in a 2-1 win over Tottenham Hotspur in the 1981/82 season.

Gary Pallister

Pallister did not have the normal start to a life as a professional footballer.

While most top players are spotted by scouts as children, Gary was still playing non-league football for Billingham Town as a teenager.

It was not until 1984, when he was 19, that he joined Middlesbrough, the team he had supported since he was a boy. When he first arrived at their old stadium, Ayresome Park, he was a very tall and skinny young man.

He had to work hard to change his physique and learn how to handle the physical demands of being a professional defender in a tough league.

A very important part of his development happened in October 1985. Middlesbrough decided to send him on loan to Darlington to get more experience.

At that time, Darlington were playing in the Third Division under Cyril Knowles.

Gary made his first appearance for Darlington on October 19, 1985, in a 1-0 loss to Bristol City. Even though he only played seven matches at Darlington, the experience was very important to his career growth.

In his final game for the club, the team won 6-0 against Swansea City. Interestingly, former England player Jimmy Rimmer played in goal for The Swans that day.

This brief spell in the lower leagues gave him the confidence and physical toughness he needed to return to Middlesbrough and fight for a regular place in their starting lineup.

When he returned to Middlesbrough, the club was going through a very difficult time.

In 1986, the team nearly went out of business. Gary became a key player in the legendary squad that saved the club and helped it start winning again. Working under manager Bruce Rioch, Gary helped Middlesbrough achieve two promotions in a row. They went from the Third Division in 1987 to the top division by 1989.

Gary played exceptionally well during this period, so much so that he was named to the PFA Team of the Year in two divisions. He also played for the senior England national team while he was still a Second Division player. He made his England debut against Hungary in April 1988.

By the time he finished his first period at Middlesbrough in 1989, he had played 156 league games and was considered one of the best young defenders in England.

In August 1989, Alex Ferguson decided to sign Gary for Manchester United.

The transfer fee was £2,300,000, a record amount for a defender in Britain at the time.

Because of the high price, there was a lot of pressure on him to fix the team's defensive problems.

His first few months at Old Trafford were quite difficult. He found the training much harder than what he was used to and felt the weight of the record transfer fee. Alex Ferguson noticed that Gary needed to be stronger, so he put him on a strict weight-lifting program to add muscle to his 6-foot-4-inch frame.

This hard work quickly showed results. By the end of his first season, the fans voted him the Sir Matt Busby Player of the Year. He also helped the team win the FA Cup in 1990, which was the start of a very successful era for the club.

At Manchester United, Gary formed a famous defensive partnership with Steve Bruce. People often referred to them as a single unit because they worked so well together. They had different styles that balanced each other perfectly. Gary was fast and very calm when he had the ball at his feet, while Steve Bruce was known for being aggressive and brave in challenges. Together, they were the heart of the team that won the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1991 and the very first Premier League title in 1993.

Gary was also recognised by other professional players as the best in the country when he won the PFA Players' Player of the Year award for the 1991/92 season.

He was incredibly reliable and played almost every week, missing only one league match over three years, from 1992 to 1995.

The defender's career at Manchester United was trophy-laden. He won the Premier League four times, the FA Cup three times, and the League Cup once. He was also selected for the PFA Team of the Year five different times while playing in the top division.

One of his most famous moments happened in April 1997. In a massive game against rivals Liverpool at Anfield, Gary scored two goals with his head. United won the match 3-1, and those goals were a huge reason why the club went on to win the league title that year. After playing 437 games and scoring 15 goals for Manchester United, he left in 1998 as the club began to bring in younger defenders, such as Jaap Stam.

In July 1998, Gary returned to Middlesbrough. The club paid £2,500,000 to bring him back.

This was an unusual situation because Middlesbrough actually made a small profit on him after he had spent nearly ten years away at another club.

Back at the Riverside Stadium, Gary used his years of experience to lead the team, which was then managed by his former Manchester United teammate Bryan Robson.

Unfortunately, he suffered from recurring back and hip injuries during his second spell at the club, which made it hard for him to play every week.

Despite these health issues, he still played 55 league games over three seasons. He played his final professional match in 2001 and retired at 36, just as Steve McClaren was taking over as manager.

For the England national team, Gary earned 22 caps over eight years. Even though he was very successful with his clubs, he did not play as many games for England as a lot of people expected.

This was because many other legendary defenders were playing at the same time, such as Tony Adams, Des Walker, and Mark Wright. Gary was often in the squad for qualifying matches, but he never actually got to play in a major tournament like the World Cup or the European Championship. His last game for England was a World Cup qualifier against Poland in October 1996.

After he retired, Gary stayed involved in the sport in different ways. He became a well-known television pundit, appearing on the BBC and ITV to analyse matches, and he often appeared on

Manchester United's own television channel, MUTV. He also kept a strong connection to the North East of England.

In September 2010, he returned to his former loan club, Darlington, to serve as their operations director. He helped the club through a difficult period while they were playing in the Conference National League.

Additionally, he helped start a football academy with other former Middlesbrough players to help train the next generation. Gary Pallister is remembered as one of the most talented and successful defenders of his generation.

He was a player who had the toughness of a defender from the North East but also the grace and skill of a modern elite athlete.

Gary Pallister's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Helping his team gain promotion to the First Division in the season 1988/89.

Stephen Pears

Pears began his football career as an apprentice at Manchester United in 1978.

Although he was clearly a talented young goalkeeper, he found it difficult to break into the first team as Gary Bailey was the established number one.

Because he wanted to play regular matches, Stephen moved to Middlesbrough on loan in November 1983.

His debut was a great success. On November 5, 1983, he helped the team win 2-0 against Cardiff City, keeping a clean sheet.

He played twelve games during this short stay and quickly became a favourite among the fans at Ayresome Park.

Middlesbrough liked him so much that they tried to buy him permanently. However, the club was having serious financial

problems at the time. They could not afford the £80,000 that Manchester United wanted for him, so Stephen had to go back to Old Trafford.

When he returned to Manchester United, he finally got his chance to play for the senior team in January 1985 against Coventry City. He played five games for the club that season, including a win in the FA Cup and a match where he kept a clean sheet against West Bromwich Albion.

Even though he was playing well, United decided to sign another goalkeeper, Chris Turner, from Sunderland. This made it clear that Stephen would remain a backup player if he stayed at Old Trafford.

In July 1985, Middlesbrough finally found the money they needed to sign him permanently.

This move changed his life and started a connection with the club that would last for many years.

The 1985/86 season was a very dark time for Middlesbrough. The team was relegated to the Third Division, and the club was in such bad financial shape that it was mentioned a few times in this book. His loyalty paid off as he became the starting goalkeeper for a legendary young team managed by Bruce Rioch.

During the 1986/1987 season, he played every single minute of every league game. His ability to stop shots was a major reason why the team recovered so quickly and earned promotion back to the Second Division in their first attempt.

The following year, the 1987/1988 season, was even more impressive for him. Stephen set a club record by going seven games in a row without letting in a single goal between September and November. Many people believed he was the best goalkeeper outside the top division at the time.

One of his most famous performances happened in the FA Cup against Everton at Goodison Park, where fans still remember his incredible saves. That season ended with another promotion after Middlesbrough beat Chelsea in a dramatic play-off final.

In 1990, Stephen had the honour of playing at Wembley Stadium in the Zenith Data Systems Cup Final.

Although Middlesbrough lost 1-0 to Chelsea, his reputation as a top goalkeeper continued to grow.

By 1992, he was very close to playing for the England national team. The manager, Graham Taylor, called him up for a friendly match against Czechoslovakia. However, he had a terrible run of bad luck.

During a training session, he collided with teammate Dion Dublin and broke his cheekbone, ending his chances of playing.

When the Premier League started in 1992, Stephen was still the main goalkeeper for Middlesbrough. He played 26 games in that first Premier League season, but he started to suffer from more injuries. In 1994, Bryan Robson became the manager, and the club began spending more money on other players.

In his final competitive season with the club, Stephen played 11 games and helped Middlesbrough win the First Division title in 1995.

His time at Middlesbrough ended with a very special and emotional game on May 16, 1995. It was the last match ever played at Ayresome Park before the club moved to their new home, the Riverside Stadium. The stadium was full with 19,000 fans.

Stephen played for both teams during the match. Near the end of the game, he was given a penalty kick. He scored it, which made him the last person ever to score a goal at Ayresome Park. It was a perfect way to say goodbye to a player who had spent ten years defending those same goals.

After leaving Middlesbrough, he spent one season at Liverpool as a backup goalkeeper, then two years at Hartlepool United before retiring in 1998.

He went straight back to Middlesbrough to start a new career as a coach. He spent nearly 10 years working in the club's academy, where he helped train future professional goalkeepers such as Ross Turnbull and David Knight.

In 2007, he was promoted to coach the first team under manager Gareth Southgate and continued in that role under several other managers.

After leaving Middlesbrough in 2013, he worked as a coach and assistant manager at Hartlepool United.

In 2014, he even served as the temporary manager for a few games.

Throughout his long career as both a player and a coach, Stephen Pears has remained a very respected figure in football in the North East. He is known as a humble man with a deep understanding of how to be a top-class goalkeeper.

Stephen Pears' Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring the last ever goal at Ayresome Park during his testimonial in season 1994/95.

Stuart Ripley

Ripley first joined the Middlesbrough academy when he was just a schoolboy.

His rise through the professional ranks coincided with one of the most chaotic and difficult periods in the club's history. He signed as an apprentice in 1984, which was a time of deep crisis for Middlesbrough.

On the pitch, the team was struggling to compete in the Second Division, while off the pitch, the club was drowning in massive financial debts that threatened its very existence.

He was only 17 when he made his senior debut on February 5, 1985, in a game against Oldham Athletic.

At that time, the Middlesbrough squad was an awkward mix of ageing veterans and local youngsters who had never been tested at a high level.

Ripley's promotion to the first team was a key part of a necessary youth revolution at the club.

However, his true strength of character was tested in the summer of 1986. By then, Middlesbrough had been relegated to the Third Division.

During the legendary 1986/1987 season, Ripley became an essential player for manager Bruce Rioch. His great pace on the right wing provided a vital outlet for a team that played with incredible heart and energy.

Before that season really gained momentum for him, he was sent on a one-month loan to Bolton Wanderers, who were in the Third Division.

He made five appearances for The Trotters, an experience he later described as a major wake-up call regarding the physical intensity and toughness of lower-league football.

He returned to Middlesbrough as a much more robust and prepared player, helping the team achieve the incredible feat of winning promotion at the first attempt.

The following 1988/89 season was even more impressive, as Ripley played a central role in securing a second consecutive promotion.

Over the next four seasons, Ripley established himself as one of the most consistent and reliable wingers in English football.

He stayed loyal to Middlesbrough even after they suffered relegation in 1989 and was a driving force in their successful push back to the top flight.

By the early 1990s, he had turned himself into a specialist at crossing the ball. His technique was very specific and hard to defend; he would often sprint past a defender to the byline before cutting back or whipping in a fast, swirling cross into the dangerous area between the goalkeeper and the defenders. This reliability and quality made him a major target for many top-flight clubs.

In July 1992, Ripley became the first major signing for Blackburn Rovers in their new Premier League era. The transfer fee was just over £1,000,000, which was a clear statement of intent from the club's owner, Jack Walker. Ripley's impact at his new club was immediate.

In his very first Premier League game for Blackburn Rovers, he scored against Crystal Palace, making him the first player in the club's history to score a Premier League goal.

As that season went on, he became one half of a dangerous dual-wing attack, playing on the right while Jason Wilcox played on the left. This tactical plan was created specifically to provide service to the striker Alan Shearer. Ripley's ability to deliver high-quality crosses was a huge reason why Shearer was able to score so many goals.

The 1994/95 season was the absolute peak of his professional career.

While the media usually focused on the famous strike partnership of Alan Shearer and Chris Sutton, Ripley was the engine room that powered the attack.

He played in 37 league games that year, missing only five matches during a very long and tiring campaign.

His physical stamina was impressive, as he was often asked to run back and help his defender, Henning Berg, just as much as he was expected to join the attack.

On the final day of the season at Anfield, even though Blackburn Rovers lost the game to Liverpool, they were crowned league champions.

Ripley was widely celebrated as one of the unsung heroes of that title victory, as his tactical discipline allowed the team's stars to play at their best.

After winning the league title, Ripley faced the new challenge of playing in the UEFA Champions League. While Blackburn Rovers as a whole struggled to compete against the best teams in Europe, Ripley continued to perform at a high level in domestic matches.

However, as the 1990s progressed, several injuries began to slow his famous explosive pace.

He stayed at Ewood Park until 1998, eventually playing nearly two hundred games for the club. He then moved to Southampton in 1998 for a fee of £1,500,000.

The hope was that he could bring his veteran experience to a team that was frequently involved in relegation battles.

His time on the south coast was a bit inconsistent; while he still showed flashes of his old talent, his time on the field was often cut short by recurring hamstring problems.

His career with the England national team is often seen as a case of missed opportunities. He won his first international cap in 1993 during a 7-1 victory over San Marino, a game most remembered for England conceding a goal in the first few seconds.

Despite being a vital part of the best club team in the country in 1995, he was often overlooked by England manager Terry Venables for Euro 96.

This was largely because the national team had started to move away from using traditional wide wingers in favour of a narrower midfield.

He eventually earned his second and final cap four years later under manager Glenn Hoddle in a match against Moldova.

After he retired from playing in 2002, he did not follow the usual path into football coaching or management.

Instead, he committed himself to his academic studies. He earned a first-class honours degree in law and then trained to become a qualified solicitor.

This massive career change was fuelled by a promise he had made to his parents when he was a young man.

He eventually started his own sports law consultancy and became a respected figure on the legal side of the sports industry, focusing on matters such as player contracts and disciplinary hearings.

For many years, he has been a member of the Football Association's Judicial Panel, where he oversees cases that benefit from the perspective of someone who has actually played the game at the highest level.

Stuart Ripley's legacy is split between two different worlds. In the North East and in Lancashire, he is remembered as a footballer of great integrity and skill who provided the assists for some of the most famous goals of the 1990s.

In the legal profession, he is respected as a pioneer who demonstrated that the hard work and preparation required in elite sports could be applied to build a successful second career in a difficult field.

His son, Connor, has continued the family tradition of playing professional football as a goalkeeper, but Stuart remains the only member of the family who can boast both a Premier League winner's medal and a law degree.

Stuart Ripley's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Making his Middlesbrough debut against Oldham Athletic in the 1984/85 season.

Bernie Slaven

Slaven's early football career in Scotland was a bit of a journeyman experience, as he spent time playing for several different clubs, including Greenock Morton, Airdrieonians, and Queen of the South.

However, he really started to make a name for himself at Albion Rovers.

During the 1984/85 season, he was in incredible form, scoring 31 goals in only 43 appearances.

Because he was playing so well, he took the unusual step of writing letters to various English clubs to request a trial.

This bold move worked, and he eventually signed a contract with Middlesbrough in October 1985 for a transfer fee of £25,000.

When Slaven arrived at Ayresome Park, the club was going through a massive period of change.

He made his first appearance for the team on October 12, 1985, in a match against Leeds United. Slaven quickly became a massive favourite among fans for his smart movement on the pitch and his natural ability to finish scoring chances.

Slaven was a key member of the famous 1986 Middlesbrough squad that survived the threat of total liquidation.

He also played a central role as the team achieved the remarkable feat of winning back-to-back promotions, rising from the Third Division to the First Division in just two years.

His partnership with other legendary players, such as Tony Mowbray and Gary Pallister (mentioned many times in this book), defined a golden era for the club. Slaven was also incredibly consistent; he finished as the club's top goalscorer for six consecutive seasons between 1987 and 1993.

In the very first season of the Premier League in 1992/93, Slaven made history. He became the first-ever Republic of Ireland international to score a goal in the newly formed league.

He famously scored both goals in a 2-0 victory over Manchester City in August 1992.

Despite his status as a club legend, his long career at Middlesbrough came to an end in March 1993 when he was given a free transfer and joined Port Vale.

By the time he left Teesside, he had scored a total of 146 goals in 381 appearances across all competitions. This impressive tally placed him sixth on the list of Middlesbrough's all-time leading goalscorers.

After moving to Port Vale, he continued his habit of finding the back of the net, scoring 13 goals in 46 appearances.

In February 1994, he decided to move back to the North East to join Darlington. Although he was nearing the end of his professional career, he brought valuable experience to The Quakers.

During two seasons at Feethams, the striker made 37 league appearances and scored 7 goals.

He officially retired from professional football in 1995, though he kept playing at the non-league level for Billingham Synthonia, where he maintained an extraordinarily high scoring record.

On the international stage, Slaven earned seven caps playing for the Republic of Ireland.

He was eligible through his Irish grandfather and made his debut in 1990 against Wales, scoring his only international goal in that match.

He was also selected for the 1990 World Cup squad in Italy, although he did not get any playing time during the tournament.

After retiring from football entirely, Slaven became a well-known media personality in the North East, famous for his outspoken and passionate punditry.

He remains an iconic figure to Middlesbrough supporters today, remembered as a player who quite literally wrote his own ticket to success.

Bernie Slaven's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Being Middlesbrough's top scorer in six seasons in a row between 1987 and 1993.

Chapter Five

A Brief History of the 1990s

In the 1990/91 season, the manager Colin Todd tried to push the Middlesbrough team toward the play-offs.

The football they played was often basic, but Bernie Slaven was a player who could win games all by himself.

He was a natural goal scorer who loved being in the penalty area and finding the back of the net.

The midfield was made stronger by the arrival of Trevor Putney and the steady work of Paul Kerr. This was a team built on hard work and being very organised in defence. They finished seventh in the league, which meant they qualified for the new play-off system. The semi-final game against Notts County was very close and tense. After a draw in the first game at their home ground, Ayresome Park, the team travelled to Meadow Lane with high hopes.

However, a narrow defeat ended their dreams of moving up. This failure led the manager to leave because the owner, Steve Gibson, and the board felt the club needed a fresh approach to keep up with the changing world of English football.

Lennie Lawrence was the man chosen to lead the team for the 1991/92 season.

The pressure was very high because the top clubs were starting a new league called the Premier League.

Being part of that first season was seen as something the club had to do for money and pride. Lawrence was known for being very strict tactically, and he changed many players in the squad.

He signed Paul Wilkinson, a big striker who would become very important, and John Hendrie, who brought excitement to the side.

The defence was led by the famous Tony Mowbray and by a very reliable goalkeeper, Stephen Pears.

The season was a long and difficult race. As the end of the year approached, Middlesbrough found themselves in a three-way battle for the top spots with Ipswich Town and Blackburn Rovers. On the final day, the team needed a good result at Molineux against Wolverhampton Wanderers. The team fell behind and had a player sent off, but they showed the club's spirit.

Hendrie and Wilkinson both scored to win the game 2-1. This meant Middlesbrough finished in second place and earned a spot in the very first Premier League season.

The 1992/93 season started with high hopes. Middlesbrough won their first home game at Ayresome Park against Manchester City.

Paul Wilkinson scored the first-ever goal for the club in the Premier League.

Later that year, they beat the same team again with four goals and had a famous win over the champions, Leeds United.

However, as winter came, it became clear that the squad was not strong enough.

They did not have enough skilled players to compete with big teams like Manchester United, who were spending lots of money. After a very bad run of games in the second half of the year, the club fell into the relegation zone.

Even though the goalkeeper played well, the club finished near the bottom and became one of the first teams to be relegated from the new Premier League.

The 1993/94 season, back in the lower league, was poor, considering they had just been relegated from the Premier League. They finished ninth.

The fans were growing tired of the manager's simple style, and fewer people were watching the games.

Behind the scenes, Steve Gibson was planning something huge.

He realised that to be one of the best clubs, they needed a famous leader whom the whole world respected.

In May 1994, he surprised the football world by hiring Bryan Robson as player/manager. Robson's arrival was the start of the modern version of the club.

He came from Manchester United with many medals and a winning attitude that immediately changed the club.

His first season was a year of celebration. It was the last year the club would play at Ayresome Park, and everyone was excited.

He brought in Nigel Pearson to lead the defence and gave chances to young players like Jamie Pollock and Craig Hignett.

The team played with an attacking style and a strong desire to win. They signed a German striker, Uwe Fuchs, on loan, who scored many goals quickly and helped the team win the league title.

The final game at the old stadium was very emotional as the fans said goodbye to a place that had been their home for ninety-two years.

John Hendrie scored both goals to win the game, and Middlesbrough were champions.

The summer of 1995 was perhaps the most important time in the history of the club. Middlesbrough moved into the Riverside Stadium, a brand-new arena on the banks of the river.

At the time, it was the most modern stadium in England. To match this beautiful new home, the owner broke the record for the most a club had spent on a player to sign Nick Barmby.

This was followed by the signing of a young Brazilian star, Juninho. When he arrived at the airport, thousands of fans were there to greet him.

He was the best player in Brazil, and people all over the world were talking about him joining a team in the North East of England.

In the 1995/96 season, the team became known for its very entertaining play. Juninho was more skilful than any player the fans had ever seen.

At first, he found the English game very physical, but soon he became the most exciting player in the country.

He worked very well with other attacking players, and the team climbed high in the table. Even though they finished in the middle of the league, the season was a success because it showed the club could attract world-class stars.

The 1996/97 season was so dramatic that people still talk about it to this day.

The manager and owner decided to buy even more famous players. They signed Fabrizio Ravanelli, who had just won the European Champions League with Juventus, and a strong Portuguese midfielder, Emerson.

The season started with a very exciting draw against Liverpool, where Ravanelli scored three goals.

The team were amazing at attacking but very weak at defending. The season was strange because they did very well in the cup competitions but very poorly in the league.

They reached two major finals at Wembley Stadium. However, their position in the league was dangerous.

In December, a flu bug swept through the camp. The club thought they had permission to cancel a game against Blackburn Rovers, but the league disagreed and was very harsh, deducting 3 points as punishment.

Those three points would cause a lot of pain later on in the season. Even though they played in two finals, they lost both.

On the final day of the league season, they drew their game, but it was not enough because of the points that were taken away. Middlesbrough, with some of the most expensive players in the world, were relegated.

Juninho crying on the pitch at the end of the game became a famous image of sadness.

The 1997/98 season required the team to be very brave. Many people thought the stars would all leave, and while some did, the owner spent money on a new star, Paul Merson.

He was an amazing leader and helped the team return to the Premier League at the very first attempt. Paul was the bridge between the skill of the top league and the hard work needed in the lower league.

The team also reached another cup final, making it three finals in just over a year, though they lost again.

They secured their move back to the top league on the final day with a big win.

The last two years of the decade saw the club become more stable. Bryan Robson brought in experienced coaches and players to strengthen the defence.

They signed striker Hamilton Ricard, who scored many goals and became a firm favourite.

During this time, the club finished in the middle of the table, showing they were now a solid force in the Premier League.

The decade ended with the club feeling strong and ready for the future.

Chapter Six

Ten Memorable Players from the 1990s

Mikkel Beck

Beck arrived at Middlesbrough in the summer of 1996 as one of the very first high-profile players to take advantage of the Bosman ruling.

His move to Teesside signalled the start of a massive change for the club.

After he impressed for Denmark during the Euro 96 tournament, the striker was hand-picked by manager Bryan Robson. He joined a squad that was quickly becoming one of the most discussed in Europe.

While global superstars like Juninho and Fabrizio Ravanelli took most of the headlines, Beck was brought in to be the functional, hardworking partner to their individual brilliance.

His debut season in 1996/97 remains one of the most statistically bizarre campaigns in the history of English football. Beck was part of a team that reached both the FA Cup Final and the League Cup Final while simultaneously being relegated from the Premier League.

This unusual situation defined the early part of his career at the club. He was a vital piece of a side that could outplay the best teams in the country during cup competitions, but struggled to find any real consistency in the league.

During that first year, Beck made 25 league appearances and scored five goals, including a memorable strike against local rivals Newcastle United.

However, it was his contribution to the famous cup runs that truly made him a favourite among the Riverside faithful. He played a massive role in the semi-final victory over Chesterfield, scoring the opening goal in the replay to help secure Middlesbrough's place at Wembley.

Despite all his hard work, the season ended in genuine heartbreak. The team suffered two defeats in major finals and relegation, largely caused by a controversial three-point deduction for a postponed fixture against Blackburn Rovers.

Following the drop to the second tier, Beck faced a significant crossroads in his career.

He chose to stay with Middlesbrough in the First Division, a decision that cemented his status as a dedicated professional in the eyes of the supporters. The 1997/98 season proved to be his most prolific period in a red shirt.

Playing in a league that suited his physical style and aerial strength, Beck became the focal point of the Middlesbrough attack. He finished that campaign with 14 league goals in 39 appearances, playing a huge part in helping the club secure an immediate return to the Premier League.

His ability to partner with different types of strikers, including the legendary Paul Merson and later Hamilton Ricard, showed his versatility. He was a target man who could both finish chances himself and provide opportunities for others.

During this period, he once again helped the club reach a major final, the 1998 League Cup Final against Chelsea, though Middlesbrough unfortunately finished as runners-up yet again.

By the time Middlesbrough returned to the Premier League for the 1998/99 season, the landscape of the squad had changed. Bryan Robson continued to invest heavily in new talent, and the arrival of

players like Brian Deane, combined with the presence of Hamilton Ricard, meant that Beck's opportunities as a guaranteed starter began to fade.

Despite this change in status, he remained a useful squad member during the first half of the campaign, making 27 appearances and scoring five goals.

His work rate never faltered, but as the club looked to establish itself in the top half of the table, Robson decided to refresh the attacking options.

In March 1999, after making 91 league appearances and scoring 24 league goals for the club, he was sold to Derby County for a fee of £500,000.

The legacy of Mikkell Beck at Middlesbrough is usually viewed through the lens of the Golden Era under Robson. He was never the most technically gifted player on the pitch, especially when sharing the pitch with a genius like Juninho, but he provided necessary physicality and reliable goal threat during a major period of transition. His total goal tally for Middlesbrough across all competitions stood at 31 goals in 113 appearances.

His departure marked the end of an era for the Danish striker in the North East, but he is still remembered fondly by the Riverside crowd for his role in those historic seasons.

He is forever linked to the frequent trips to Wembley and the dramatic battle for promotion. Even after retiring and moving into a successful career as a football agent, Beck has frequently spoken of his time at Middlesbrough as the most formative and exciting chapter of his professional life.

Mikkell Beck's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring the opening goal against Chesterfield that helped Middlesbrough reach the FA Cup Final in the 1996/97 season.

Emerson

Emerson arrived at Middlesbrough in May 1996 as one of the most exciting and mysterious signings of a truly revolutionary era for the club.

He was a Brazilian midfield general with a reputation for immense power, technical grace, and a thunderous long-range shot. Middlesbrough signed him from FC Porto for a fee of approximately £4,000,000.

His arrival was part of a very bold recruitment drive by manager Bryan Robson, who wanted to blend international flair with domestic grit. This plan involved placing Emerson alongside other high-profile new arrivals, such as Fabrizio Ravanelli and the established fan favourite Juninho.

His pedigree was unquestionable, and his debut for Middlesbrough suggested that the club had secured a player capable of totally dominating the Premier League.

On the opening day of the 1996/97 season, in a thrilling 3-3 draw against Liverpool at the Riverside Stadium, Emerson's performance in the heart of the midfield was a revelation to everyone watching. He displayed a level of physical presence that immediately endeared him to the supporters.

The fans quickly nicknamed the trio of Juninho, Ravanelli, and Emerson as the 'Samba Kings'.

His first goal for the club came in September 1996 during a 4-1 victory over West Ham United. It was a strike that became his trademark. After receiving a pass from Juninho outside the penalty area, he jinked past a defender before unleashing a powerful drive into the top corner from 25 yards out. This ability to score spectacular goals from distance was a recurring theme during his time in England. He followed it up with another memorable effort in a 7-0 League Cup win against Hereford United and a dominant performance against Huddersfield Town in the same competition.

However, the initial promise of his Middlesbrough career was soon clouded by off-field complications and a personal struggle to adapt to life in North East England.

While he initially seemed to enjoy the local social scene, the difficulty of the transition began to weigh heavily on him. Matters were further complicated by persistent interest from major European clubs, most notably FC Barcelona, where his former mentor Bobby Robson was then in charge.

This interest appeared to unsettle the midfielder, leading to a noticeable decline in his consistency on the pitch as the 1996/97 season progressed.

The campaign turned into a bizarre mixture of cup glory and league despair. Emerson was a central figure as Middlesbrough reached both the FA Cup Final and the League Cup Final. This was the first time the club had ever reached either showpiece game. He played in the semi-final draw against Chesterfield, a game that is still etched in the memory of Boro fans today. Yet, despite these historic runs, the club's league form plummeted. As has been mentioned before, a controversial three-point deduction for a postponed match against Blackburn Rovers ultimately proved fatal, and Middlesbrough were relegated to the First Division.

In the wake of relegation, many people expected the club's expensive foreign stars to leave immediately. While Juninho and Ravanelli eventually moved on to other clubs, Emerson surprisingly stayed at the Riverside for the start of the 1997/98 season.

During this period, he formed a brief but effective partnership with Paul Merson.

In September 1997, he scored a spectacular goal in a 2-1 win away at Sunderland, firing a long-range shot into the net at the newly opened Stadium of Light.

Despite showing flashes of his immense talent, his relationship with the club continued to deteriorate.

He frequently travelled back to Brazil and eventually went AWOL, claiming he could not return to England due to personal and family reasons regarding the difficulty of adjusting to the region. The standoff between the player and the club reached a breaking point in late 1997.

Chairman Steve Gibson took a firm stance, but it became clear to everyone that Emerson's time on Teesside was over.

In January 1998, he was sold to the Spanish side CD Tenerife for a fee of roughly £4,000,000.

His departure was a source of great frustration for many fans who felt they had only glimpsed a small part of his true potential. However, his impact during his eighteen-month stay remained undeniable. In total, he made 52 league appearances for Middlesbrough and scored eight goals.

Emerson's career after leaving Middlesbrough took him across Europe and eventually back to Brazil. He enjoyed a successful spell in Spain with CD Tenerife and later with Deportivo La Coruna, where he was part of a squad that had recently won the La Liga title.

He also played for Atletico Madrid before making a brief return to the United Kingdom with Rangers in 2003.

This move made him the first Brazilian to ever play for the Scottish club. He eventually moved to Greece, playing for Skoda Xanthi and AEK Athens. In a poetic turn of events, he returned to the Riverside Stadium in 2005 as a player for Skoda Xanthi in a UEFA Cup tie. He received a very warm reception from the fans who still remembered his spectacular strikes and the excitement he brought to the club during those turbulent years in the mid-nineties.

Emerson's legacy at Middlesbrough is often debated by supporters. To some, he represents the great what-if of the Bryan Robson era. They see him as a world-class talent whose stay was cut short by a lack of fulfilment on the pitch.

To others, he remains one of the most gifted individuals ever to wear the red shirt. He was a player whose physical power and

technical ability were perfectly suited for the English game, even if only for a short time. His career at the club remains a focal point of nostalgia for a generation of supporters who witnessed the meteoric rise and dramatic fall of the mid-nineties Middlesbrough project.

Emerson's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring his first goal for his new club in a 4-1 win against West Ham United in the 1996/97 season.

Bryan Robson

Robson began his long journey in football as a young apprentice at West Bromwich Albion.

In the very early years of his professional life, it seemed like his career might end almost before it had truly started. Between 1975 and 1977, he suffered the terrible luck of breaking his leg three different times in very short succession.

During that particular period of football history, many players would have been forced to retire after such a series of major injuries. However, the physical strength and mental toughness shown by Robson were truly extraordinary.

He refused to let these setbacks stop him and worked hard to return to the pitch.

By 1978, he had become the main driving force of an exciting West Bromwich Albion team managed by Ron Atkinson. He was a key member of the famous squad that finished third in the First Division and reached the UEFA Cup quarter-finals.

During his time playing at The Hawthorns, he played in 198 matches and scored 40 goals. He quickly earned a reputation as a midfielder who could dominate any game through his sheer willpower and his excellent technical skills.

In October 1981, Robson decided to follow his manager, Ron Atkinson, to Manchester United. The move cost a transfer fee of 1,500,000, a record amount for a British player at the time.

He famously signed his new contract on a simple table in the middle of the pitch at Old Trafford. Over the next 13 years, he would grow to become the ultimate icon for Manchester United fans.

He was appointed club captain in 1982 and eventually earned the famous nickname 'Captain Marvel'.

On the pitch, he was known as a box-to-box midfielder. This meant he seemed to be everywhere at once, often making a desperate tackle to save a goal at one end of the field before running to the other end to score a header.

Robson led Manchester United to several FA Cup titles, winning the trophy in 1983, 1985, and 1990.

When Alex Ferguson took over as manager in 1986, he immediately saw Robson as the leader who would set the standards for a new era at the club. Robson captained the team when they won the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1991, including a famous victory over FC Barcelona in the final.

Even as his playing days were coming to an end, he was still an influential leader who helped Manchester United end their 26-year wait for a league title. He also helped the club win the Premier League in both 1993 and 1994. In total, he made 461 appearances for United and scored 99 goals.

His career playing for the England national team was just as impressive as his club career. He earned 90 caps for his country and scored 26 goals, serving as the England captain 65 times. He represented England in three different World Cups in 1982, 1986, and 1990. During the 1982 World Cup, he scored one of the fastest goals in tournament history in a match against France.

Despite his success, his time at major international tournaments was often interrupted by injuries, particularly to his shoulder and Achilles tendon.

Even with these physical struggles, he remained the player whom England managers trusted the most. Bobby Robson, who managed England for many years, once famously described Bryan Robson as his best player. He said that Robson was always the first name he wrote on the team sheet, no matter which team England was playing against.

The move into management came in May 1994, when Robson took the job of player-manager at Middlesbrough.

His seven years in charge at the Riverside Stadium represented the most ambitious and exciting period in the history of that club.

In his very first season, he led Middlesbrough to the First Division title and promotion. He used his famous reputation in world football to convince international stars to join the club, including players like Juninho from Brazil, Fabrizio Ravanelli from Italy, and Emerson.

During this exciting era, Middlesbrough reached three major cup finals in just two years, including two League Cup finals and one FA Cup final. Although the club suffered a controversial relegation in 1997 after being punished with the previously mentioned three-point deduction, Robson stayed with the team.

His leadership ensured they returned to the Premier League at their first attempt in 1998.

He helped establish Middlesbrough as a regular team in the top league and brought in more star players, such as Paul Ince and Alen Boksic.

He also helped oversee the creation of the high-quality training facility at Rockliffe Park.

After he left Middlesbrough in 2001, Robson took a short break from the game before returning to manage Bradford City in 2003. While his time there was short, he soon returned to the club where he began his career, West Bromwich Albion, in 2004.

It was during this return that he achieved a legendary feat known as the 'Great Escape'.

On the final day of the 2004/05 season, West Bromwich Albion became the first club in the history of the Premier League to avoid being relegated after being at the bottom of the league table on Christmas Day.

It was a management achievement that reflected the same toughness he showed as a player.

He left West Bromwich Albion in 2006 and briefly managed Sheffield United during the 2007/08 season.

His final major role in management was an international adventure in Southeast Asia. In 2009, he was named the manager of the Thailand national team.

He spent two years there trying to update their tactical approach and improve their status in Asian football. He eventually decided to step down in 2011 due to health reasons, but he had successfully helped make the sport more popular in that region. After he returned to England, he was appointed global ambassador for Manchester United, a role he still holds today.

Bryan Robson's Memorable Middlesbrough Moments

Leading Middlesbrough to three cup finals.

John Hendrie

Hendrie's early years in football helped him prepare for his future success.

He began his career at Coventry City, where he struggled to break into the starting team.

In 1984, he moved to Bradford City, and this turned out to be a great decision.

During his four seasons there, he played 173 games and scored 46 goals. He was a very influential player when the team won the

Division Three title in 1985. Sadly, this happened at the same time as the tragic Bradford City stadium fire, which people never forgot.

Three years later, he earned a move to Newcastle United.

At his new club, he played 34 matches and scored 4 goals. However, the club was going through a difficult time, so he was allowed to move to Leeds United.

He helped the Yorkshire-based club win the Second Division title in 1990 before eventually moving to Middlesbrough.

After five successful years there, he joined Barnsley in 1995 for about £250,000.

Some people thought his best days were over, but he proved them wrong. He became a key part of the team during a very successful era.

His experience helped Barnsley reach the Premier League for the first time in their history in 1997. He played over 100 times for the Yorkshire club and scored 17 goals.

In 1998, he was appointed player-manager. He led the club to a respectable 13th place in the league before retiring from professional football in 1999.

Throughout his career, Hendrie was known for being a reliable player who helped his teams win. He played in more than 500 professional matches and scored over 120 goals.

One of his greatest achievements was winning promotion to the top league with three different clubs: Middlesbrough, Leeds United, and Barnsley.

Today, fans remember him not just for being a great goalscorer but also for being a true gentleman who always had a strong bond with the supporters at every club he represented.

John Hendrie's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Helping Middlesbrough secure promotion to the Premier League in season 1992/93.

Juninho Paulista

Juninho Paulista is a name that every football fan in Middlesbrough knows very well. His full name is Osvaldo Giroldo Junior, but to the people on Teesside, he is simply the greatest player to ever wear their red shirt.

He was not just a great player; he was a person who changed the club's history and showed how a foreign player could become a local hero in the English Premier League.

He was a unique talent who brought a touch of Brazilian magic to a town that was famous for its heavy industry and hard work.

Juninho was born in the large city of São Paulo in Brazil. He started playing football at a small club called Ituano.

The midfielder was very talented even as a teenager, and in 1993, he moved to one of the biggest clubs in the country, São Paulo FC.

This was a very special time for that club. They were coached by a legendary man named Tele Santana. Juninho became a very important part of a team that was good enough to beat the best teams in the entire world.

In 1993, they won the Intercontinental Cup by beating AC Milan.

A year later, in 1994, they won the Copa CONMEBOL. By the time 1995 arrived, Juninho was seen as the best young player in all of Brazil and was starting to play regularly for the national team.

In October 1995, something incredible happened. Juninho decided to move to Middlesbrough for a fee of £4,750,000. This was a huge shock to the world of football. At that time, top Brazilian stars did not usually move to smaller industrial towns in the north of England.

Most people expected a player of his talent to go to a big club in Italy or Spain. However, Bryan Robson, due to his stature in the game, persuaded him to sign for Middlesbrough.

The excitement in the town was huge. Over 5,000 fans went to the stadium just to see him introduced to the crowd for the first time.

Juninho played his first game against Leeds United at the Riverside Stadium. It did not take long for him to show everyone how good he was. Within just a few minutes of starting, he played a perfect pass through the defence to his teammate Jan Age Fjortoft, who scored a goal. This assist proved right away that the hype was real. The local fans quickly gave him a nickname. They called him 'The Little Fella'. This was because he was only 5 feet and 5 inches tall.

However, his small size did not stop him. He was very strong and had a low centre of gravity. This allowed him to keep his balance when much bigger defenders tried to tackle him. He also had amazing speed when he started to run with the ball at his feet. He could weave through the very physical English defences that were common in the 1990s.

The 1996/97 season was perhaps the best time of his first stay in England. He played in a creative role just behind the star striker Fabrizio Ravanelli. Juninho was the player who made everything happen for the team. That year, Middlesbrough were very exciting to watch. They reached two major cup finals: the FA Cup final and the League Cup final.

Juninho played so well that year that he was chosen as the Premier League Player of the Season. This was a very rare achievement because his team were actually relegated to the Second Division that same year.

One of the most famous images in the history of English football is from the last day of that season. After the team was relegated at Leeds United's Elland Road, Juninho was seen sitting on the grass, crying. It showed the fans how much he truly cared about the club and the town.

Because he wanted to keep his place in the Brazil squad for the 1998 World Cup, Juninho had to leave Middlesbrough after they went down to the lower league. In 1997, he moved to Atletico Madrid for £12,000,000. This was a record fee for Middlesbrough at the time.

In Spain, the football was more technical, and Juninho did well at first. He scored 14 goals in his first 55 matches. But then, something terrible happened in 1998.

During a game, Michel Salgado broke his leg after a terrible tackle. This injury was a disaster for him.

It meant he could not play in Brazil's 1998 World Cup team. After this, things became difficult in Spain.

The club was unstable, and Juninho began to miss the love and appreciation he felt from the fans in Middlesbrough.

In 1999, he returned to the North-East for a second time. This was a one-season loan deal.

The team had changed, and Bryan Robson was playing a more defensive style of football.

This meant Juninho was no longer the team's main focus, as he had been before. Still, he showed his quality by scoring four goals in 28 games.

He helped the team finish in a safe mid-table position. The fans really wanted the club to buy him permanently again, but it did not happen. The club did not have enough money at the time, and the manager wanted to try different tactics. So, Juninho went back to Brazil to play for a club called Vasco da Gama on loan.

In Brazil, Juninho found his best form again. He won the Brazilian Championship and the Copa Mercosur in 2000. These great performances helped him return to the Brazil national team. His biggest achievement for his country came in 2002.

He was fully fit and was picked by the manager, Luiz Felipe Scolari, for the World Cup in South Korea and Japan. Juninho started the first few games of the tournament.

In the final match against Germany, he came on as a substitute. Brazil won the game and became world champions for the fifth time.

This success led to Juninho's third and most emotional time at Middlesbrough. He signed a permanent contract to rejoin the club in the summer of 2002 for £6,000,000.

The fans treated him like a king who had come home. Unfortunately, he suffered a serious knee injury during pre-season training.

This stopped him from playing for many months. When he finally returned to play in early 2003, the fans gave him an incredible welcome.

The following season, 2003/04, was the one that everyone will remember forever. Juninho was a key player as Middlesbrough marched toward the League Cup final. He even scored in the semi-final against Arsenal at Highbury.

In February 2004, he played in the final at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. Middlesbrough beat Bolton Wanderers 2-1.

This was the first major trophy the club had won in its 128-year history. Juninho had finally kept the promise he made years before to bring success to the fans.

After winning the trophy, Juninho's time at the club began to end. The new manager, Steve McClaren, wanted to change the way the team played.

In 2004, Juninho moved to Scotland to play for Celtic.

His time in Glasgow was quite short and not very enjoyable. He played well in his first game against their rivals, Rangers, but he found the Scottish style of football too rough and direct. He only played 14 times for Celtic and scored one goal.

After this, he went back to Brazil to play for teams like Palmeiras and Flamengo.

In 2007, he had one last adventure in another country. He moved to Australia to play for Sydney FC as their star player. Even as he grew older, he still showed moments of brilliance.

However, injuries meant he could not play as much as he wanted to.

Eventually, he returned to the club where he started, Ituano. He did not just play for them; he also became the club's president.

He finally retired from playing in 2010. In his very last match, he helped Ituano win a game that saved them from being relegated.

The legacy of Juninho Paulista is about more than just the 49 times he played for Brazil or the trophies he won in South America. In Middlesbrough, he is seen as a hero for choosing to live in a town that most world-class players ignored. He made the people there feel special. He proved that a world champion could love a club in the north of England just as much as the fans did.

He is the only player to have three separate and successful periods at Middlesbrough.

Even today, every player who signs for the club is compared to him. He was a small man who became a giant in the history of English football. He was the player who perfectly combined Brazil's beautiful football with Middlesbrough's hardworking spirit.

Juninho Paulista's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Winning the Premier League Player of the Year award in the 1996/97 season.

Paul Merson

Merson was a football player who had a huge amount of natural talent from a very young age.

His life in football was very interesting because it took him from the very top of the sport in Europe down to the smaller, lower leagues in England. His story is one of great success on the field, but also some very difficult personal struggles off the field.

He was born in Harlesden, London, and his journey into professional football began at Arsenal. He joined the club as a young apprentice in 1984. Before he became a regular player for their first team, he went on loan to Brentford. This was a very helpful time for him because it allowed him to practice his skills and become a dangerous forward capable of scoring goals.

He finally made his debut for Arsenal in 1986.

At that time, the manager was George Graham, known for being very strict and ensuring his players were disciplined.

Under Graham, Merson grew into one of the most creative and clever players in English football.

He was a very important part of the famous 1989 team that won the league title in dramatic fashion, beating Liverpool at their own stadium in the final seconds of the season. Because he played so well that year, he was named the best young player in the country.

During the eleven years he spent as a professional at Arsenal's home ground, Highbury, Merson became a symbol of the club's success. He was more than just a man who scored goals; he was like an architect for the team. He had a special ability to find small spaces on the pitch where he could receive the ball. Once he had it, he could pass it perfectly to his teammates so they could score.

While playing for Arsenal, he won a second league title in 1991, both the FA Cup and the League Cup in 1993, and the Cup Winners' Cup in 1994.

However, his career nearly came to a halt in late 1994. He made public that he was suffering from serious addictions to alcohol, drugs, and gambling.

This was a very brave thing to do at that time. Fortunately, the club and the players' union supported him. He went to a specialised clinic for help and returned to football in 1995. Even after everything he had been through, he still played at a very high level. When Arsene Wenger arrived as manager in 1996, Merson initially did well.

However, Wenger wanted to change many aspects of the club, including what the players ate and how they prepared for games. He also wanted to bring in younger players.

Because of these changes, Merson left Arsenal in 1997, which surprised many people.

His next move was to Middlesbrough. The club paid £5,000,000 for him, a record amount for a team in the second division. Bryan Robson convinced Merson to drop down a level to help Middlesbrough return to the top league.

Merson was the team captain and was much better than most of the other players in that league.

He scored 12 goals and created many more for his teammates. Thanks to his leadership, Middlesbrough won promotion immediately. He also helped them reach a major cup final in 1998.

He played so well that he was the only player from a lower league chosen to play for England at the 1998 World Cup.

In the famous match against Argentina, he had to take a penalty in a high-pressure shootout. He stayed very calm and scored, which remains one of the best moments of his time playing for his country.

Merson left Middlesbrough in 1998 because he wanted to be closer to his family in the south of England.

He moved to Aston Villa for almost 7,000,000 and stayed there for nearly four years.

At Villa Park, he played a very mature style of football. He was the captain when they reached the FA Cup final in 2000.

Even as he got older, he could still see passes that other players could not, which was a special skill to have.

In 2002, Paul moved to Portsmouth. Just like he had at Middlesbrough, he helped them win promotion to the Premier League.

The manager, Harry Redknapp, knew that Merson's experience and creativity would make a big difference. After a year in the top league with Portsmouth, he moved to Walsall in 2003. Eventually, he became the player/manager there.

This was a very difficult time for him because it was hard to lead a team while still dealing with his own personal battles.

He left Walsall in 2006 and ended his playing days with short spells at Tamworth and a very brief comeback with Caerau in Wales in 2017.

Overall, Merson played 21 times for England and scored three goals. People often called him the magic man because he could come off the bench and change a game with one brilliant pass or shot.

Over his whole career, he played in 624 professional games and scored 127 goals.

Today, he is a famous face on television. He talks openly about mental health and addiction to help others who might be struggling.

He also remains one of the most respected people in the media for his ability to understand and explain the game of football.

Paul Merson's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Helping Middlesbrough clinch promotion to the Premier League in season 1997/98.

Robbie Mustoe

Mustoe's football career is a great example of a player who succeeded through hard work and patience.

He grew up in a village called Witney in Oxfordshire. As a young teenager, he was very tall and thin, and he did not seem like a future star.

However, a late growth spurt and a very strong work ethic changed his life.

While playing against Oxford United's youth team, he performed so well that their scouts decided to sign him.

He joined their youth ranks in 1984. By 1986, he signed a professional contract.

This was a very exciting time for the club because they were playing in the top division of English football and had just won the League Cup.

Mustoe made his first appearance for the senior team during the 1986/87 season.

He played 20 matches in the top league over two years before the team was relegated in 1988.

It was in the Second Division that he really began to show his potential. He became a box-to-box midfielder who could defend well and also score goals.

In the 1989/90 season, he played 38 games and scored seven goals. His skill at winning the ball and helping the attack attracted interest from clubs like Leicester City and West Bromwich Albion.

However, he eventually signed for Middlesbrough in July 1990 for £375,000.

By the time he had left Oxford United, the 21-year-old had already played 91 league games and scored 10 goals.

Mustoe stayed at Middlesbrough for twelve years and became a club legend.

He played 454 games for the club under three different managers: Colin Todd, Lennie Lawrence, and Bryan Robson. He was a key part of the teams that won promotion to the Premier League in 1992 and 1995.

While famous international stars like Juninho and Fabrizio Ravanelli were getting all the attention from the fans, Mustoe was the player who did the hard work in the middle of the field.

His job was to protect the defence and give the ball to the creative players so they could score. He was incredibly fit and rarely missed a game. He played in three big finals at Wembley Stadium in the late 1990s, despite suffering a severe knee injury during the 1997 FA Cup Final.

After leaving Middlesbrough in 2002, he played one more season in the Premier League with Charlton Athletic.

He then moved to Sheffield Wednesday before retiring in 2004. In total, he played nearly 600 professional games and scored more than 40 goals.

After he retired, he moved to the United States to start a coaching career. He worked at Bentley University and Boston College.

In 2007, he helped lead the Boston College team to a major conference title.

Today, he is very well known in North America as a football expert for NBC Sports.

Robbie Mustoe's Memorable Middlesbrough Moments

Featuring in three cup finals for Middlesbrough.

Nigel Pearson

Pearson began his professional football career in November 1981 when he signed for Shrewsbury Town from Heanor Town.

The club paid only £5,000 to sign him, which turned out to be a bargain price for such a talented player. Pearson was a young defender who quickly learned how to handle the physical style of the Second Division.

He played his first game for the senior team on the very first day of the 1982/83 season against Oldham Athletic.

He soon became a very important part of the defence because he was strong and reliable.

During his first full season, he missed only three games and scored his first professional goal against Barnsley in March 1983.

He stayed at Shrewsbury for six years and played 181 games. Even though he had some injuries in the middle of the 1980s, he grew into a natural leader that the rest of the team looked up to.

In October 1987, Pearson moved to the top division of English football when he joined Sheffield Wednesday. The club paid £250,000 for him, and he would stay there for seven very successful years. At his new club, Pearson became a symbol of the club's toughness and spirit.

He was made the captain of the team and led them to one of their biggest moments in modern history.

In 1991, they reached the League Cup final at Wembley Stadium, where they played Manchester United. Pearson was named the man of the match, and his team won 1-0.

During that same season, he also led the team to promotion back to the First Division. Pearson made history again in 1992 when he scored the first-ever goal for Sheffield Wednesday in the new Premier League during a match against Everton.

However, his time at the club also had some difficult moments. In 1993, he helped the team reach two major finals, but he broke his leg in the semi-final and was unable to play at Wembley.

By the time he left the club in 1994, he had played 224 games and scored 14 goals.

In July 1994, Bryan Robson brought Pearson to Middlesbrough for £750,000.

Robson wanted a strong leader to help with his new project at the club.

Some people were worried about Pearson's old injuries, but he proved them wrong by proving to be a fantastic signing.

In his first season, he was the captain as Middlesbrough won the First Division title.

One of his most important moments was scoring a late goal against Sunderland in the final derby match at their old stadium, Ayresome Park.

He was also the captain for the very last game played at that historic ground.

When the club moved to their new home, the Riverside Stadium, Pearson continued to play well. He appeared in almost every game during the 1995/96 season as the club established itself in the Premier League.

The 1996/97 season was a very dramatic one for Pearson. He suffered a serious neck injury that kept him out of action for four months.

When he returned in March 1997, the team started playing much better. He took pride in captaining Middlesbrough in two major cup finals in the same season.

They played Leicester City in the League Cup final and Chelsea in the FA Cup final. Unfortunately, Middlesbrough lost both games and were relegated from the Premier League as mentioned previously.

Even though it was a difficult time for the club, Pearson stayed to ensure they returned to the top league. Despite having bad knees that limited how often he could play, he led the team to promotion in 1998.

He played his final game in a 4-1 win over Oxford United, then retired.

After he retired, Pearson moved straight into coaching. His first job was managing Carlisle United, starting in December 1998.

He was the manager during one of the most famous moments in football history. In the final seconds of the season, goalkeeper Jimmy Glass scored a goal that saved Carlisle from being relegated to the Conference.

After that, Pearson worked as an assistant coach at several big clubs, including Stoke City, West Bromwich Albion, and Newcastle United.

He also coached the England Under-21 team and managed the very first match at the newly rebuilt Wembley Stadium, which was a 3-3 draw against Italy.

Pearson found his greatest success as a manager at Leicester City. He had two different spells at the club.

During his first time there, he led the team to the League One title in 2009 with a record-breaking 96 points. After a short time managing Hull City, he returned to Leicester City in 2011.

He then led them to the Championship title in 2014 with 102 points. In the 2014/15 season, he achieved what many people called a miracle.

His team was at the bottom of the Premier League, but they won seven of their last nine games to stay in the league.

This survival paved the way for Leicester City to win the Premier League title the very next year.

After leaving Leicester City, he managed other clubs, including Derby County, Watford, and Bristol City. By the time he reached Bristol City, he had managed over 600 professional games.

Throughout his whole career, Nigel Pearson has been known for his leadership, discipline, and refusal to give up.

Nigel Pearson's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Leading the Middlesbrough team out for the game against Luton Town, which was the last ever competitive match at Ayresome Park.

Fabrizio Ravanelli

Ravanelli's career was very inspirational because he started in Italy's lower leagues and worked his way up to become a star of European football. .

He began playing for his local team, Perugia, in 1986. During his first three seasons playing in Serie C2 and Serie B, he showed he was a very talented young striker. He scored 41 goals in 90 games for the club.

After that, he had short, less successful spells playing for Avellino and Casertana.

However, he found his rhythm again while playing for Reggiana between 1990 and 1992.

He scored 24 goals in 66 games there, which led to a dream move to Juventus.

At his new club, Ravanelli became a world-class player. When he first signed, he was a backup player under the manager Giovanni Trapattoni.

However, he worked very hard to improve his technique and eventually became a key part of the team. He played in one of the most famous attacking lines in football history alongside Gianluca Vialli and Alessandro Del Piero.

His best years in Turin were under the manager Marcello Lippi during the 1994/95 and 1995/96 seasons. He was a major reason why Juventus won both the Italian league and the Italian cup in 1995.

The following year, he reached the highest level of club football. He scored the opening goal in the 1996 Champions League final against Ajax. Juventus eventually won that match on penalties.

During his four years with the club, he won every major trophy possible, including the UEFA Cup, the league title, and the Champions League.

In the summer of 1996, shortly after winning in Europe, Ravanelli surprised the football world. He decided to move to England to sign for Middlesbrough for £7,000,000, a record transfer fee at the time.

His first game for his new club is still remembered as one of the most famous debuts in Premier League history. He scored three goals against Liverpool at the Riverside Stadium.

Throughout that season, he was an incredible goal scorer, netting 31 goals in all competitions. He helped the team reach the finals of both the FA Cup and the League Cup. However, the season ended in disappointment. The club were relegated from the top tier of English football.

They also lost both of their cup finals at Wembley Stadium. Even though he played well, Ravanelli was often frustrated during his time there.

He frequently complained about the club's training methods and its facilities.

After Middlesbrough were relegated, Ravanelli moved to France to join Marseille in 1997.

He played there for two productive seasons in the French league. He scored 28 goals and helped the club finish in second place. The striker also helped them reach the 1999 UEFA Cup final.

In December 1999, he returned to Italy to play for Lazio. He added even more trophies to his collection there. He won another league title and the Italian Cup as part of their double-winning team in 2000.

In the final years of his career, Ravanelli returned to England to play for Derby County, starting in 2001.

He stayed there for two years and scored 14 league goals, but the team was relegated in 2002.

In 2003, he had a short two-month stay with Dundee in Scotland. This time was cut short because the club had financial problems and went into administration.

However, he did manage to score three goals in a single cup match while he was there.

He finally returned to where he started his career. He retired in 2005 at Perugia after helping his hometown team in the second division.

For his country, Ravanelli played 22 times for Italy and scored 8 goals. One of these was scored during the 1996 European Championship.

After he retired from playing, he became a coach. He managed the Juventus youth team and then held brief managerial roles at Ajaccio in France and Arsenal Kyiv in Ukraine.

Fabrizio Ravanelli's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring three goals on his debut in the home game against Liverpool in the 1996/97 season.

Mark Schwarzer

Mark Schwarzer was one of the most reliable and successful goalkeepers in the history of the Premier League.

He began his football journey in Australia, playing in the National Soccer League for the Marconi Stallions.

Between 1990 and 1994, he played 58 games for the club. He also helped them win the Australian championship in 1993.

Because of his German family background, he decided to move to Germany to play in the Bundesliga. He spent two seasons there playing for Dynamo Dresden and Kaiserslautern.

Even though he did not play many games for their first teams, the experience was very useful.

He learned to train in a very disciplined way in one of Europe's toughest leagues. This training helped him prepare for his future career in England.

In 1996, Schwarzer moved to England to play for Bradford City, which was in the Second Division at the time. He made a great impression.

After playing only 13 games, he was signed by Middlesbrough manager Bryan Robson for £1,000,000 in February 1997.

This move marked the start of an 11-year stay at Middlesbrough, during which he would become a club legend. He joined the team in the middle of a very stressful season. The club reached two cup finals but was also fighting to stay in the top league.

He played his first game in a League Cup semi-final against Stockport County and then played in the final against Leicester City.

He missed the replay of that final because of an injury, but he had already shown everyone that he was the best goalkeeper at the club.

The 2003/04 season was perhaps the best year of his time at Middlesbrough. Schwarzer was a huge part of the team that won the League Cup, the club's first major trophy. He played very well in the final against Bolton Wanderers, even though he made a late mistake that almost cost the team the game.

The following season, he was a hero again. On the very last day of the season, he saved a penalty from Robbie Fowler in a match against Manchester City.

That save ensured that Middlesbrough finished high enough in the league to play in European football, which led to a great run in the 2005/06 UEFA Cup.

Schwarzer even played with a special mask to protect a broken cheekbone during this time. He helped the team reach the final in Eindhoven.

By the time he left Middlesbrough in 2008, he had played 446 games. He was the foreign player who had served the club the longest.

Schwarzer joined Fulham on a free transfer in 2008 and had a very successful time in West London.

He played over 200 games for them across five seasons. He was a very important player for the team that reached the Europa League final in 2010 under the manager Roy Hodgson. He was named Fulham's Player of the Year in 2009 and the Premier League Player of the Month in February 2010. Even though he was almost 40 years old, he was still one of the top goalkeepers in the league.

This success led to a move to Chelsea in 2013 to be a backup for Petr Cech. Whilst there, he became the oldest player ever to play in the Champions League knockout stages when he started in the semi-finals against Atletico Madrid.

The final part of his career was very unusual. He joined Leicester City in January 2015 and played six games as the team fought to avoid relegation.

The next year, he was part of the squad that famously won the Premier League title in 2016. This made him the only player to be part of two different title-winning squads in two years in a row, because he had been at Chelsea the year before.

However, he did not play enough games in either season to receive an official winner's medal.

He finally retired in 2016 at the age of 43. He finished with 514 Premier League games, more than any other player not from Britain.

For his country, Schwarzer is Australia's most-capped player with 109 games.

His first game was in 1993 against Canada, where he became famous for saving two penalties in shootouts.

He was also the hero in a very important match against Uruguay in 2005. He saved two more penalties in that shootout, which helped Australia qualify for the World Cup for the first time in 32 years. He played in both the 2006 and 2010 World Cups as the first-choice goalkeeper.

He was known for being very calm and preparing very carefully for every match.

People remember him for how long his career lasted and for being a leader for other Australian players in Europe.

Mark Schwarzer's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring the last ever goal at Ayresome Park with a penalty during his Testimonial.

Chapter Seven

A Brief History of the 2000s

At the start of the year 2000, Middlesbrough Football Club were still led by Bryan Robson.

He was remembered for having brought big stars from other countries to play for the team in the years before.

However, the season that ended in the year 2000 was not really good enough. The team finished in 12th place.

The following season started off very badly and ended up in relegation.

This forced Steve Gibson to do something very different.

He hired Terry Venables to assist Robson in December 2000. He had previously been the manager of the England national team and was known for his tactical knowledge and excellent coaching ability.

It was a strange system where they shared the job. Venables handled the coaching and planning, while Robson remained the main manager.

This change worked almost right away. The team became much more stable.

They also signed a prolific striker from Croatia, Alen Boksic, and a strong defender, Ugo Ehiogu.

These new players helped Middlesbrough move away from the relegation zone.

Boksic was a world-class player, and even though he was frequently injured, he still scored plenty of goals for the team that season.

Together, the two managers guided the team to a safe position. They finished 14th, a great result because it looked like they were going to be relegated in November.

However, this shared job was only meant to be a short fix for the season.

In the summer of 2001, both Robson and Venables left the club. This opened the door for a new leader who would start the most successful five years in the club's history.

Steve McClaren was the man chosen for the job in June 2001.

He had previously been an assistant to Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United.

McClaren was known as a very good coach. Steve Gibson wanted someone who used new ideas rather than the old ways of managing.

The owner gave McClaren a decent budget to buy new players who fit his system.

He usually played with four defenders, four midfielders, and two strikers, but sometimes he would play with an extra man in midfield when they played away from home to be more defensively secure.

The new manager brought in experienced players, including Gareth Southgate, who became the team's leader and captain.

He also brought in young players from his former club, such as Jonathan Greening.

That year, the team had a great run in the FA Cup and reached the semi-final, where they only lost by one goal to a very strong Arsenal side.

The club again finished in 12th place in the league. More importantly, the way the club was run became very professional. They built a world-class training centre at Rockliffe Park, giving the players the best facilities for practice.

The next season saw the return of a hero. Juninho came back to Middlesbrough for the third time in his career. The fans were overjoyed. His arrival brought excitement back to the stadium.

The team was already strong with players like George Boateng working hard in the middle of the pitch. They also spent a record amount on Italian striker Massimo Maccarone.

Whilst he found the league very tough at first, the team were really hard to beat at home.

They even had huge wins against Manchester United and Liverpool. The club finished in 11th place that season.

While the league position was steady, the club were slowly building something big.

Their youth academy, led by Dave Parnaby, was starting to produce local stars.

Young players like Stewart Downing and James Morrison were beginning to play for the first team.

This was a great plan because it mixed expensive star players with local boys who loved the club. This success was proven when the youth team won the FA Youth Cup in 2004, beating many big clubs along the way.

The 2003/2004 season was the year that changed everything. For 128 years, Middlesbrough had never won a major trophy.

This finally changed with a brilliant run in the League Cup. The journey started in September with a win against Brighton & Hove Albion. Then they beat Wigan Athletic with goals from Maccarone and a Spanish star Gaizka Mendieta.

Mendieta was a world-famous player who brought a lot of class to the midfield. In the next round, the team beat Everton after a very tense game that went to a penalty shootout. Mark Schwarzer, made very important saves to help them win the tie.

After that, they played a dramatic game against Tottenham Hotspur. They were behind until the last few minutes of the match, but they scored a late goal and won on penalties again.

In the semi-final, they played Arsenal.

Middlesbrough played excellently and won both games to reach the final.

On February 29, 2004, they played Bolton Wanderers in the final in Wales. The game started really well for Middlesbrough.

They scored two goals in the first seven minutes. Even though Bolton Wanderers pulled a goal back, the Middlesbrough defence held strong for the rest of the game, winning the match and, therefore, the trophy, their first ever in their history.

This win meant they would play in European football for the first time.

The next year was a landmark year for the club because they played against teams from all over Europe. To strengthen the team, McClaren signed strikers Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink and Mark Viduka.

The team proved they belonged in Europe. They beat Lazio and reached the later rounds of the competition.

They finished seventh in the league, their highest position in many years. This meant they qualified for Europe for the second season in a row.

The 2005/06 season was a campaign no Middlesbrough fan will ever forget.

It was the most emotional year in the club's history because of their run in the UEFA Cup.

In the quarter-final against Basel, Boro lost the first game and were losing the second too. They needed to score four goals to win, and somehow, they did it. Massimo Maccarone scored the winning goal in the final minutes.

Then, in the semi-final against Steaua Bucharest, the same thing happened again. They were losing by three goals and therefore needed four goals to progress once more.

Slowly but surely, they pulled goals back, and in the very last minute, Maccarone scored a diving header to send the club to a European final.

It was a miracle. Even though they lost the final to Sevilla, the journey was an incredible achievement for the town.

Shortly afterwards, McClaren left to become England's manager. Gareth Southgate, who had been the captain, was chosen to be the new manager.

The club began spending less money and focused on using players from their own academy.

For a few years, they stayed in the middle of the league. But things began to get difficult by the 2008/09 season.

The team lost many of its leaders, including the goalkeeper, Mark Schwarzer.

The young players struggled to find consistency, and the team did not score enough goals.

Injuries to key defenders made them fragile. They fell into a relegation battle and, sadly, they could not save themselves.

After eleven years in the top league, the club was relegated. It was a very sad moment for a team that had been in a European final only three years earlier.

The decade ended with the club in the Second Division, but the memories of the trophies and the big European nights stayed with the fans forever.

Chapter Eight

Ten Memorable Players from the 2000s

Alen Bokšić

Alen began his football career at Hajduk Split, one of the biggest and most famous clubs in former Yugoslavia. He made his professional debut in 1987 when he was only 17.

Even as a teenager, people could see he was going to be a star because of his incredible strength and skill. He got better every year, but his most memorable moment for the club was in 1991. He played in the final of the Yugoslav Cup against Red Star Belgrade.

Red Star Belgrade were a legendary team at the time and had just been crowned European champions. Bokšić scored the only goal of the match to give Hajduk Split the win.

This turned out to be the last goal ever scored in that tournament because Yugoslavia soon began to break apart amid the war. That goal became a powerful symbol of the end of an era and the beginning of Croatia's independence.

In 1991, Bokšić moved to Western Europe to try his luck in France. It was a very difficult start for him because he joined Cannes, but suffered from terrible injuries.

He was only able to play one single game for them during his whole time there. However, his talent was still obvious to everyone, and in 1992, Olympique Marseille signed him.

The 1992/93 season at his new club was the best year of his career for scoring goals. He played for a great manager, Raymond Goethals, on a team full of world-class stars.

Boksic was unstoppable that year and finished as the top scorer in the French league with 23 goals.

He was also amazing in European matches, scoring six goals in the Champions League. He helped Olympique Marseille reach the final against the Italian giants AC Milan in May 1993. They won the game and became the first French club to ever win the European Cup.

The striker was so impressive that season that he finished fourth in the Ballon d'Or.

After this victory, Olympique Marseille found itself in serious trouble with the French League over a match-fixing scandal. They lost their league title and were relegated to a lower division.

Because of this, Boksic left the stricken French club and moved to Italy to join Lazio. He stayed there for three seasons during his first period in Rome.

He did not score as many goals in Italy as he had in France, with only 17 in 67 matches, but he was still a vital player for the team. He played for Zdenek Zeman (the coach) in a famous attacking group alongside Giuseppe Signori and Pierluigi Casiraghi.

Boksic was the power behind the group. He made long, strong runs that stretched the other team's defence and created plenty of space for his teammates to score.

In 1996, he signed for Juventus, then the European champions, and they believed Boksic was the final piece they needed to complete the perfect team.

In his one year there, he won the Italian league title, the Intercontinental Cup, and the UEFA Super Cup.

In the Champions League, he was the team's top scorer with four goals as they reached another final. They lost that game to Borussia

Dortmund, but Boksic still helped by setting up a goal for his teammate Alessandro Del Piero.

Some people complained that he only scored three league goals that year, but his manager, Marcello Lippi, loved him. He said Boksic was valuable because he worked so hard that he physically destroyed the opposing defenders.

Boksic went back to Lazio in 1997. This second time in Rome was the most successful and stable period of his career.

He became a leader in a team that was one of the best in the world. He helped his new club win the Italian Cup in 1998 and again in 2000.

Most importantly, they won the league title in the 1999/00 season. This was only the second time in history that Lazio had won the league, and it ended a very long wait of twenty-six years.

He also won the UEFA Cup Winners' Cup and the UEFA Super Cup during these years.

The fans loved him and gave him the nickname L'Alieno, which means The Alien. They called him this because his talent seemed to come from another planet and because he was a very quiet, private person.

In 2000, Boksic made a surprise move to England to play for Middlesbrough for £2,500,000. He was 30 and had a history of injuries, so some people worried he could not handle the tough English style of football.

He proved them wrong immediately by scoring two goals on his debut against Coventry City. While at Middlesbrough, he was the league's highest-paid player.

Even though he played only 68 games over three years due to injuries, he was still a hero to the fans. He scored 22 goals and was named the club's Player of the Year in 2001.

The Middlesbrough fans still remember his amazing goals. Even though he was a big and strong man, he often scored with very

beautiful and delicate shots that seemed impossible for someone of his size.

For his national team, Boksic had a mix of great moments and bad luck.

He was in the Yugoslavia squad for the 1990 World Cup but did not get to play.

When Croatia became independent, he became a key player for the new country. He played in the 1996 European Championship with his partner Davor Suker. However, suffered a huge disappointment in 1998. Just before the World Cup in France, he hurt his knee and could not play. Croatia finished in third place, and many people think they could have won the whole thing if Boksic had been there.

He finally played in a World Cup in 2002, when he was 32. He played in three games, but by then, he and his teammates were past their best years.

He retired in 2003 and stayed away from the spotlight. He eventually bought a private island near the coast of Croatia, where he now lives a quiet life away from the pressure of football.

Alen Bokšić's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring two goals on his debut in a 3-1 win over Coventry City in the season 2000/01.

Doriva

Doriva began his professional path in the famous youth academy of São Paulo FC.

This club is well known for producing some of the most talented players in the world.

He earned a spot in the senior team during the early 1990s. At that time, the club was enjoying a very successful period under their legendary coach, Tele Santana.

To help him gain more experience and playing time, Doriva spent short periods away on loan with smaller clubs, Anapolina and Goiania.

When he returned to São Paulo, he joined the team during a golden era of success.

In 1993, he was part of the squad that won the Copa Libertadores and the Intercontinental Cup. In the Intercontinental Cup final in Tokyo, Sao Paulo defeated the famous Italian team AC Milan to be named the world's best club team.

These early years of playing in high-stakes matches taught Doriva to stay calm and professional under pressure, a defining trait of his career.

After finding success at São Paulo, Doriva moved to another Brazilian club, Atlético Mineiro, in 1995.

It was during his time there that he really grew into a powerful and dominant player in the centre of the field.

Over two seasons, he became a regular starter, playing 75 matches. He was known for his hard work and his ability to stop the opposing team's attacks. He also had a simple, effective way of passing the ball, which allowed the more creative players in his team to play their natural game.

His performances were so steady and reliable that scouts from European teams began to watch him closely. This led to a major move to Portugal in 1997, when FC Porto paid £8,000,000 to sign him.

Moving to European football was an easy transition for Doriva. At FC Porto, he joined a team that was the best in Portugal at the time. He quickly became a very important part of their midfield.

During his two seasons there, he won the Portuguese league title twice and also won the Portuguese Cup. His time in Portugal proved that his defensive skills were a great fit for the organised and tactical style of European football. He gained a reputation as a reliable player who did the hard work for the team, which led to a move to Italy's top league, Serie A, with Sampdoria in 1999.

Although he stayed in Italy only briefly, he played more than 50 games and learned to handle the physical, demanding style of Italian football. In 2000, he moved to Spain to join the club Celta Vigo.

In the Spanish league, Doriva continued to show everyone how valuable he was as a defensive specialist. Celta Vigo was a very strong team back then and often finished near the top of the league. Doriva's job was to protect the defenders and stop some of the world's best attackers.

However, it was his move to the English Premier League in January 2003 that would make him most famous among European fans. He joined Middlesbrough, firstly on loan, and many fans did not know much about him when manager Steve McClaren brought him in.

At Middlesbrough, Doriva found a place where he truly belonged. He joined a team that was full of international stars like Juninho, Gaizka Mendieta, and Gareth Southgate.

While the famous stars often received the most attention in the news, Doriva became the team's unsung hero. He formed a great partnership with George Boateng, another very good midfield player.

Together, they formed the foundation of the most successful period in Middlesbrough's history. Doriva was a tough player who was excellent at tackling. The fans loved him because he played with a lot of grit and heart, showing the kind of determination they respected.

The biggest moment of his time in England happened on February 29, 2004. Doriva started in the League Cup Final at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. He helped Middlesbrough win the game 2-1 against Bolton Wanderers.

This was a massive achievement because it was the club's first major trophy in its long history. Doriva later said this win was the most special moment of his career because he felt a very strong emotional connection with the fans.

He remained a key player as Middlesbrough played in European competitions for the first time, even reaching the UEFA Cup Final in

2006. In total, he played over 100 games for the club, demonstrating his fitness and consistency.

On the international stage, Doriva achieved the dream of every Brazilian child by wearing the famous yellow jersey of the national team.

He made his debut for Brazil in 1995 and played twelve games over three years. His most impressive achievement was being chosen for the 1998 World Cup squad in France.

Even though the team had superstars like Ronaldo and Rivaldo, Doriva was there to provide crucial defensive support. He played as a substitute in a 3-0 win over Morocco during the group stage. Although Brazil lost the final to France, being part of a team that finished runner-up at a World Cup is a very rare and prestigious honour.

Doriva's time as a player ended very suddenly in 2007. After leaving England, he returned to Brazil to sign for América-SP.

During a standard medical test, the doctors thought they found a serious heart defect.

Because both his father and grandfather had died from heart issues at a young age, Doriva decided it was safest to stop playing football immediately.

He was 34 at the time. Interestingly, further tests later showed that the initial diagnosis was wrong and that his heart was actually healthy.

However, he had already mentally moved on from playing, so he stayed retired and started a new career as a coach.

His coaching career has been very active. He famously led a small team called Ituano to win the São Paulo state championship in 2014, which was a huge surprise. After that success, he managed some of the biggest clubs in Brazil, such as Vasco da Gama and São Paulo.

In recent years, he has worked as a high-level assistant coach, including a role with the Albania national team.

Doriva's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Playing a huge part in helping Middlesbrough win the League Cup (their first ever trophy) with a 2-1 win against Bolton Wanderers in the season 2003/04.

Ugo Ehiogu

Ugo's professional journey started at West Bromwich Albion. He joined them as a young trainee and eventually signed his first professional contract in July 1989.

Even though he was a very talented young man, his time at that club was quite short. He only played two league games for the first team as a substitute.

However, even in those few minutes on the pitch, those watching him could see he had great potential to become a great defender.

In August 1991, Aston Villa manager Ron Atkinson decided to take a chance on the young player. He bought Ugo for £40,000.

This turned out to be an incredible deal for the club because Ugo went on to become one of the best defenders in Aston Villa's history.

When he first arrived at Villa Park, he was still learning his trade. However, by 1994, he had earned a regular spot in the starting lineup. He became the main partner to the legendary defender Paul McGrath, taking over from Shaun Teale.

Playing next to someone as experienced as McGrath helped Ugo become a very disciplined and strong player.

The 1990s were a fantastic time for Ugo and his team. He was a very important part of the Aston Villa side that finished second in the very first Premier League season in 1992/93.

One of his most famous moments during those early years happened in the 1993/94 League Cup semi-final. They were playing against Tranmere Rovers. The two games they played were very exciting and ended in a 4-4 draw, which meant there had to be a penalty shootout to decide who would win the tie. Ugo was chosen to

take the fifth penalty. His shot was powerful, but it hit the crossbar. Luckily, Aston Villa still won the shootout.

Even though he did not play in the final against Manchester United, he was very happy for his teammates.

Two years later, in 1996, Ugo finally got his chance to win a major trophy. He played in the League Cup final at Wembley Stadium against Leeds United. Aston Villa won 3-0, and Ugo was a key reason they kept a clean sheet.

Because he played so well throughout that entire season, he was named in the PFA Premier League Team of the Year.

During his nine years at Aston Villa, he played in more than 300 matches across all competitions and scored 12 league goals, which is a good number for a defender.

His final big game for the club was the 2000 FA Cup Final. Unfortunately, Aston Villa lost 1-0 to Chelsea, and Ugo received a runners-up medal.

Later that year, in November 2000, Ugo moved to Middlesbrough. The transfer fee was £8,000,000, a club record paid by the North-East-based team at the time.

This move was exciting because it allowed him to play alongside Gareth Southgate again. The two of them had played together at Aston Villa, and they quickly became one of the strongest defensive pairs in the Premier League.

People started calling them the Twin Towers because they were so tall and hard for strikers to get past. They were known for being very stable and reliable partners.

His time at Middlesbrough was very successful, even though it started with some bad luck.

In his very first game against Charlton Athletic, he was injured just five minutes into the match. He had a calf muscle problem and had to go off.

However, Ugo worked hard to get fit again and soon became a leader in the defence for the manager, Steve McClaren.

He was a vital part of the team during their historic League Cup run in the 2003/04 season. The defender had missed the beginning of the season because of a knee injury, but he returned just in time for the big final in Cardiff. Middlesbrough beat Bolton Wanderers 2-1, which was the first time the club had ever won a major trophy, as mentioned previously in this book.

Ugo stayed at Middlesbrough for seven years. He played 126 league games and scored seven goals. He also helped the team reach the UEFA Cup final in 2006, a huge achievement.

As he reached the final years of his playing career, Ugo went on loan to Leeds United for a short time in 2006.

In January 2007, he moved to Scotland to play for Rangers. Even though he was older by then, he still had some magic left. In his very first match against their rivals, Celtic, he scored a goal that fans still talk about today. He performed a spectacular overhead kick to score the only goal of the game.

This 1-0 victory made him a hero at the club, and the fans voted it the Rangers Goal of the Season.

After a year in Scotland, he returned to England to join Sheffield United. He played 26 games for them and scored a winning goal against Preston North End. On August 3, 2009, he decided it was time to stop playing and announced his retirement.

Ugo also had a very proud career playing for the England national team.

He achieved something historic in April 1993 while playing for the England under-21 team.

In a game against the Netherlands, he became the first black player to captain an England team in a competitive match.

This was a very important moment for football in England. He played 15 times for the under-21s and once for the England B team

before making his debut for the senior team in May 1996. He came on as a substitute for Tony Adams in a game against China. Ugo won four caps for the senior team in total.

His most memorable moment came in February 2001 when England played a friendly match against Spain. The game was played at Villa Park, his old home stadium. Ugo scored a great header to help England win 3-0. It was the only goal he ever scored for his country. His final appearance for the national team was against Italy in March 2002.

After he retired from playing, Ugo showed that he had many other talents. He was very interested in music and helped start a record label called Dirty Hit. This label became very successful and even signed a famous band called 'The 1975'.

However, football was always his main passion, so he worked hard to get his coaching certificates. He worked with the youth teams at Tottenham Hotspur and also helped the England under-20 team during the 2013 World Cup.

In July 2014, he was appointed head coach of the Tottenham Hotspur under-21 team. He was very popular at the club because he was kind and humble.

He often stayed late after training to help young players of all ages improve their skills.

Sadly, Ugo Ehiogu passed away on April 21, 2017. He was only 44 years old.

He suffered a cardiac arrest while he was at the Tottenham Hotspur training ground.

This news was very shocking and sad for everyone in the football world.

Tributes came from many different clubs and players. People remembered him as a gentle giant and a warrior who always played the game with honesty and heart.

To ensure he is never forgotten, a special football pitch was opened in his honour in Haringey in 2019.

This pitch gives young children a place to play and helps keep their memories alive.

Ugo Ehiogu's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Helping his club reach the UEFA Cup Final in 2006.

Jonathan Greening

Jonathan Greening started his professional football career at his hometown club, York City.

Even as a young boy, it was clear that he had a special talent for the game.

He was known for being very creative on the ball, and he quickly stood out while playing in the lower leagues of English football. Because he played so well at York City, he began attracting interest from bigger teams.

At that time, Manchester United were the most successful club in the country.

In 1998, Sir Alex Ferguson decided to sign him. For any young player in the late 90s, moving to Old Trafford was the ultimate dream.

Greening arrived at his new club at a very exciting time. They were about to start their most successful era.

However, the team was full of world-class players. It was very difficult for any young midfielder to get into a starting lineup that already included stars like Roy Keane, Paul Scholes, David Beckham, and Ryan Giggs.

Even though it was hard to get regular game time, the coaches at United thought very highly of him. He spent most of his three years there as a squad player.

This meant he played mostly in cup games or came on as a substitute during league matches.

Despite not being a regular starter, he earned a unique place in the history of the sport. This happened during the famous 1998/99 season. That year, Manchester United won the Treble: the Premier League, the FA Cup, and the Champions League.

Greening was on the bench as a substitute during the Champions League final against Bayern Munich at the Camp Nou stadium in Spain. He did not actually get onto the pitch during the game, but because he was part of the squad, he received a winner's medal.

By 2001, Greening realised that he needed to move if he wanted to play every week. He decided to join Middlesbrough. He moved there in a deal that also included his teammate, Mark Wilson. Together, they cost about £3,000,000. This move turned out to be a great one for the midfielder.

In the North-East, he was no longer just a young prospect with potential. Instead, he became a central part of the team. Greening was the person who organised the midfield. He had a lot of energy, a great vision for passing, and he was very good at keeping the ball. The manager, Steve McClaren, relied on him heavily, and the fans loved him immediately.

The midfielder's first full season at the club was incredibly successful. He played so well that he was voted the Player of the Year for the 2002/03 season.

His performances were so strong that he was even called up to the England national team by the manager Sven-Goran Eriksson.

Although he did not actually play in the game, being selected for the squad was a huge honour.

During his time at Middlesbrough, the club also won the League Cup in 2004. Even though he was part of the winning squad, he unfortunately missed out on a place in the team for the final match.

In 2004, Greening looked for a new challenge and signed for West Bromwich Albion. The transfer fee was just over £1,000,000.

Many people believe that he played his best and most influential football while he was at West Bromwich Albion.

He became the heart of the team. Eventually, he was made the club captain, which showed how much the club respected his leadership. He played a massive role in helping the team get promoted to the Premier League in 2008. That season, his fellow professionals even voted him into the PFA Championship Team of the Year.

The fans at West Bromwich Albion really appreciated his consistency. He was a leader during a time when the club was moving up and down between the top two divisions.

One of his greatest strengths was his versatility. He could play in a defensive role to protect the back line, or he could move further forward to create chances for the strikers. He played over two hundred games for the club before moving to Fulham in 2009.

At Craven Cottage, he worked once again with manager Roy Hodgson. This move led to another famous European journey. He was a key member of the squad that reached the UEFA Europa League final in 2010.

Fulham were considered a smaller club, so reaching the final was a massive achievement. They had to beat huge teams like Juventus and Wolfsburg to get there.

Although they lost the final to Atletico Madrid, Greening's experience was very important for the team. As he got older, he became a veteran leader who offered tactical discipline.

Towards the end of his career, he joined Nottingham Forest in 2011.

He stayed there for three seasons and also had a short loan spell at Barnsley. Even though he was losing some of his speed, his technical skills were still very high.

His teammates always spoke about how professional he was and how he helped the younger players.

When he left Forest in 2014, he did not want to stop playing. He loved football so much that he went to play for Tadcaster Albion. He played there with his brother, Josh.

He was not doing it for fame or a high salary. He just wanted to enjoy the game. He even helped Tadcaster Albion win promotion.

After finally retiring from playing, he moved into coaching. He started by helping the youth teams at York City.

Later, he became the manager of Scarborough Athletic.

This was a special job because he was born in Scarborough. As a manager, he uses the lessons he learned from great coaches like Sir Alex Ferguson and Roy Hodgson.

He has already been successful in management, leading Scarborough Athletic to a promotion in 2022.

Today, he continues to lead the club as they look to climb even higher in the football leagues. Currently, they are in the National League North.

At the time of writing, Greening is still the manager of Scarborough Athletic.

Jonathan Greening's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Winning the club's Play of the Year award in the season 2002/03.

Massimo Maccarone

Maccarone began his football career at the renowned youth academy of AC Milan.

Coaches at the club had high hopes for him because he was very talented.

However, the first team was full of some of the best players in the world.

This meant it was almost impossible for a young player like him to get a chance to play in real games. Because of this, he had to leave the club to try to find success at another club.

His first few years as a professional player were spent in the lower leagues of Italian football.

This time was like a school for him. It was very tough, but it helped him become a stronger person. He learned to handle physical defenders and stay calm when he had a chance to score.

During these early years, he played for Varese and Prato. These seasons were very important because they gave him the experience he needed to grow.

In 2000, he moved to Empoli. This was the time that his career really started to take off.

At his new club, Maccarone became part of a very successful attacking pair. He played alongside Antonio Di Natale, who also had an excellent career.

Together, they scored many goals and helped Empoli earn promotion to Serie A, Italy's top tier.

Maccarone was playing so well in the lower division that something very unusual happened.

He was called up to play for the Italian national team. First, he played for the under-21 team, but then he was picked for the main senior team.

This success made him one of the most famous young players in all of Europe.

In the summer of 2002, many top clubs wanted to sign him. The manager of Middlesbrough, Steve McClaren, worked hard to secure his signature.

In the end, Middlesbrough beat off all the competition and paid a record fee for him. They spent slightly more than £8,000,000, which was the most the club had ever paid for a player at that time.

When he arrived in England, the fans were overjoyed. They gave him the nickname 'Big Mac'.

Everyone believed he was the star player who would help Middlesbrough finish near the top of the Premier League and play in European tournaments.

His time in England started very well. In his first game at home against Fulham, he scored two goals. The fans took to him straight after that. He continued to show that he was very good at finding space and finishing his chances.

However, playing in the English Premier League was very different from playing in Italy. The games were much more physical and very fast.

After a while, he began to struggle. He suffered from injuries, and he started to lose his confidence. Because he didn't score many goals, he eventually lost his place in the starting team.

Middlesbrough had other great strikers, such as Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink and Mark Viduka, and they began playing them more than him. He was sent back to Italy on loan to play for Parma and Siena.

Many people thought he would be remembered as an expensive flop for Middlesbrough.

But then came the 2005/06 season. This campaign changed everything for him. Middlesbrough was playing in the UEFA Cup. They reached the quarter-finals against Basel. In the second leg, Middlesbrough was losing and needed to score three goals to stay in the tournament.

Maccarone came off the bench as a substitute. Late in the game, he scored the goal that made the score 4-1 on the night and sent his team to the next round. It was a miracle.

Then, in the semi-finals against Steaua Bucharest, it happened again. Middlesbrough needed four goals to win. Maccarone scored the first goal, giving the team hope. Then, in the 89th minute of the game, he jumped high and scored a header at the back post. The stadium

went crazy. These two goals made him a hero forever. Even though he struggled in the league, the fans always respected him for those European nights. Middlesbrough went to the final but lost 4-0 to Sevilla.

In 2007, he moved back to Italy to join Siena permanently. This was a great move for him.

He became the captain and the team's most important player. He scored ten or more goals in several consecutive seasons. The striker was no longer just a player who waited for the ball. He had become a leader who helped his team stay in the top league.

After doing very well at Siena, he moved to Palermo in 2010 and then played briefly for Sampdoria. Massimo did not score as many goals at those clubs, but he was still respected as a very good striker in the top division.

In 2012, when he was 33, he returned to Empoli. This was the club where he first became famous.

Many people thought he was too old and would retire soon. But Maccarone proved them wrong.

He led his club back into the top league and continued to score goals against the best teams in the country.

In one game against Bologna, he celebrated a goal by going to the side of the pitch and taking a sip of beer from a fan's cup. This became a very famous moment that people still talk about. He also played very well alongside teammate Riccardo Saponara. They were one of the best pairs in the league that year.

When he was 38 years old in 2017, he decided to try something completely new.

Massimo moved to Australia to play for Brisbane Roar in the A-League. He played very well and was the club's top scorer.

Maccarone then returned to Italy to play one last time for Carrarese in the third tier. He finally retired in 2020 at the age of 40.

He had a 22-year career and scored over 200 goals in total. After he retired, he became a coach. He has managed Ghiviborgo and Piacenza.

Massimo Maccarone's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring two goals on his debut in a home match against Fulham in the season 2002/03.

Franck Queudrue

Queudrue played his first match for Lens in October 1999.

During his early years playing in France's top league, people quickly saw that he was not just an ordinary defender who stayed at the back. He had a rare ability to move forward and change the game in the attacking part of the field. In only his third game, he scored a thrilling goal in the 90th minute.

This goal helped his team beat Olympique Marseille. It was a great start for a young player.

In October 2001, the defender made a major career change. He moved to the North East of England to join Middlesbrough.

At first, he was only there on a loan deal to see if he liked English football.

The club at that time were trying to become one of the best in England, and Queudrue was exactly the type of player the team needed. He made an impact almost straight away.

In only his second game, he scored a goal with a powerful header against Middlesbrough's local rivals, Sunderland.

This moment started a great relationship with the fans that lasted for five years. Because he played so well, the club decided to keep him permanently at the end of the season.

In 2002, they paid £2,500,000 to buy him from Lens.

His time at Middlesbrough coincided with the club's most successful years.

He was a very important player in the team that won the League Cup in 2004. They beat Bolton Wanderers 2-1 at the Millennium Stadium in Wales.

Queudrue was very important because he was a strong and reliable defender. He was also able to play in many different positions. Usually, he played on the left side of the defence, but he could also play in the middle or even in midfield when the manager needed him to.

Sometimes people talked about his lack of discipline because he played very hard and was very aggressive. On occasions, this led to him receiving red cards. Most of these were received because he always played with passion; with this in mind, the fans didn't get on his back when he was sent off.

That aside, the most exciting time for him in European football was during the 2005/06 season. Middlesbrough went on a very surprising and thrilling run in the UEFA Cup, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Queudrue played in 14 games during that European season. He helped the team win some very famous games in which they had to come back after being behind. Also, as discussed above, these games were against Basel and Steaua Bucharest.

He played in the final match in Eindhoven against Sevilla, which, as mentioned previously, his team lost 4-0.

By the time he left Middlesbrough in 2006, he had played almost 200 games and scored 12 goals. Not a bad haul for a defender.

In the summer of 2006, he moved to London to play for Fulham. He turned out to be a very good signing for their manager, Chris Coleman.

However, things soon became difficult because the club changed managers. He did not agree with the next manager, Lawrie Sanchez, because he disliked the team's playing style. Even with these problems, he still played thirty-two games in his one year in West London.

This showed he was a player who could perform well under pressure.

In 2007, he moved to Birmingham City for £2,000,000. This part of his career had both hard times and good times.

In his first year, the club was relegated. But Queudrue stayed and helped the team return to the top tier the very next year.

He was an experienced player whose leadership was very helpful for the team. He also had a public argument with one of the club's owners, David Sullivan, who had criticised his play.

Queudrue showed that he was mentally strong by playing very well and proving the owner was wrong.

In 2010, he played a few games for Colchester United on a short loan to stay fit before his time in England ended.

Later that same year, he decided to return to France and join his first club, Lens.

This was an emotional move because he wanted to help his childhood club during a difficult time. Even though he was in his early 30s, he was still a very good player who understood the game well.

He spent two years there and helped the younger players improve their game.

Then he moved to a team in Paris, Red Star, for his very last season.

He retired in 2013. Throughout his career, he played nearly 400 professional matches in the top leagues of France and England.

His international career was short but very interesting. He played one game for the France B team in 2000. For a long time, there was a lot of talk about him playing for the Republic of Ireland. He believed he had a grandfather who was born in Ireland. The Ireland manager, Mick McCarthy, really wanted him to play for his team.

However, they found out that the Irish relative was actually his great-grandfather. Because of the rules at that time, he was not allowed to play for Ireland.

Franck Queudrue's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring his first Middlesbrough goal against Sunderland in the season 2001/02.

Chris Riggott

Chris' footballing adventure began at his hometown club, Derby County, where he progressed through the youth ranks at a time when the club was a stable presence in the Premier League.

He made his professional debut for the Rams on May 14, 2000, coming on as a substitute for Steve Elliott during a match against Chelsea.

His impact at Pride Park was immediate. In his first full season as a regular starter, 2000/01, he made 34 appearances and scored three goals.

His performances were so consistent that he was named Derby County's Player of the Year at the age of just 20, an impressive feat for a young centre-back in the top flight.

During this period, he also earned recognition at the international level, making nine appearances for the England under-21 team.

Despite the club's eventual relegation to the First Division, Riggott's stock remained high, and he stayed with the Rams for the first half of the 2002/03 season, making a further 22 appearances.

In January 2003, Riggott made a high-profile move to Middlesbrough in a joint transfer deal with teammate Malcolm Christie for a combined fee of £3,000,000.

This move reunited him with Steve McClaren, who had coached him as a schoolboy.

Riggott became an instant favourite on Teesside when he scored two goals in only his second appearance—a 3-1 victory over local rivals Sunderland at the Stadium of Light. This brace cemented his

reputation as a 'big game' player, a label he would reinforce throughout his stay at the club.

The peak of Riggott's career coincided with the most successful era in Middlesbrough's history. He was part of the squad that won the League Cup in 2004.

However, his importance to the team grew in the following seasons, particularly as he provided essential cover and eventually a starting partnership with Gareth Southgate.

During the 2005/06 season, Riggott was an integral part of the Middlesbrough side that embarked on a legendary run to the UEFA Cup Final.

He made 13 appearances in the competition that year and scored one of the most famous goals in the club's history. In the semi-final second leg against Steaua Bucharest, with Middlesbrough trailing 3-0 on aggregate and needing a miraculous comeback, Riggott scored the third of the four goals required to secure a 4-2 victory and a place in the final in Eindhoven.

Following the retirement of Southgate and his transition into the manager's chair, Riggott faced increased competition for places with the arrival of international defenders like Jonathan Woodgate and Robert Huth.

His time at Middlesbrough was increasingly hampered by persistent injuries, which limited his first-team opportunities.

In February 2008, he joined Stoke City on loan for the remainder of the season. His experience proved vital for the Potters as he made nine appearances, helping Tony Pulis's side secure promotion to the Premier League.

Upon returning to Middlesbrough, he continued to battle for fitness but found it difficult to maintain a consistent run in the team as the club struggled with relegation and subsequent seasons in the Championship.

After making 148 appearances and scoring eight goals for Middlesbrough, Riggott left the club in 2010.

He subsequently signed for Cardiff City in the Championship. However, his time in South Wales was short-lived due to ongoing injury concerns, and he managed only two appearances for the Bluebirds before his contract was cancelled by mutual consent in early 2011.

In a sentimental move, he returned to Derby County in August 2011 to train and eventually signed a short-term contract.

Despite his desire to contribute to his boyhood club, he was unable to make a senior appearance during this second stint due to a recurrence of his injury problems.

His final professional move was to Burton Albion in February 2012. He joined the Brewers under the management of former teammate Paul Peschisolidi, but the same physical challenges that had plagued his later years at Middlesbrough and Cardiff City still persisted.

Realising that his body could no longer withstand the rigours of professional football, Chris Riggott announced his retirement from the game on March 20, 2012, at the age of 31.

Throughout his career, Riggott was respected for his professionalism and his ability to read the game, often compensating for a lack of raw pace with excellent positioning.

His statistics across the Premier League, Championship, and European competitions reflect a reliable top-tier defender when fit.

With over 200 career appearances and several iconic goals to his name, he remains a respected figure at both Derby County and Middlesbrough.

Since retiring, he has pursued interests outside the professional spotlight, but his contribution to Middlesbrough's most successful period, particularly his role in the UEFA Cup 'miracles', ensures his place in North East football folklore.

Chris Riggott's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring twice against Sunderland in an away fixture in the season 2002/03.

Fabio Rochemback

Fabio's path began in the youth academy of Sport Club Internacional in Porto Alegre, a club renowned for producing high-calibre Brazilian talent. Rochemback quickly rose through the ranks, making his senior debut as a teenager and establishing himself as a combative and technically gifted presence in the heart of the midfield.

During his initial three-year spell at Sport Club Internacional, he made 40 appearances and scored seven goals, catching the attention of European scouts with his maturity and ability to dictate play.

In July 2001, at the age of 19, Rochemback secured a dream move to Europe, signing for FC Barcelona in a transfer worth approximately €15,000,000.

He arrived at the Camp Nou during a period of transition for the Catalan giants, tasked with the unenviable role of helping to fill the void left by the departure of the legendary club captain Pep Guardiola.

While Rochemback offered a more physical, direct style of play than Guardiola's technical finesse, he struggled to find consistent form during a turbulent era for the club.

Despite this, he provided several flashes of his potential, most notably scoring a spectacular long-range goal against Liverpool at Anfield in the UEFA Champions League.

In total, he made 68 appearances for FC Barcelona across two seasons, scoring four goals, but he was eventually deemed surplus to requirements as the club looked to restructure under new management.

In 2003, Rochemback moved to Portugal to join Sporting CP on a two-year loan deal.

This period proved to be one of the most productive phases of his career. In the Portuguese Primeira Liga, he rediscovered the confidence that had characterised his early years in Brazil.

His ability to strike the ball with power and accuracy from distance became a trademark, particularly on set pieces. He became a central figure in the Sporting CP midfield, helping the club reach the 2005 UEFA Cup Final. Although they ultimately lost the final to CSKA Moscow in their own stadium, Rochemback's performances throughout the tournament, including crucial goals against Feyenoord and Newcastle United, made him one of the most highly-rated midfielders in Europe at the time.

His displays for Sporting CP caught the eye of Middlesbrough manager Steve McClaren, leading to a high-profile move to the English Premier League on transfer deadline day in August 2005.

Rochemback signed a five-year contract with the Teesside-based club, arriving as part of an ambitious recruitment drive that included the likes of Gaizka Mendieta and Yakubu.

He made his debut in a 2-1 win over Arsenal and quickly became a fans' favourite for his work rate and penchant for spectacular goals.

His first goal for the club was a memorable strike in a 3-0 victory over reigning champions Chelsea at the Riverside Stadium.

Rochemback's time at Middlesbrough was highlighted by another remarkable European run. He was an essential part of the squad that reached the 2006 UEFA Cup Final.

He remained with Middlesbrough for three seasons, making 68 league appearances.

His final act for the club was scoring a magnificent free-kick in the famous 8-1 victory over Manchester City on the final day of the 2007/08 season.

In May 2008, after Middlesbrough declined to take up an option to extend his contract, Rochemback returned to Sporting CP on a permanent basis.

His second stint in Lisbon lasted just one season, during which he helped the club compete at the top of the table and in the Champions League.

However, the pull of his homeland remained strong, and in August 2009, he returned to Brazil to sign for Grêmio.

Back in Porto Alegre, Rochemback took on a leadership role, eventually becoming the club captain.

He spent three seasons at Grêmio, where his experience and tactical discipline were vital in navigating the competitive Brazilian Série A and the Copa Libertadores.

Seeking a new challenge in the latter stages of his career, Rochemback moved to China in January 2012 to join Dalian Aerbin in the Chinese Super League.

He spent two seasons in Dalian, where he remained a regular starter and contributed seven goals in 51 appearances.

His time in China allowed him to experience a different footballing culture while still performing at a high level. After leaving Dalian Aerbin in late 2013, he had a brief stint with the amateur side Ipiranga de Passo Fundo in Brazil before officially moving away from the professional game.

On the international stage, Rochemback earned seven caps for the Brazilian national team, all in 2001.

He was part of the squads for both the FIFA Confederations Cup and the Copa América. While he was competing for places during a golden era of Brazilian midfielders, including the likes of Emerson, Gilberto Silva, and Juninho Pernambucano, his inclusion in the national team at such a young age was a testament to his raw talent.

Fabio Rochemback's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Playing a huge part in helping Middlesbrough reach the 2006 UEFA Cup final.

Gareth Southgate

Gareth's footballing education began at Southampton, but it was marked by an early and significant failure.

At thirteen, he was released by the Saints, who informed him that he was physically underdeveloped and unlikely to possess the stature required for the professional game.

This rejection could have ended his aspirations, but instead, it instilled a 'prove them wrong' mentality that would become a recurring theme in his life.

He found a second chance at Crystal Palace, a club then known for its 'bearpit' atmosphere of tough, street-fighting characters.

Under the guidance of youth team manager Alan Smith, Southgate was initially seen as too soft. Smith famously told a teenage Southgate that he should consider becoming a travel agent if he wasn't prepared to toughen up.

Taking these comments to heart, Southgate began a period of physical and mental fortification that culminated in his first-team debut in October 1990.

At Selhurst Park, Southgate was initially a versatile utility player, primarily operating as a central midfielder. His ability to read the game and distribute the ball with precision made him a standout in a team of older, more aggressive players.

By the 1993/94 season, he was appointed captain at the age of twenty-three.

He led the club to the First Division title, scoring an impressive nine goals from midfield that year.

His leadership style was quiet but firm; he was never the loudest voice in the room, but he was the most respected. His nickname, Nord, was given by teammate Wally Downes because Southgate's articulate and clipped way of speaking reminded everyone of television host Denis Norden.

Despite his growing stature, Palace were relegated from the Premier League in 1995, and Southgate, recognising his need to stay in the top flight to fulfil his England ambitions, moved to Aston Villa for £2,500,000.

His transition to Villa Park coincided with a pivotal tactical shift. Manager Brian Little moved him from the midfield anchor role to the centre of a three-man defence.

This conversion was masterful. Southgate possessed the intelligence to anticipate danger before it manifested and the technical skill to play the ball out from the back, a trait that was still relatively rare in English defenders of the mid-nineties.

Alongside Paul McGrath and Ugo Ehiogu, Southgate formed one of the most disciplined defensive lines in the country.

In his debut season at Villa, he lifted the League Cup at Wembley, a 3-0 demolition of Leeds United. His form was so undeniable that Terry Venables handed him his first England cap against Portugal in December 1995.

The summer of 1996 provided the most defining and public trauma of his career. Playing in a home European Championship, Southgate was an ever-present force as England reached the semi-finals.

However, in the shootout against Germany, he volunteered for the sixth penalty. His low, weak shot was saved by Andreas Kopke, sending England out of the tournament.

The fallout was immense. Southgate became the face of a national failure, mocked by rival fans and haunted by the memory.

Yet, his response was a masterclass in emotional intelligence. He fronted the media, refused to hide, and eventually turned the moment into a positive by starring in a self-deprecating Pizza Hut advertisement alongside Stuart Pearce and Chris Waddle.

This ability to confront failure rather than be consumed by it would later become the cornerstone of his managerial philosophy.

Southgate stayed at Aston Villa for six years, making nearly 200 appearances and eventually becoming club captain.

He was a model of consistency, leading the team to the 2000 FA Cup Final, which they lost to Chelsea. By 2001, at the age of 30, he sought a final challenge and signed for Middlesbrough for £6,500,000.

He was the first signing of new manager Steve McClaren, who had coached him as an assistant for England.

At Middlesbrough, Southgate's impact was transformative. He was the leader the club had lacked, bringing a level of top-tier professionalism to a squad that had often underachieved.

In 2004, he captained the side to a 2-1 League Cup victory over Bolton Wanderers.

This was followed by a legendary run to the 2006 UEFA Cup Final, where a battered and ageing Southgate led his team through impossible comebacks against Basel and Steaua Bucharest.

His final professional match was the final in Eindhoven, a 4-0 defeat to Sevilla, marking the end of a playing career that spanned over 600 club matches and 57 international caps.

Gareth's move into management was sudden and fraught with difficulty.

In June 2006, Middlesbrough chairman Steve Gibson appointed Southgate as manager to succeed McClaren.

Because he lacked the mandatory UEFA Pro Licence, he required a special dispensation from the Premier League, which was granted due to his long service as an international player.

His tenure at Middlesbrough was a rollercoaster. He secured safe mid-table finishes in his first two seasons but struggled to maintain the squad's quality as the club's finances tightened. In 2009, Middlesbrough were relegated to the Championship.

Although he started the following season well, sitting in fourth place, he was dismissed in October 2009.

The sacking was a second major public failure for Southgate, one that hit his self-esteem hard and led him to step away from the dugout for several years.

During this period, Southgate worked as a pundit but, more importantly, took a role with the Football Association as head of elite development in 2011.

He was tasked with modernising the 'England DNA' by examining how the nation produced and nurtured young talent.

This period of study and reflection was vital. He moved into the role of England under-21 manager in 2013, where he began working with the players who would eventually define his senior tenure: Harry Kane, John Stones, and Jordan Pickford.

He led the under-21s to a 2016 Toulon Tournament victory, proving his methods could yield results.

When the senior England job became vacant following Sam Allardyce's scandal-hit exit in 2016, Southgate was initially hesitant.

He had previously stated he didn't feel ready, but as interim manager, he brought immediate stability. He was appointed permanently in November 2016. His tenure revolutionised the national team.

He dismantled the fear factor that had plagued English football for decades, fostering a club-like atmosphere in which players felt safe being themselves. He replaced the old, hierarchical culture with one built on empathy and transparency.

The results were unprecedented in the modern era. At the 2018 World Cup in Russia, Southgate led a young, unheralded squad to the semi-finals, a run that united a fractured country and made the manager a fashion icon for his signature waistcoat.

This was followed by a third-place finish in the 2019 Nations League and a historic journey to the Euro 2020 final.

Played at Wembley, the tournament saw England reach their first major final since 1966. Though they lost on penalties to Italy, Southgate had successfully reconnected the team with its public.

He continued to lead the side with poise through the 2022 World Cup and finally to the Euro 2024 final in Germany.

After a narrow 2-1 defeat to Spain in Berlin, Southgate announced his resignation in July 2024, having managed 102 matches—the third-most in history—and leaving the team ranked among the top three in the world.

In the 2025 New Year Honours, Gareth Southgate was awarded a knighthood for his services to association football.

Now known as Sir Gareth, he is remembered as the man who healed the wounds of 1996 and proved that modern, empathetic leadership could succeed at the highest level of sport.

His legacy is one of profound cultural change, transforming the England shirt from a heavy burden into a badge of pride for a new generation of players and supporters alike.

Gareth Southgate's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Captaining Middlesbrough to their 2-1 League Cup win over Bolton Wanderers in 2004.

Boudewijn Zenden

Zenden's journey into professional football began in MVV Maastricht's youth system before he was recruited by the prestigious PSV academy.

It was at PSV that Zenden first demonstrated the technical skill and stamina that would define his career. Breaking into the first team in the mid-1990s, he quickly became a key figure on the left wing, displacing more established players through sheer consistency.

During the 1996/97 season, Zenden was instrumental in PSV's Eredivisie title, a performance that earned him the Dutch Football Talent of the Year award.

His time in Eindhoven was incredibly productive, as he made 112 league appearances and scored 32 goals, helping the club secure the KNVB Cup and multiple Johan Cruyff Shields.

In 1998, his performances for both club and country led to a high-profile move to FC Barcelona, where he joined a large contingent of Dutch players under the management of Louis van Gaal.

At the Camp Nou, Zenden showcased his adaptability; while naturally a winger, he was frequently deployed as a left wing-back, replacing the local favourite Sergi.

Despite the intense pressure and the revolving door of superstars at FC Barcelona, Zenden helped the club win the La Liga title in the 1998/99 season. He made nearly 100 appearances for the Catalan giants across all competitions, a feat that solidified his status as a top-tier European professional.

Seeking a new challenge in the Premier League, Zenden signed for Chelsea in 2001 for a fee of £7,500,000.

His debut was spectacular, as he scored within nine minutes of his first match against Newcastle United.

However, his time at Stamford Bridge was often disrupted by persistent injuries, which prevented him from maintaining a consistent run in the starting eleven. Despite these setbacks, he was a member of the squad that reached the 2002 FA Cup Final.

With the arrival of Roman Abramovich and a massive influx of new talent in 2003, Zenden moved on loan to Middlesbrough, a decision that would lead to some of the most memorable moments of his career.

At Middlesbrough, Zenden became a central figure in a historic period for the club. He transitioned from a pure winger into a more central midfield role, where his tactical intelligence and experience were invaluable.

He famously scored the winning goal—a penalty—in the 2004 League Cup final against Bolton Wanderers.

His performances were so impressive that the move was made permanent, and he played a vital role in Boro's subsequent European campaigns.

His success on Teesside earned him a move to Liverpool in 2005 under Rafael Benitez. At Anfield, Zenden continued to be a 'big game' player, starting in the 2005 UEFA Super Cup victory over CSKA Moscow and later featuring in the 2007 UEFA Champions League Final against AC Milan.

Although Liverpool lost that final, Zenden's contribution to the team's balance and defensive solidity was highly valued by Benitez.

After his contract expired at Liverpool, he moved to France to join Olympique Marseille, where he spent two seasons and helped the club compete at the top of Ligue 1 and in the Champions League.

Zenden returned to the Premier League in 2009 for a final professional stint with Sunderland.

Even in his mid-30s, his professionalism was evident, as he provided a calm, veteran presence to a young squad. He scored several memorable goals for the Black Cats, including a stunning volley against Tottenham Hotspur, before eventually retiring from professional play in 2011.

Internationally, Zenden was a stalwart for the Netherlands, earning 54 caps and scoring seven goals.

He represented the Oranje at the 1998 FIFA World Cup, where he scored a magnificent goal in the third-place play-off against Croatia, and at Euro 2000 and Euro 2004. His international career was marked by the same versatility he showed at the club level, often playing as a winger, wing-back, or central midfielder depending on the team's needs.

Since retiring, Zenden has become a coach, bringing his vast knowledge of the game back to the clubs where he once played.

He served as an assistant manager to Rafael Benitez at Chelsea, helping the team win the UEFA Europa League in 2013, and has held various coaching roles at PSV.

Today, he remains an active figure in the football world, often seen providing expert punditry on Dutch television.

Boudewijn Zenden's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring the winning goal in the 2004 League Cup Final in the 2-1 win against Bolton Wanderers.

Chapter Nine

A Brief History of the 2010s

At the start of 2010, Middlesbrough Football Club was undergoing many changes.

The club had just been dropped from the top tier in 2009. They were finding it very hard to adjust to the physical and financial demands of playing in a lower league.

Gordon Strachan was the manager at that time. He brought in several players from Scotland (where he was born), some of whom proved to be huge disappointments and ultimately weren't good enough.

By the start of the following season, the team was struggling, despite the manager having been financially backed by the club's owner.

In October 2010, Strachan quit his job. The team were in 20th place and was at risk of falling into the third tier of English football.

This forced Steve Gibson to appoint former club captain Tony Mowbray to replace the Scotsman. The fans were pleased with this choice.

The club's wage bill was far too high for the second tier, so Mowbray spent his early years getting rid of a lot of dead wood.

The season ended with the team in 12th place, which was a good start.

Mowbray also focused heavily on giving young players in the academy a chance in the first team if they were good enough.

Because the club lacked the finances, he had to sign players on free transfers or loan them from other clubs to keep the team competitive.

In the following two campaigns, the team had good starts but ultimately slipped away. For a long period of time, it looked like Mowbray might lead the team back into the top tier.

However, the team played poorly in the final months of the season and finished just outside the top spots.

The following season was even worse.

By Christmas, the team were in second place and looked set for promotion. But then the wheels fell off. They only won three games in the entire year of 2013.

This bad run of form caused the team to fall from 2nd place all the way down to 16th. Because of these results, Mowbray was sacked in October 2013.

Even though the fans still loved him, the results on the pitch were not good enough for a club that wanted to be back at the top table.

In November 2013, the club hired Aitor Karanka. He was the first manager from outside of Britain to lead the team. He had previously worked as an assistant manager at Real Madrid.

Karanka brought a very disciplined, defensive style of play. His main tactics were being organised and preventing the other team from scoring.

While the rest of that season was spent making the team steady, you could see his influence right away.

The defence became much stronger, and the players started to believe they could win every game.

They finished that season in 12th place, but everyone could see they were ready for a promotion push.

The 2014/15 season was very exciting for the fans. The team became very strong in the league. They had a great defence and some very talented attacking players like Patrick Bamford, who scored lots of goals.

They finished 4th in the league and reached a huge Play-off Final at Wembley.

Thousands of fans dressed in red went to watch them, but the team played nervously and lost 2-0 to Norwich City. It was a tough day for everyone at the club.

Instead of giving up, Steve Gibson invested more money in the team in order to make them stronger for their next promotion push.

They brought back local hero Stewart Downing and signed several other players.

The season was very tense, and Karanka made sure the defence was the best in the league. There was some drama in the middle of the season when the manager was away for one game after an argument, but he came back to lead the team to the finish line.

The race to move up went down to the very last day of the season. In a very loud and exciting stadium, Middlesbrough got the draw they needed against Brighton & Hove Albion.

This meant they finished in second place and were finally back in the Premier League after seven long years.

The 2016/17 season in the top league began with high hopes.

It started well with a win over their rivals, but soon the team found it very hard to score goals. While their defence were still good, unfortunately, they were not winning enough games.

The manager and the players started to have disagreements again. Karanka was let go in March 2017 after a string of bad results.

His assistant (Steve Agnew) tried to save the club, but he could not stop the team from being relegated.

It was a very bitter moment for the fans after waiting so long to get back.

When they returned to the second tier in 2017, the club spent a record amount of money on new players to try to get back up immediately.

They hired Garry Monk as manager, but the team lacked a clear identity.

They were not as strong in defence as they had been, and the results were extremely inconsistent.

Monk was fired in December, and Tony Pulis was brought in to bring stability.

He made the team defensively strong again and led them to the play-offs, but they lost to Aston Villa.

The next year, he remained manager, but many fans did not like the style of play.

The team was very disciplined but did not score many goals, playing a very defensive game.

They stayed near the top of the table for most of the year, but a very bad run of six losses in a row cost them dearly. They missed out on the top spots by just one point on the final day.

The club decided not to keep Pulis after that.

The decade ended with a complete change. The club hired another former captain, Jonathan Woodgate, as head coach in 2019.

He promised to play more attacking football and use more young players from the academy.

He wanted the club to stop spending so much money and build a team for the future.

However, the change was very difficult. The team struggled to learn the new style and found themselves near the bottom of the league as the year ended.

Oddly enough, the decade ended in a lot of uncertainty, just as it had started.

Throughout the aforementioned ten years, the club remained a very important part of the community. Steve Gibson remained the loyal owner, putting his own money into the club even when things were difficult. Credit to him for that!

Chapter Ten

Ten Memorable Players from the 2010s

Albert Adomah

Albert's professional breakthrough was in January 2008 when he signed for Barnet, then competing in League Two.

He made an immediate impact, scoring on his Football League debut against Hereford United.

Adomah quickly established himself as a key creative force for the Bees, earning the Barnet Young Player of the Year award for the 2008/09 season.

His performances attracted significant interest from higher-division clubs, leading to a move to Bristol City in the summer of 2010 for a fee determined by a tribunal.

At his new club, Adomah transitioned seamlessly into the Championship.

He was named the club's Player of the Year after his first season, a campaign in which he registered five goals and numerous assists across 48 appearances.

He spent three seasons at Ashton Gate, accumulating 136 appearances and scoring 17 goals. His direct running style and crossing ability made him a fan favourite and solidified his reputation as one of the most effective wingers in the second tier.

In August 2013, Adomah joined Middlesbrough. His time on Teesside was highly successful, highlighted by a prolific 2013/14 season where he scored 12 league goals.

He played a vital role in Middlesbrough's 2015/16 campaign, which resulted in promotion to the Premier League.

Although he made his Premier League debut for Middlesbrough at the start of the 2016/17 season, he soon returned to the Championship by signing for Aston Villa.

His tenure at Villa Park further cemented his legacy in the Championship.

During the 2017/18 season, he finished as the club's top scorer with 14 league goals, helping the team reach the Play-Off Final.

The following year, he was part of the squad that successfully secured promotion to the Premier League via the play-offs.

After leaving Villa Park in 2019, he had a brief stint with Nottingham Forest and a loan spell at Cardiff City.

In October 2020, Adomah signed for Queens Park Rangers, the club he had supported since childhood.

He spent four seasons at Loftus Road, surpassing 100 appearances for the club and providing crucial experience.

In July 2024, he moved to Walsall in League Two on a free transfer. As of early 2026, he continues to play for the Midlands-based club, contributing goals and assists while reaching a career milestone of over 775 professional matches.

Internationally, Adomah represented Ghana, qualifying through his heritage. He earned 19 caps for the Black Stars between 2011 and 2018.

Albert Adomah's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring twelve goals for Middlesbrough in the 2013/14 season.

Britt Assombalonga

Britt's football career began in Watford's youth ranks, where he signed as a 17-year-old in 2010. His impact at the youth level was immediate, as he finished as the second-highest goalscorer for the academy side during a season that saw them reach the FA Youth Cup quarter finals.

This early promise earned him a professional contract, and he soon began a series of loans that would form the foundation of his senior career.

His first experience of senior football came during a loan spell with Wealdstone in 2011, during which he scored 11 goals in just 16 games.

This was followed by a brief but highly successful stint at Braintree Town, where he averaged a goal per game.

These performances in non-league football prompted Watford to hand him his first-team debut in March 2012 against Coventry City.

However, to continue his development, he was loaned to Southend United for the 2012/13 season.

There, he became a central figure, netting fifteen league goals and helping the club reach the League Trophy final at Wembley.

The summer of 2013 marked a permanent departure from Watford as he signed for Peterborough United in a club record deal.

His single season at London Road was nothing short of sensational. Assombalonga scored 33 goals in all competitions, including the opening goal in the 2014 Football League Trophy final, which Peterborough United won.

His performances in League One made him one of the most sought-after strikers in the country, and Nottingham Forest secured his signature in August 2014 for a fee of approximately £5,000,000.

His time at The City Ground was a period of both incredible highs and significant physical challenges. He started his career at his new

club in devastating form, scoring 15 goals in his first 29 Championship appearances.

Unfortunately, in February 2015, he suffered a severe knee injury that sidelined him for over a year.

His return to action in early 2016 proved his resilience.

During the 2016/17 season, he proved his fitness and quality by scoring 14 goals, including two on the final day of the season to help Forest avoid relegation. Over three seasons with the club, he scored 30 goals in 65 league games, maintaining a goal-scoring rate that made him a legend among the Forest faithful.

In July 2017, Assombalonga made a high-profile move to Middlesbrough for a club-record fee of £15,000,000.

This transfer carried immense expectations as Middlesbrough expected an immediate return to the Premier League.

He began his tenure on Teesside with the same clinical edge he had shown elsewhere, scoring fifteen league goals in his debut season.

Under Tony Pulis's management, he remained a consistent goal threat, contributing 14 goals the following year.

During his four-year stay at the Riverside Stadium, he made over 160 appearances and scored 47 goals. He even served as club captain, reflecting his status as a senior leader in the squad.

Whilst the club did not achieve the promotion they craved during his time there, his consistency as a double-digit goalscorer cemented his place as a key figure in the club's modern history.

Following the end of his contract at Middlesbrough in 2021, Assombalonga moved abroad to join Adana Demirspor in the Turkish Süper Lig.

This move represented a new chapter in a different footballing culture. He adapted well to Turkish football, scoring ten goals in his first full season and playing alongside high-profile internationals.

However, the pull of English football remained strong, and he returned to Watford in January 2023 for a brief second spell with his

first professional club. After his short stint back at Vicarage Road, he returned to Turkey, signing with Antalyaspor and later Amedspor, where he continued to demonstrate his veteran presence and goal-scoring instincts.

The years spent in Turkey were particularly enlightening for the striker, as he had to adjust to a league that was often more technical and less physically relentless than the English Championship. At Adana Demirspor, he found himself as part of an ambitious project, often being utilised as the spearhead of a fast-attacking transition system.

His ability to hold the ball up and bring creative midfielders into the game was as important as his finishing.

Even as he aged, his understanding of space allowed him to remain a constant threat, and he became a popular figure among the Turkish supporters who appreciated his explosive style and work ethic.

In October 2025, Assombalonga returned to the English league system by signing for Barnet.

In the twilight of his professional career, he brought a wealth of experience to the League Two side. Despite being in his 30s, his movement and positional awareness remained sharp, and he quickly integrated into the squad, contributing goals in both league and cup competitions.

His presence in the lower leagues was seen as a significant coup for Barnet, providing a clinical edge to their attacking options as they pushed for success in the 2025/26 campaign.

His arrival sparked a renewed sense of optimism at the club, with younger players looking to him as a mentor and an example of professional longevity.

Internationally, Assombalonga represented the DR Congo.

After several years of deliberation regarding his international future, he made his debut in 2018.

One of his most memorable moments for his country came during the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations, where he scored his first international goal in a 4–0 victory over Zimbabwe.

His international career allowed him to showcase his abilities on a different stage, competing against some of the best defenders on the continent. These matches were often played under challenging conditions, requiring mental and physical adaptability that further rounded out his skill set as a professional athlete.

Britt Assombalonga's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring 15 league goals in the 2017/18 season.

Daniel Ayala

Ayala's developmental years were spent at Sevilla's prestigious youth academy.

As a teenager, he showed immense promise, possessing the physical attributes and tactical awareness that distinguished him from his peers in the Andalusian club's setup.

In 2007, he made the high-profile and somewhat controversial decision to move to England, joining Liverpool's academy after declining a professional contract with his hometown club.

This move was a significant step for a young player, involving a transition to a new culture and a much more physical style of football.

His early years at Merseyside were spent adapting to the English game, where he featured prominently in the under-18 and reserve teams.

One of his standout moments during this period was playing through a painful injury during the 2008/09 FA Youth Cup final, a display of the grit and determination that would define his professional reputation.

His senior debut for Liverpool was on August 16, 2009, when he replaced Martin Skrtel in a Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur.

Just days later, he made his first start for the club in a 4-0 victory over Stoke City at Anfield.

At that time, Liverpool possessed a wealth of defensive talent, and breaking into the first team permanently was a daunting task. While his time at Anfield was ultimately limited to five senior appearances, it laid the foundation for a career defined by resilience and tactical intelligence.

He had the opportunity to train alongside some of the finest players in the world, learning how to become a better centre-back from established internationals.

To gain regular first-team experience, Ayala was sent on several loan spells, first to Hull City in 2010.

His debut for the Tigers against Portsmouth was a successful one, and he quickly became a regular in the side, even scoring his first professional goal in a match against Derby County.

These stints in the Championship were pivotal, allowing him to showcase the aerial dominance and defensive positioning that would become his trademarks.

In August 2011, Ayala moved to Norwich City on a permanent basis for an estimated fee of £800,000.

This move was intended to be his springboard back into regular Premier League action.

However, his tenure in East Anglia was unfortunately marred by persistent knee and hamstring injuries, which significantly limited his contribution during the club's top-flight campaign.

These physical setbacks were a source of great frustration for both the player and the club, preventing him from establishing a consistent rhythm.

Despite these struggles, he remained a sought-after defender due to his natural ability. He eventually joined Nottingham Forest on loan for the 2012/13 season, where he sought to rebuild his match fitness and prove his durability. At his temporary home, he showed flashes of the quality that had originally attracted Liverpool, but the season was one of transition for the club, and he eventually returned to Norwich without a permanent move.

The most successful and defining chapter of Ayala's career began in late 2013 when he moved to Middlesbrough.

Initially arriving on an emergency loan, he made an instant impact under the management of Aitor Karanka.

His style perfectly suited Karanka's defensive philosophy, which prioritised organisation, discipline, and aerial superiority. The deal was made permanent in January 2014, signalling the start of a long and fruitful relationship between the player and the Teesside club.

In the North-East, Ayala evolved into one of the most respected and feared centre-backs in the Championship.

His partnership with Ben Gibson became the bedrock of the team's success.

He was a cornerstone of the Middlesbrough side that reached the 2015 play-off final at Wembley, although that particular day ended in disappointment. Undeterred, he played an instrumental role in their successful promotion to the Premier League in the 2015/16 season.

His defensive contributions were supplemented by a significant threat in the opposing penalty area; he was frequently the target for set-pieces, using his height and timing to score crucial goals.

During the 2017/18 campaign, Ayala achieved a remarkable feat for a defender by scoring seven goals in a single season. This prolific output further endeared him to the Middlesbrough faithful, who recognised him as a warrior on the pitch.

Over seven years at the club, he made over 200 appearances, consistently performing at a high level despite occasional injury layoffs.

He eventually served as club captain, a testament to his leadership qualities and the respect he commanded in the dressing room. His departure in 2020 marked the end of an era for the club, as he left behind a legacy of defensive excellence and was widely regarded as one of the best defenders to have worn the Boro shirt in the modern era.

Following his time with Middlesbrough, Ayala signed a three-year contract with Blackburn Rovers.

Joining a club with a rich history and a youthful squad, he was brought in to provide veteran experience and stability to the backline.

His period at Ewood Park followed a familiar pattern; when fit, he was arguably the best defender on the pitch, but his time was frequently punctuated by injury layoffs that prevented him from playing a full season.

He made over 50 appearances for Rovers, often producing dominant displays that helped the team push for the play-offs. His ability to read the game and organise those around him was invaluable to the development of the younger players in the squad.

However, as his contract approached its end, the club decided to move in a different direction.

After his release from Blackburn in 2023, Ayala had a brief and challenging spell with Rotherham United. This period was perhaps the most difficult of his professional life.

Joining a team struggling near the bottom of the table, he found it difficult to find a match rhythm. His short tenure was characterised by two red cards in quick succession, which limited his availability and hindered his ability to help the team's survival efforts.

These disciplinary issues were uncharacteristic of a player known more for his composure than for rashness. Eventually, this led to his departure from the club in March 2024 by mutual consent.

In the latter stages of 2024, Ayala made a brief, low-profile appearance for non-league side Potters Bar Town, playing in a cup match to maintain some level of activity.

By early 2025, his retirement from professional football had been confirmed on social media.

Beyond his extensive exploits in English club football, Ayala also represented Spain at the youth level.

He earned caps for the under-21 national team, appearing alongside players who would go on to achieve great success on the international stage. While a senior cap for Spain remained elusive, his achievements in the English game were significant.

Daniel Ayala's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring seven goals from centre-half in season 2017/18.

Patrick Bamford

Bamford began his footballing career at Nottingham Forest, a club with a strong track record of developing young talent.

Even as a youth player, he stood out not just for his athletic ability but for his academic intelligence, notably turning down a scholarship to Harvard University to pursue a career in professional football. This intellectual background often showed in his style of play, which relied more on clever movement and anticipation than on raw physical power.

He made his senior debut for Nottingham Forest in December 2011, but his stay at the City Ground was short-lived.

His potential was so evident that Chelsea, then the reigning European champions, moved quickly to secure his services in January 2012.

At his new club, Bamford entered the infamous loan system, a period of his career that would define his early 20s.

His first move away from Stamford Bridge was to Milton Keynes Dons in League One. It was here that he truly began to find his feet in senior football.

Over two loan spells with the club, he proved to be a prolific goalscorer, netting 21 goals in 44 appearances. His ability to lead the line as a lone striker while also dropping deep to link play caught the eye of clubs higher up the pyramid.

This success led to a step up to the Championship with Derby County in early 2014.

At Pride Park, he continued his progress, scoring eight goals in twenty appearances and helping the Rams reach the play-off final.

The 2014/15 season represented a significant milestone in his career when he joined Middlesbrough on loan.

Under the guidance of Aitor Karanka, Bamford became the focal point of a team pushing for promotion.

His movement off the ball and his clinical finishing were essential to Middlesbrough's tactical setup. He finished the season with 17 league goals and was named the Championship Player of the Year.

Despite the individual accolades, the season ended in heartbreak as Middlesbrough lost the play-off final at Wembley. This period on Teesside remained a fond memory for the player and the fans, creating a bond that would see him return to the club later in his career.

During this particular season, he demonstrated an uncanny ability to find space in crowded penalty areas, often finishing chances with a single touch. His partnership with players like Lee Tomlin and Albert Adomah was central to one of the most exciting attacking units in the division.

Following his success in the Championship, the next logical step was the Premier League.

However, this period proved to be the most challenging of his professional life. He embarked on a series of top-flight loans to Crystal Palace, Norwich City, and Burnley. For various reasons, including tactical misfits and lack of consistent game time, he struggled to replicate his lower-league form.

He failed to score a single goal across these three spells, leading some critics to question whether he had the physical attributes to succeed at the highest level of English football.

These doubts were a significant test of his mental fortitude, but he remained convinced of his own ability to compete at the top.

The experience at Burnley under Sean Dyche was particularly contrasting to his style, as the team used a more direct approach that did not favour his preference for intricate link-up play.

In January 2017, Bamford decided to leave Chelsea permanently, returning to Middlesbrough in a deal worth approximately £10,000,000.

The club was then in the Premier League but were relegated at the end of the season. Back in the Championship for the 2017/18 campaign,

Bamford initially struggled to find his best form as the club went through managerial changes.

However, under Tony Pulis, he experienced a resurgence in the second half of the season, notably scoring a hat-trick against Leeds United. He finished that season with 11 league goals, proving once again that he was a top-tier striker in the Championship.

This period was vital in rebuilding his confidence after several stagnant years in the Premier League loan cycle.

The turning point that would change the course of his career occurred in July 2018 when he signed for Leeds United.

The move was significant not just because of the rivalry between the two clubs, but also because it aligned him with Marcelo Bielsa's managerial philosophy.

Bamford's first season at Elland Road was hampered by a serious knee injury, yet he still managed to contribute ten goals in 22 appearances.

Despite his contributions, he faced intense scrutiny from a section of the fanbase who criticised his conversion rate.

This pressure would have broken many players, but Bamford's resilience and Bielsa's unwavering faith kept him at the forefront of the team. Bielsa famously valued Bamford's contribution to the team's overall structure far more than simple goal tallies, citing his defensive work as irreplaceable.

The 2019/20 season was the year Bamford and Leeds United finally achieved their goal.

He was the undisputed starting striker for a team that played some of the most demanding and attractive football in the country. His role was much more than just scoring; he was the first line of defence, a tireless runner who initiated the press and created space for teammates like Pablo Hernandez and Jack Harrison.

He finished the season with 16 goals as Leeds United won the Championship title, ending a 16-year absence from the Premier League.

This achievement was a personal vindication for Bamford, who had been told during his earlier loan spells that he wasn't suited to the top flight. His ability to endure the physical demands of Bielsa's 'murderball' training sessions spoke volumes about his professional dedication.

Returning to the Premier League with Leeds in 2020, Bamford silenced his critics almost immediately. He scored on the opening day against Liverpool at Anfield and followed it up with a spectacular hat-trick against Aston Villa.

Throughout the 2020/21 season, he was one of the most effective forwards in the division, finishing the campaign with 17 goals and seven assists.

His performances were so impressive that they earned him a call-up to the England national team, and he made his debut against Andorra in September 2021.

This was the highlight of his career, a journey from a loanee to a Premier League star and a full international.

His 17-goal haul placed him among the elite strikers in Europe that year, highlighting his refined finishing and positional awareness.

Unfortunately, the subsequent years were defined by physical struggles. The high-intensity style of play demanded by the Bielsa era took a toll on his body, and he suffered a succession of foot, hamstring, and groin injuries.

These issues restricted him to just nine appearances in the 2021/22 season. His absence was deeply felt by Leeds, who struggled to maintain their attacking potency without his specific link-up play. Even when he returned to the pitch, he often had to play through pain or lacked the match sharpness that had made him so dangerous. The psychological impact of these recurring injuries was immense, yet he continued to work through grueling rehabilitation cycles to support the team's survival efforts.

The 2022/23 season was another difficult period as Leeds United battled against relegation.

Bamford found himself in the middle of a high-stakes struggle, dealing with fluctuating form and the psychological weight of the club's position.

Despite scoring some crucial goals, the team was eventually relegated back to the Championship. This marked a period of change for both the club and the player.

In the Championship, once again for the 2023/24 season, Bamford had to adapt to a new role under Daniel Farke.

While he was no longer the guaranteed starter every week, he remained a vital senior figure in the squad, contributing important goals during the club's push for an immediate return to the Premier League. His experience proved crucial in a dressing room filled with younger players navigating the pressures of a promotion race.

At the time of writing, Bamford is with Sheffield United.

Patrick Bamford's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Scoring 17 league goals in the 2014/15 season.

George Friend

George's professional life started at Exeter City, where he joined the academy as a teenager.

Unlike many young players who are fast-tracked into professional environments at very young ages, he balanced his early footballing development with his academic studies in Devon.

He signed his first professional contract with The Grecians in March 2006, when the club was competing in the Conference.

His debut came shortly after against Forest Green Rovers, marking the beginning of a period where he would become a central figure in the club's resurgence.

During his early years at St James Park, he was noted for his physical fitness and his willingness to learn from veteran defenders, often staying late after training sessions to work on his crossing and defensive headers.

The 2007/08 season was a landmark campaign for the young defender. He became a mainstay in the Exeter City team that fought for promotion back to the Football League. During this season, he became the club's youngest-ever captain, a testament to the maturity and communication skills that would define his later career.

Leading men much older than himself required a unique level of psychological strength, and Friend handled the responsibility with a grace that surprised many observers.

He was part of the side that defeated Cambridge United in the play-off final at Wembley Stadium, securing Exeter's return to the professional ranks.

His performances as a versatile defender who could operate at left-back or in the centre of the defence did not go unnoticed by scouts

from higher divisions, who were impressed by his composure under the immense pressure of a Wembley final.

In September 2008, Wolverhampton Wanderers secured his signature for a significant six-figure fee.

The move to the Championship represented a major step up in intensity and competition. Moving from the Conference to a club chasing the Premier League was a steep learning curve.

While his time at Molineux did not lead to him becoming a regular starter, it was a vital period of growth. He was forced to adapt to a much faster pace of play and more rigorous tactical demands. He was part of the squad that won the Championship title in the 2008/09 season, earning promotion to the Premier League.

To ensure he continued to play competitive minutes, the club used the loan system, sending him to Millwall, Southend United, and Scunthorpe United.

Each of these loan spells added a different layer to his game; at Millwall, he learned the grit required for a London scrap, while at Scunthorpe, he honed his ability to play out from the back in a more technical setup.

One of the more unique moments of his career occurred during his time at Wolves in December 2009.

He was handed his Premier League debut against Manchester United at Old Trafford.

This match became famous in English football history when Wolves manager Mick McCarthy made 10 changes to his starting lineup, leading to a fine for the club for fielding a weakened team.

For the defender, however, it was a dream come true, as he competed against some of the best players in the world on one of the grandest stages in sport. Marking players like Wayne Rooney and Park Ji-sung provided an invaluable education in elite-level movement and spatial awareness.

He eventually returned to Exeter City on loan to finish the 2009/10 season, helping his former club maintain their League One status, a move that demonstrated his loyalty to the team that gave him his start in football.

After leaving Wolves on a permanent basis, he signed for Doncaster Rovers in the Championship in 2010.

This was the period where he truly established himself as one of the best left-backs in the second tier.

Over two seasons at the Keepmoat Stadium, he became a fan's favourite and was eventually named club captain.

His relationship with the Doncaster Rovers supporters was built on his relentless work rate and his tendency to drive the team forward during difficult moments.

Despite the club's relegation in 2012, his individual performances were so high-quality that he was named the club's Player of the Year and Supporters' Player of the Year.

His consistency and professional conduct during a difficult season for the club made him a primary target for several ambitious Championship sides.

He left Doncaster Rovers with his head held high, having proven himself a top-level Championship defender capable of leading a side through adversity.

In July 2012, he made the move that would define his professional legacy, signing for Middlesbrough.

Over the next eight years, he became much more than just a regular starter; he became a symbol of the club's identity.

In his first season on Teesside, he was named the Players' Player of the Year and the Community Player of the Year, highlighting his impact both on and off the pitch.

His raiding runs down the left flank, and his defensive reliability were key components of a Middlesbrough side that consistently challenged at the top of the table. He developed an almost telepathic

understanding with the club's midfielders, knowing exactly when to overlap and when to sit back and hold the defensive line.

The mid-2010s saw him reach the peak of his career.

He was named in the PFA Championship Team of the Year for two consecutive seasons in 2014/15 and 2015/16.

These accolades were a reflection of his status as the premier left-back in the division.

In the 2015/16 campaign, he was a vital part of the Middlesbrough team that finally secured promotion to the Premier League on a dramatic final day against Brighton & Hove Albion.

His emotional connection to the club and the local community was evident throughout the celebrations, as he had become a standard-bearer for the region's values.

He wasn't just a player from the south living in the north; he had become a Teessider by adoption, getting involved in local initiatives and speaking passionately about the club's importance to the town's social fabric.

He returned to the Premier League with Middlesbrough for the 2016/17 season, making 24 appearances in the top flight.

Despite the club's eventual relegation, he proved he could compete against the elite attackers of the world.

Friend remained with the club for three more seasons in the Championship, eventually being named club captain in early 2019. By the time he left the Riverside Stadium in 2020, he had made nearly 300 appearances for the club.

His departure marked the end of an era, and he was widely praised by the North East media and fans for his service and the dignity with which he represented the institution.

Even after his exit, he remained a figure of immense respect, often returning to the area for charity work and maintaining close ties with the club's foundation.

In August 2020, he joined Birmingham City on a free transfer, reuniting with his former Middlesbrough manager Aitor Karanka.

He brought much-needed experience and leadership to the Birmingham dressing room during a period of transition for the club.

Despite facing some injury challenges as he entered his mid-thirties, he remained a respected figure and a reliable option across the defensive line.

His three-year spell in the Midlands saw him provide a steady influence, helping the club navigate several difficult Championship campaigns. Younger players at Birmingham often spoke of 'The Friend Effect', referring to his ability to calm the dressing room during losing streaks and his willingness to mentor the club's academy prospects on the nuances of professional conduct.

His final chapter as a player took him back to his roots in the West Country, as he signed for Bristol Rovers in July 2023.

This move was particularly poignant as he had spent time at the club's centre of excellence as a young child before moving to Exeter City.

It was a homecoming in the truest sense. Although his playing time was limited by persistent injuries during the 2023/24 season, his value was recognised in other ways.

He became an unofficial coach on the field, often seen directing traffic from the sidelines or the bench.

In February 2024, he announced his retirement from professional football, bringing an end to a nineteen-year playing career that encompassed nearly 500 competitive appearances.

The change from the pitch to the boardroom was immediate. Upon his retirement, he was appointed as the Director of Football at Bristol Rovers. This role allowed him to draw on the extensive knowledge he had gained throughout his journey, from his non-league beginnings to the Premier League.

His preparation for life after football had been thorough; he had earned a UEFA A coaching license, a degree in Sports Broadcasting and Journalism, and qualifications in talent identification and scouting.

This diverse educational background made him a unique candidate for a leadership role in football administration.

He understood the game from the grassroots up, but he also understood the media landscape and the financial pressures of modern club management.

George Friend's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Playing a major role in Middlesbrough's promotion to the top flight in season 2015/16.

Ben Gibson

Ben's breakthrough at Middlesbrough occurred during the 2013/14 season, where he quickly established a formidable partnership with Daniel Ayala.

Gibson was a cornerstone of the defensive unit that became the hallmark of the club's success under Aitor Karanka.

His composure on the ball and his aerial dominance were pivotal as the club reached the play-off final in 2015 and eventually secured automatic promotion to the Premier League in 2016.

During Middlesbrough's stay in the top flight, Gibson's individual performances remained high despite the team's collective struggles.

His consistency earned him a call-up to the England national team squad in 2017, marking the pinnacle of his time with his hometown club.

In 2018, he made a high-profile move to Burnley for a joint club record fee. However, his time at Turf Moor was unfortunately

characterised by limited playing opportunities and persistent injury setbacks.

Seeking a fresh start and a return to regular first-team action, he joined Norwich City in 2020. This move proved to be a masterstroke for both the player and the club. Ben was an important part of his new club's successful 2020/21 Championship campaign, providing the veteran leadership and defensive organisation required to win the title.

He remained a vital part of the Canaries' backline through subsequent seasons in both the Premier League and the Championship, proving his durability and tactical intelligence.

Following his successful tenure in East Anglia, Gibson moved to Stoke City in 2024.

Joining the Potters represented a new challenge for the experienced defender, who was brought in to provide a steadying influence to a squad undergoing many changes.

His ability to organise the defence and his professional conduct in the dressing room made him an immediate leader within the group. As he navigated the 2025/26 season, he continued to demonstrate the same qualities that had defined his career: a relentless work ethic and a deep understanding of defensive positioning. Ben Gibson remains a highly respected figure in the English game, embodying the attributes of a modern, ball-playing centre back who never shies away from the physical demands of the sport.

His career serves as a testament to the importance of resilience and the value of a professional approach to the game.

Ben Gibson's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Playing a huge part in helping Middlesbrough gain promotion to the top flight in season 2015/16.

Grant Leadbitter

Grant's career in football began in the youth system of his boyhood club, Sunderland.

Joining the academy at 16, he quickly stood out for his work ethic and technical maturity.

His professional debut came in September 2003 during a League Cup match against Huddersfield Town.

To accelerate his development, he was sent on a brief loan to Rotherham United in 2005.

Upon his return to Wearside, he broke into the first team under the management of Mick McCarthy.

Following Sunderland's relegation in 2006, Leadbitter's commitment to the club was solidified when he signed a new contract, dismissing interest from higher divisions to lead the club's revival.

Under Roy Keane, he played an instrumental role in the 2006/07 campaign, appearing in every match and scoring seven goals as Sunderland clinched the Championship title and returned to the Premier League.

One of the most defining and poignant moments of his career occurred at the Stadium of Light in October 2008. After scoring a stunning 25-yard goal against Arsenal, Leadbitter's emotional celebration—kneeling to kiss the turf—became etched in football history.

He later revealed that his father's ashes had been buried under that specific spot on the pitch, and the goal served as a final, deeply personal tribute. This moment cemented his status as more than just a player to the fans; he was a supporter who lived the dreams of those in the stands.

In September 2009, Leadbitter moved to Ipswich Town for a fee of £2,600,000.

At Portman Road, his game evolved. No longer just a high-energy youth prospect, he became a midfield general, dictating the tempo of matches and taking on significant responsibility as a senior player.

Over three seasons with the Tractor Boys, he made 126 appearances and scored 14 goals.

His consistency was remarkable, and he was frequently cited by teammates and managers as the heartbeat of the team.

Despite his success in East Anglia, the pull of the North East remained strong, and in the summer of 2012, he signed for Middlesbrough when his contract expired.

His time on Teesside proved to be the most prolific and decorated period of his career.

In his debut season, he was named the club's Player of the Year, a rare feat for a defensive-minded midfielder.

As captain, he led Middlesbrough through a period of intense transformation under Aitor Karanka. Leadbitter embodied the manager's tactical discipline. He was the on-field lieutenant who organised the defensive structure while providing a threat from set-pieces and long-range strikes.

In the 2014/15 season, his leadership and ten goals earned him a place in the PFA Championship Team of the Year. Although the club suffered a heartbreaking play-off final defeat that year, Leadbitter spurred them on the following season.

In 2015/16, he captained the side to automatic promotion to the Premier League, ending the club's seven-year absence from the top flight.

After six and a half seasons and over 240 appearances on Teesside, Leadbitter made an emotional return to Sunderland in January 2019.

The club was then in League One, and Leadbitter returned with the singular goal of helping his boyhood team climb back up the pyramid. Despite being in the twilight of his career, his influence remained

profound. He provided a steady hand in a volatile environment and served as a mentor to a young squad.

He led the team to the EFL Trophy final in 2019 and eventually won the trophy in 2021, a fitting penultimate achievement. His final professional appearance came in the League One play-off semi-finals in May 2021.

Retiring in September 2021 with nearly 600 career appearances, Leadbitter did not stay away from the game for long.

Grant spent the following year earning his UEFA A coaching license and returned to Middlesbrough in 2022 as an individual development coach. His transition into coaching was seamless, as his playing career had always been characterised by his tactical knowledge and leadership.

By 2023, he was promoted to the first-team coaching staff at Middlesbrough, working under Michael Carrick.

In this role, he continued to influence the next generation of players, sharing the tactical acumen and professional standards that defined his eighteen years on the pitch.

Grant Leadbitter's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Winning the Middlesbrough Player of the Year award in season 2012/13.

Adam Reach

Adam's senior debut for Middlesbrough in May 2011 was an immediate success, as he came off the bench to score in a victory over Doncaster Rovers.

During his early years on Teesside, he spent significant time on loan to gain first-team experience, representing Darlington,

Shrewsbury Town, and Bradford City. Each of these spells helped refine his technical skills and physical adaptability.

By the 2014/15 season, he became a regular fixture for Middlesbrough, contributing to a campaign that saw the club reach the Championship play-off final.

After a successful loan at Preston North End during the 2015/16 season, he left Middlesbrough permanently, having made over 60 appearances for the club.

In August 2016, Reach moved to Sheffield Wednesday for an undisclosed transfer fee.

His 5-year tenure at Hillsborough was the most prolific period of his career. He became a mainstay in the Owls' starting lineup, making over 200 appearances.

It was during this time that he gained national attention for a series of remarkable goals from outside the penalty area, including a famous strike against Leeds United. His work rate and crossing ability made him a vital asset for multiple managers at Wednesday, and he consistently featured among the club's top performers in minutes played and chances created.

Following the expiration of his contract at Sheffield Wednesday in 2021, he joined West Bromwich Albion.

At The Hawthorns, he provided valuable depth and versatility, often being deployed in various defensive and midfield roles. While his goal-scoring output decreased in the West Midlands, his professionalism and tactical intelligence remained highly valued by the coaching staff.

After three seasons and over 70 appearances for the Baggies, he sought a new challenge as his contract concluded in 2024.

His career path subsequently led him to Wycombe Wanderers for a brief spell in early 2025 before he secured a move to Lincoln City in September 2025.

Joining The Imps allowed Reach to reclaim a prominent role, where his extensive experience in the top two tiers of English football was utilised to bolster the squad's League One campaign.

By early 2026, he had already become an influential figure at Sincil Bank, continuing to provide goals and assists from the left flank. International recognition also featured in his career, having represented England at the under-19 and under-20 levels.

Adam Reach remains a highly respected professional, noted for his longevity and the high technical standard he maintains across several positions.

Adam Reach's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Playing a significant part in helping Middlesbrough reach the Championship Play-off Final in the 2014/15 season.

Lee Tomlin

A native of Leicester, Lee's move into the professional game was unconventional, beginning in Leicester City's youth ranks before he moved into non-league football with Rushden and Diamonds.

It was there that Tomlin first demonstrated the ball control and vision that would become his trademarks.

Between 2005 and 2010, he made almost 200 appearances for the club, evolving from a raw teenage prospect into a prolific attacking threat under the mentorship of Justin Edinburgh.

His impressive form in the Conference prompted a move to Peterborough United in August 2010.

This transition to League One saw Tomlin thrive in an attacking system that suited his creative instincts.

He played a vital role in Peterborough United's promotion to the Championship in his debut season, culminating in a victory over Huddersfield Town in the play-off final at Old Trafford.

Over the next few years at London Road, Tomlin became a central figure for the Posh, amassing over 150 appearances and scoring 43 goals.

His ability to beat defenders in tight spaces and provide incisive through-balls made him one of the most coveted players outside the top flight.

In January 2014, Middlesbrough secured his signature, initially on loan, before making the move permanent.

His time at the Riverside Stadium is remembered fondly by supporters, highlighted by a masterclass performance in a 2–0 FA Cup victory against Manchester City at the Etihad Stadium.

During this match, Tomlin's technical skill was on full display, notably when he executed a sublime '360 turn' that left global superstar Vincent Kompany stranded.

His creative influence helped Middlesbrough reach the Championship play-off final in 2015, and although the club narrowly missed out on promotion, Tomlin's individual contributions earned him the Championship Player of the Month award in January of that year.

His performances on Teesside earned him a dream move to the Premier League with AFC Bournemouth in August 2015 for a fee of £3,500,000.

While his opportunities in the top flight were limited to ten appearances, he did manage to score his first Premier League goal from the penalty spot in an FA Cup tie.

Seeking regular football, he joined Bristol City on loan in early 2016, where he quickly became a cult hero. His six goals in eighteen appearances helped steer the club away from relegation, leading to a permanent transfer the following summer.

At Ashton Gate, Tomlin continued to provide moments of magic, further solidifying his reputation as a specialised 'number ten' who could change a game with a single touch.

In 2017, Cardiff City moved to bring him to Wales. His tenure with the Bluebirds was a mix of individual brilliance and fitness struggles.

Despite these challenges, he played a crucial role in Cardiff City's 2017/18 promotion campaign and later enjoyed a standout 2019/20 season, where he scored several vital goals that helped the club reach the play-offs.

During this period, he was often cited by managers as the most naturally gifted player in the squad, possessing a level of vision that was rare at the Championship level.

Following his time in Wales and brief loan spells back at Peterborough United and Nottingham Forest, Tomlin had short stints at Walsall and Doncaster Rovers while battling persistent injuries.

In October 2022, Tomlin announced his initial retirement from professional football due to these physical setbacks.

However, his love for the game led him to a brief return as a player-coach at Ilkeston Town later that year.

This experience sparked a new interest in the tactical side of the sport. He dedicated himself to earning his coaching badges and spent time working within the academy structures at Leicester City and various non-league clubs to refine his leadership style.

By August 2025, Tomlin had successfully transitioned to a full-time coaching career, being appointed assistant manager at Morecambe in the National League.

Working alongside manager Ashvir Singh Johal, Tomlin brought his vast playing experience to a squad fighting for stability. His journey took another significant turn in late January 2026 when, following Johal's departure, Tomlin was named joint caretaker manager alongside Neil Wainwright.

This role as a leader of first-team affairs represents the latest chapter in a career that has spanned every level of the English game.

Lee Tomlin's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Playing a significant role in helping Middlesbrough reach the Play-off Final in 2015.

Adama Traoré

Traoré's story begins in the suburbs of Barcelona, specifically in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat.

Born to Malian parents, he was immersed in football from a young age alongside his older brother Moha.

His talent was so undeniable that he was scouted for FC Barcelona's legendary La Masia academy at just eight years old.

During his eleven-year residency at the academy, he developed as a player, no end.

By 2013, he was promoted to FC Barcelona B, where he quickly became the team's primary outlet for direct attacking play.

In the 2013/14 season, he made 63 appearances for the B side, scoring eight goals and providing numerous assists.

His rapid improvement caught the eye of the first-team coaching staff, leading to a senior debut in November 2013, when he replaced Neymar in a 4–0 win over Granada.

Just days later, he made his Champions League debut against Ajax, becoming one of the youngest players in the club's history to feature in the competition. He also played a pivotal role in FC Barcelona's win in the inaugural UEFA Youth League in 2014, scoring twice in the tournament.

Despite his potential, the sheer depth of FC Barcelona's attacking talent—headlined by Messi, Suárez, and Neymar—meant first-team opportunities were scarce.

Seeking a platform to showcase his abilities, Traoré made a bold move to the English Premier League in August 2015, signing for Aston Villa for a fee of £7,000,000.

Unfortunately, his time at Villa Park was fraught with difficulty. The club were heading towards relegation, and Traoré's individualistic, high-risk style was seen as a luxury the team could not afford.

He suffered several injuries and was eventually sidelined due to disciplinary issues as the club's season collapsed.

The winger made only eleven appearances for Villa, scoring one goal in the League Cup against Notts County, before the club's relegation prompted a search for a new destination.

In August 2016, he joined Middlesbrough, a move that would prove to be a significant turning point in his adaptation to English football.

Initially, under Aitor Karanka, he was seen as a 'wildcard' substitute who could destroy tired defences with his pace but lacked the tactical discipline required for a starting role.

Following Middlesbrough's relegation to the Championship in 2017, the appointment of Tony Pulis proved transformative.

Pulis, a manager known for his no-nonsense defensive organisation, took a personal interest in Traoré's development.

He worked relentlessly with the winger on his final ball and his defensive positioning. This 'tough love' approach provided brilliant results during the 2017/18 campaign.

Traoré became the most statistically dominant dribbler in Europe, often completing more take-ons than entire opposing teams combined.

He finished the season as Middlesbrough's Player of the Year, having scored five goals and provided ten assists, and helped guide the club to the Championship play-offs.

His explosive form in the second tier convinced Wolverhampton Wanderers to break their club transfer record to sign him for £18,000,000 in August 2018. His first season at Molineux was a period of transition, as he adapted to Nuno Espírito Santo's intricate 3-4-3 system.

Initially used as a wing-back, he had to learn the defensive nuances of the role, but it was his move into the front three during the 2019/20 season that truly unleashed him.

That campaign remains the most successful of his career; he scored four goals and registered nine assists in the Premier League, while his performances in the Europa League earned him worldwide acclaim.

His brace against Manchester City in a 2–0 win at the Etihad Stadium became the blueprint for how to use his speed on the counter-attack. It was also during this period that the famous ‘baby oil’ strategy began; Wolves' medical staff started applying oil to his arms before matches to prevent defenders from grabbing him and causing the recurring shoulder dislocations that had plagued him.

Traoré’s unique profile earned him his first senior call-up for Spain in 2020.

After years of speculation regarding whether he would represent Mali, he debuted for Luis Enrique’s side in October 2020 against Portugal. His impact was immediate, with his direct running offering a ‘Plan B’ for a Spanish side traditionally reliant on short passing.

He was subsequently included in the squad for the UEFA Euro 2020 finals, featuring in the tournament as Spain reached the semi-finals.

However, back at club level, Wolves entered a period of transition following Nuno’s departure. Traoré’s contract situation became a point of discussion, leading to a high-profile return to FC Barcelona on a six-month loan in January 2022.

While he provided two assists in a memorable Europa League victory over Napoli and showed flashes of his La Masia training, the move was not made permanent due to FC Barcelona's ongoing financial restructuring.

He returned to Wolves for the 2022/23 season, remaining a professional and dedicated member of the squad despite his looming free agency. Under Julen Lopetegui, the club secured another season

in the Premier League before his contract finally expired in the summer of 2023.

Fulham won the race for his signature, seeing him as a vital piece of Marco Silva's attacking puzzle. His time at Craven Cottage was characterised by his role as a high-impact substitute.

Even in limited minutes, his presence forced opposing managers to change their defensive structures.

His most notable contribution for Fulham came in the 2024/25 season, where his consistency in late-game situations helped the club maintain a comfortable mid-table position.

Despite a few hamstring issues that limited his starts, he remained a firm favourite for his work ethic and the sheer excitement he generated whenever he touched the ball.

In January 2026, a new chapter began when he joined West Ham United on a loan deal for the remainder of the 2025/26 season.

The move was a logical reunion with Nuno Espírito Santo, who had recently taken over the managerial reins at the London Stadium.

Nuno's tactical philosophy, which relies heavily on transition speed and wide-area dominance, was the perfect fit for Traoré.

He made his debut for the Hammers on January 31, 2026, in a high-intensity London derby against Chelsea.

Entering the game as a second-half substitute, he immediately showcased the attributes that have defined his decade in England: a low centre of gravity, a sudden burst of acceleration, and the physical strength to hold off world-class defenders. His arrival at West Ham United was seen as a crucial piece of business to help the club in its fight against relegation.

Adama Traoré's Memorable Middlesbrough Moment

Winning Middlesbrough's Player of the Year award in 2018.