



Iraola, was appointed by Bournemouth in June, on the same day that O'Neil was dismissed by them
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Gary O'Neil's Bournemouth return is bad news for

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Defeat by Everton, with few positives to take away, puts more pressure on manager still searching for his first league win

Paul Joyce, Northern Football Correspondent

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The last thing Andoni Iraola needs, other than perhaps a trip to Manchester City, is the prospect of a hero returning to Bournemouth.

When the Premier League resumes after the international break, however, the Basque manager could find himself in the unusual position of being less popular than the man in the opposition dugout.

The sight of Gary O'Neil at the Vitality Stadium with his Wolverhampton Wanderers side a week on Saturday will bring renewed focus on the decision to sack the Englishman weeks after keeping Bournemouth in the top flight last season.

It seemed one of the more brutal dismissals of recent times, with Iraola installed as his replacement the same day and under orders from Bill Foley, the Bournemouth owner, to implement "a different style of play".



Some felt that the decision to dismiss O'Neil was harsh

RICHARD BOWCOTT/IPS/SHUTTERSTOCK

Saturday's 3-0 defeat by Everton, who had not scored more than one goal in a home league game for 12 months, left the former Rayo Vallecano coach still searching for a first league win and there were few redeeming features about his team's performance.

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Eight matches is surely not long enough for a change of approach to take hold, but there must also be concern in the upper echelons that there were few signs of the high-pressing, attacking football Iraola favours.

In its place was a flimsy, error-ridden performance. The opening goal by James Garner, which came courtesy of a slip by Illia Zabarnyi, had such a negative psychological impact on Bournemouth that Iraola said his players felt “unsafe” about playing out of defence.

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“We are continuing to make mistakes and we are not solid at the back,” Iraola said. “The competition doesn’t wait for anyone. This is the level — we have to be there.”

To come up against West Ham United, Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur, Brentford Chelsea, Brighton & Hove Albion and Arsenal in his first seven league games has proved an exacting baptism for the 41-year-old.

Yet, a £100 million summer spending spree, together with Iraola’s lofty reputation having guided Rayo Vallecano to promotion to La Liga, has left everyone short-changed, notwithstanding injuries to Tyler Adams and Alex Scott.

The key is whether Iraola possesses the players to do what he wants. If he does not, will he be more pragmatic? Though more searching questions lie elsewhere, chiefly: why the football O’Neil oversaw at Bournemouth, where he collected 36 points from 34 matches, had no future for Foley?



Bournemouth have lost ten away league matches in 2023 – no team has lost more on the road

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After all, Sean Dyche is nine months into his Everton tenure and, even with all his experience, he is still trying to coax consistency from his team, who finally married intent and end product on Saturday.

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Whether Everton can perform as well next time out in the Merseyside derby against Liverpool at Anfield remains to be seen, though there are signs of some players — in particular, Garner and the fit-again Dominic Calvert-Lewin — stepping up.

Having lost to Fulham, Wolves, Arsenal and Luton Town in their first four home games of the season, victory was essential. For the supporters, rather than Dyche, who remains cocksure over the job he is overseeing. “The fans I speak to, not the internet warriors, but fans who have been here for years, they say to me, ‘Look we can see the signs,’ ” he said. “The die-hard Evertonians are aware, they know about good performances. Most of them say to me, ‘we get it, we can see the performances but we’ve got to win’, because they want to win.

“I’m hungry to win, make no mistake about that, that’s what I do the job for. I don’t do it for joy, trust me, this is not a joyful job most of the time.”

As the shadow of O’Neil looms ever larger, Iraola would doubtless agree with that.

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