

Graham (It's killing me. I want to be on top. Let's start again) raises £1,000

By
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Directors Page and Harris (left) hear manager Graham's impassioned appeal

PICTURE BY EDWIN SAMPSON

RUGBY UNION

SUNDAY'S roast beef and veg. had to wait for a thousand loyalists who went to save Leyton Orient.

They sat in the draughty stand where, three years ago, they used to watch First Division football. Now they stared at the drawn face of poverty.

Before them, in the seats film stars and pop-singers used to pack when times were good, sat the small group of men who have stayed to give Orient the kiss of life.

There were two of the six directors listed under the club's name in the Football League handbook: Messrs. Page and Harris. The manager was there, some of the players, the secretary, an official of the supporters' club and the pools organiser.

The loyalists came with questions, suggestions, criticisms—and help. They were sickened by the past, apprehensive about the future.

Patience

They listened patiently while Arthur Page, the director who is helping to pay the players' wages, outlined how the troubles began in those First Division days "when we all gazed round in wonder at what was happening to us."

He explained how the crisis suddenly sharpened. "A year ago I wrote to every director saying the club was insolvent, and I didn't have one reply. That's why I took things into my own hands."

He told them why some familiar faces had gone from the staff. "We've been too soft in the past. We've got to have a breath of fresh air running through the club."

Orient are £100,000 in debt. Page appealed for £30,000 to keep the club alive.

But the past still rankled with them. Sudden voices from the back demanded to know what had become of all the money Orient had received from the sale of their favourite players.

Passion

Dick Graham ("the one football manager who can do something for this club," said Page) told how he had inherited £16,000 debts to players and other clubs. Still the audience was sceptical.

Stung by a sniper's jibe, Graham tossed away his notes.

"I don't want to be at the bottom of the League," he shouted. "It's killing me! I want to be at the top. Let's start again. Give us a chance!"

The loyalists responded with the passion of a revival meeting.

Suddenly money started rolling in. It came in spontaneous collections of coins, scribbled cheques and pound notes. When it was totted up it came to a little over £1,000.

That sort of money cannot save Leyton Orient, but that sort of enthusiasm will. If it is there at Thursday's annual meeting of shareholders, the worst will be over.

It changed on two...
Lions were...
were...
were...