

LOYAL FANS PITCH IN TO HELP ORIENT

AUTHORS are constantly seeking ideas for books concerning football and when one has decided that the most obvious subjects are already well covered or there is already work in hand on a great many other aspects, there might be room for a volume or two on the most maligned men in the game—the managers. "The Agony of the Football Manager" strikes me as an ideal title even if I am accused of over-dramatising the situation.

How else is one to consider the problems of club chiefs in the wicked soccer fraternity where managers have become the whipping boys of the industry?

The loose association to which these men belong has little power and precious little cash to care for those who are dismissed after considerable periods of service.

At a time when Brian Clough, the former England centre-forward and currently manager of Hartlepool United, is prepared to give up his salary in an effort to keep his club solvent, the problems of managers in the London Region alone might well be considered. The man with the greatest load of trouble on his shoulders is Dick Graham who took over the sinking fortunes of Leyton Orient as they slid out of Division II to find even more trouble awaiting them one section lower.

Dick Graham, just a few seasons ago, was joining in the toasts drunk to Crystal Palace as the club moved up the ladder of success. Today, he fills a job

that is hardly the envy of any sporting gentleman as Leyton Orient held an extraordinary meeting, in order to discover if there was support forthcoming from those who have drawn pleasure from Orient in the past.

While Sunday dinners were cooking elsewhere in East London, Orient fans gathered to hear the sad story of the club's financial plight which had already been widely publicised. The club, heavily in debt, with falling support, find they are crushed in the nut cracker of London football where fans follow the clubs that are playing attractive football and also providing the best entertainment. On these terms, Orient are hard put to compete with debts piling up round their ears, changes on the board in the offing, money not only needed to pay wages, but cash must be found somewhere to

keep Orient out of yet another drop into Division IV. A few short seasons ago, the club were in Division I and entertainment personalities were applauded to their seats and the team ran onto the pitch with the sound of Frank Field in their ears, pushing forth with the view. "I've got a feeling called the Blues." That muddy arena which displayed Division I football for a season could hardly, even then, draw crowds of 20,000. The turnstile take now is at its lowest ebb ever with interest in the affairs of Orient becoming less and less a matter of moment for locals who argue they can just as easily watch something a little better at Upton Park or White Hart Lane.

The despair that has settled over the club cannot easily be dispelled and Dick Graham has the unenviable task of talking to his players in terms of all-out effort when the future of the club itself appears, on the surface, to be uncertain. Graham spoke to those interested enough to turn up at the Sunday morning meeting pointing out that he did not care overmuch for being the manager of a failing side. Already there have been staff cuts, Les Gore has gone and the club are prepared to sell any player likely to bring a reasonable fee.

I do not recall a similar occasion when a polythene bucket (or indeed any container) was passed amongst a meeting in order to raise cash to keep a club solvent. Other clubs have experienced cash problems and yet not gathered so much publicity. Changes on the Orient board there will be, but the agony of Dick Graham, powerless to bring new talent to Brisbane Road, is a feature of the

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modern sporting sphere. His only weapon is experience and the ability to encourage his players to put on a show that will convince people there is life in the Orient yet. He said that lack of success was killing him; I have no doubt that he meant it. The grinding worry of commanding a football club that has slipped and is slipping still further is akin to facing a much more fearsome foe on the battlefield and not having the necessary armour to defend oneself.