

# The 'firemen' lose a big shot

Frank Lord

**B**IG Cliff Holton thumped a typical right-foot drive past a helpless goalkeeping colleague on a misty morning in mid-November. It was a last defiant gesture at the decision of a few minutes earlier which brought him to the end of the road.

His damaged left-knee joint had hurried the last chapter in a splendid Soccer serial spanning twenty years. And also choked off his final ambition as a player.

He had wanted to notch his 300th goal before the end he knew was in sight. His total was two short when The Orient's club doctor ruled that Cliff must call it a day.

A few days earlier, Frank Large had moved across country and upwards in class as he joined Leicester City from Northampton.

And prior to both those happenings, Frank Lord departed from Chesterfield's siege of the Third Division to become player-coach with struggling Plymouth Argyle.

The football "firemen" were on the move again, though, sadly, Holton's was a move to the sidelines.

Holton typified the "firemen" . . . the men who are called in when a club is going down in the flames of relegation; or sometimes to spark off the last lap of a promotion bid.

Goal-getters, all of 'em. Big, strong types with the odd exception. They shared strong-point is a goal-knock — the hardest definable quality in the game.

Big, strong, fast with few admirers among the purists. But elegance is no attribute when you pound the beat in the middle of the park week after week, month after month and in every grade of League football.

That inexplicable skill of being on the right spot at the right time in a crowded goalmouth is their trademark. It would still not be enough without the extra ration of courage, resolution and just plain cussedness in the face of the odds they all possess.

They are the most heavily-marked, literally as well as tactically. Over the years the job has become tougher, harder. So, conversely, they have been more in demand.

They don't usually stay too long in one place. There is always a "fire" somewhere in the league; there are always clubs which dare not go down and those which must climb back.

Take Cliff Holton, ex-fire-fighter . . . To Highbury as a big, apprehensive lad from Oxford and looking, at his start, like another of the great Arsenal full-backs of long ago.

But his strength, spirit, speed and the devastating power in his boots soon had him categorised. That, and a quickly sharpened sense of where to be when the ball came. He had to join the



Cliff Holton going for goal

by **PAT COLLINS**

brigade!

He moved on. Arsenal to Watford, Northampton, Crystal Palace, Watford again and on to that mid-November morning when, as an Orient player, he was told his travels were over.

Frank Large, from his start at Halifax, has been in constant demand by Queen's Park Rangers, Northampton, Swindon, Carlisle, Oldham, back to Northampton, and so to Filbert Street.

It may take some time for them to be recognised for what they are . . . the men for a quick salvage job. Holton and Lord were years with their parent clubs before circulating.

Lord was unfortunate with injuries at Rochdale. He broke a leg twice. He also stayed longer than the normal span when he moved on to Crewe. But from the mid-sixties his stride lengthened . . . Plymouth, Stockport, Blackburn, Chesterfield, Plymouth again.

Strange thing about these lads — or is it, when you tot up their qualities? — is that many are called back by a club they have once served.

There are quite a few "firemen" left. **Joe Bonson** — Wolves, Cardiff, Newport, Doncaster, Scunthorpe, Brentford, Lincoln, now Hednesford.

**George Hudson** — Blackburn, Accrington, Peterborough, Coventry, Northampton, now Tranmere.

**Don Weston** — Wrexham, Birmingham, Rotherham, Leeds, Huddersfield and Wrexham. Then there are **Pat Terry, Derek Dougan, Derek Kevan** and **Ray Crawford**.

Watch our transfer page up to the middle of March . . . there'll be many a call for help before then!