

AT the half-way stage last season, Leyton Orient's record was 17 points from 23 games, 23rd in Division III, and already at that stage their supporters were resigning themselves to Fourth Division football. But then came a revival, which saw them rise dramatically in the table, and they ended the season 14th with 44 points. This meant they gained 27 points from the second-half of the season.

At the start of this season I asked Orient's manager Dick Graham whether he thought the side could start as they left off, which would mean they will be well among the promotion candidates. "That is all past history," he said. "It is no good living on last season's results. It is this season we must think about." He added that he had long ago learned never to predict or make forecasts. "Nothing's so unpredictable as football," he added.

I asked Graham what he thought was the reason for the "O's" great fight-back last season when all seemed lost. "So many things helped," he replied. "Hard work by everybody, a great team spirit, a change of luck which was against us at the start, but I think the turning point came when I was able to sign such players as Eddie Werge, Bert Howe and Malcolm Slater."

Graham explained that he had managed clubs where these men

were on the staff. "They knew the type of football I wanted and they fitted in perfectly with earlier signings Cliff Holton and Brian Wood, so we began to improve our standard."

Graham said he will give the players who did so well last season, their chance in the early matches. "If they reproduce the same form many of my problems will be over, but if we did not get off to a good start then I will have to go into the transfer market." Which is fair enough in my opinion.

I asked Graham why they allowed Paul Went to move to Charlton. Went is one of the most outstanding players Orient have ever produced and looked the ideal lynch-pin for team-building.

"We really had no choice. It was a matter of finance," he replied. Graham went on to explain the position. Cash was badly needed and he recalled the meetings at the ground he had with supporters to tell them how the club was placed. There was no doubt that the club was in a difficult financial position.



BRIAN WHITEHOUSE. (MacLennan 1.)

'IT IS THIS SEASON WE MUST THINK ABOUT'

Orient Manager, Dick Graham, talks to Maurice Weedon

However, everybody was determined that the club would survive its sticky patch and Graham told how magnificently everybody rallied round, but even then there was not really enough money.

"During the past close-season we decided to re-lay the pitch, paint the stadium and floodlight pylons, plus 101 other things. All these tasks required cash to be carried out," explained Graham. The bids for Went were getting higher and the position was put to the player.

"We explained things to Paul and the decision to move was entirely his. No pressure was put on him either way," Graham said, adding that when Went decided to go, Orient knew that although they were getting a big transfer fee, they were losing a magnificent player.

Orient still have to watch finance closely. "We will not be running a reserve side this season. This means a saving of £12,000 on the season." They have only 15 professionals and their one newcomer is inside-forward Tom Anderson, a Scottish schoolboy cap who has returned from South Africa.

Graham believes in building his own future sides and there are 12 ground-staff boys and apprentice professionals.

As Orient have not entered a reserve competition, Graham will be arranging away mid-week friendly matches with Southern League teams and top-class amateur sides. "This will serve a double purpose. It will enable youngsters to get experience and mean extra finance from the gate money."

Orient will have an unusual arrangement regarding the captaincy. Brian Whitehouse will be club captain, and Cliff Holton team captain. The reason is that Holton is a part-timer and while Whitehouse will be in charge during training sessions, etc., Holton will lead the club during matches. "I think it will prove a very happy solution. Both players are great club-men and satisfied with the arrangement," Graham told me.

I asked him about any outstanding youngsters and he said he has high hopes of Tom Taylor, who captained England Boys from centre-half last season, left-back Johnny Still, an East London representative, goalkeeper Steve Bowtell, an England Boys cap, whom Graham, a goalkeeper himself until injury ended his career, considers one of the finest

young keepers he has seen, and outside-left Peter Manning.

As another economy Orient are doing without a trainer. "It is not that I don't want one, but once again it's a matter of economics," Graham said. He added that he supervises training "but the players don't really need supervising. They are so keen that they train just as hard whether I am there or not." A happy position for a manager to be in.

A doctor checks on minor cuts and injuries after every match and for serious injuries the players visit a physiotherapist in Croydon. He is Mr. Ron Etteridge, who looked after the Crystal Palace players when Graham managed that club. "He is blind, but one of the finest in his line of work," Graham said, adding that Orient players have every confidence and would rather be in his hands.

As Graham explained, the fact that Orient players are willing to travel from Leyton to Croydon shows what faith they have in Mr. Etteridge.

Happy relations

Orient have always had the happiest of relationships with their Supporters' Club and the link is even closer this season. The name has been changed from Orient Supporters' Club to The Orient Club.

"This may help to show our fans how much we appreciate their efforts." There are plans awaiting the local council's approval for a new £20,000 social club on the ground, where supporters will be able to meet players and officials.

Graham said he is always delighted to discuss problems with supporters — another thing which helps the excellent spirit between supporters and parent club. "I know decisions of the club sometimes appear puzzling to fans and if we can talk them over, misunderstandings are cleared up. Football is full of rumours and a friendly chat can usually check them."

Supporters have rallied round, helping financially, a fact which both Graham and Orient directors appreciate greatly.

When we were talking, Graham was always ready to praise the hard work other people put in, but never once mentioned his own. I know Orient's revival owes much to many people, but none have worked harder than Graham.