

TOM JOHNSTON will never forget Christmas, 1957, for that was when he broke Leyton Orient's goal scoring record.

It became almost automatic for Johnston to score for Orient. He had scored in his first game for the club at Swindon, he got the goal against Millwall which made promotion certain in 1956 and in one spell of 82 matches he hit the net 67 times.

Yet it was a remark made half in jest by someone who was almost a complete stranger to him that proved the turning point in the career of this lean, lanky Scot from Loanhead who finished the 1957-58 season the leading scorer of the whole Football League with 44 goals.

It was February, 1956, and Leyton Orient were returning from an away game and discussing the club's need for an effective centre forward.

"We really must have one. Any of you lads got any suggestions?" asked chairman Harry Zussman.

"I reckon we ought to go after that fellow Johnston who plays for Newport County. He always plays a blinder—at least against me." That somewhat rueful speaker was Stan Aldous, the then Orient centre-half against whom Johnston had scored four times in the meetings of the two clubs that season.

No one was more surprised than Aldous when he read that his chairman had followed his advice and that in future he would be trying to help Johnston score goals instead of endeavouring to stop him.

His transfer cost the Os about £6,000 but they reaped rich dividends for their outlay. Johnston clinched their bid for promotion to Division Two and just over two years later went to Blackburn Rovers for £15,000 to help the Lancashire club into Division One.

Eleven months after that he was back at Orient. This time the need was for someone to save them from relegation. Once again Tom came through, hitting nine goals in fourteen games.

Johnston sailed away to fame on a modest enough craft—Loanhead Mayflower, a Scottish junior club who play almost in the shadow of the Scott Monument in Princes Street, Edinburgh. They paid Tom 6s. 6d. a week to help boost his pit earnings.

Then came an accident which ended Tom's life as a miner and but for a near miracle put paid to any chances of him becoming a professional footballer.

It was one of those almost daily mishaps in the quest for coal. Nothing to warrant headlines, but it cost Tom Johnston a broken leg and a badly crushed arm. The leg healed well and became as strong as it was before the accident but for some time it was touch and go whether his arm would have to be amputated.

In the end it was saved but Tom thereafter would no more have thought of taking the field without having it strapped than he would have left one of his foot-

... for a man who was half killed under tons of rock TOM JOHNSTON didn't do so badly

says BASIL EASTERBROOK



ball boots in the dressing-room. Tom moved on from Mayflower to cruise along in local Soccer waters. He went to Peebles Rovers and then broke into the big time with Kilmarnock. That was in 1947, the year he got a free transfer from Rugby Park.

He drifted down to England for short spells with Darlington and Oldham Athletic. A humble enough apprenticeship to the Football League. Oldham put him on their transfer list at £2,500 and Norwich City signed him as a useful acquisition to their reserve strength.

The years were going by and it did not seem possible that Tom would ever be anything but a moderately successful Third Division performer.

Then came the end of January, 1954, and a fourth round F.A. Cup tie against Arsenal at Highbury. Norwich City's regular centre-forward, the late Johnny Summers, was injured and Tom was brought in to lead the attack at the last moment.

What happened is history, and a shining page of Soccer history at that. Johnston rocketed home two glorious headers in twenty minutes and the Gunners went out before their own supporters 1-2.

In fiction, this would have been the turning point of his career, the tide in affairs taken at the flood and leading on to fame and fortune. Being life, and not the stage or the novelist's manuscript, Tom still had some considerable time to wait before he became a nationally recognised player.

Despite the great victory over Arsenal he could not establish himself as "The Canaries" first choice centre-forward and soon he was on his way again, still in Division Three, to Newport County.

Now for the first time in his already longish career Tom became a regular first-teamer but it was not until that move to Orient that he became one of the Sunday paper round-up writers' joys.

In March, 1958, Johnston went to Blackburn Rovers after getting Orient's reluctant agreement to let him go. Tom felt that if he could get into a First Division side he had a chance of being capped by Scotland. His Oldham-born wife had relations at Blackpool, Rovers wanted a centre-forward and Tom reasoned he had a better chance at Ewood Park than at Brisbane Road, London.

Blackburn gained promotion by beating Charlton 4-3 in a tremendous match at The Valley on the last afternoon of the season, when the Athletic needed only a point to go up instead of Rovers. I was lucky enough to be one of the 56,000-odd who saw this thriller. In the first half of the following season Tom was no failure in First Division football. In 25 games he scored 14 goals. But in February, desperate Orient persuaded Rovers to let Johnston go back to them.

Blackburn received a cheque for £7,000, nearly half what they paid for him. As they got immediate promotion there can be little doubt they were satisfied with his brief year at Ewood Park.

Tom showed he had lost none of his

scoring flair for he quickly re-established himself as Orient's leading scorer and passed the 200-goal mark. He agreed to give up his dream of becoming an international star because, now well past 30, he had the good sense to realise that a man is very seldom fortunate enough to fulfil all his ambitions.

For a man who was half-killed under tons of rock hundreds of feet below the earth's surface, and failed to reach the top with his first four senior clubs Tom Johnston had every reason to feel proud of his life in football.

He made himself into a consistently successful goal scorer because he had that iron determination which has always typified the best of his race, because he was accurate with both feet and head, was quick to spot a scoring position and kept calm when he got into one.

Only once did it seem that the phlegmatic ex-miner from Midlothian had lost that calm. That was when he was sent off in a Second Division game against Doncaster Rovers in September, 1956.

Orient pressed for a personal hearing for him a month later and the very unusual step was taken of failing to support a referee's decision. A Football Association commission cleared him of the charge of attempting deliberately to kick an opponent.

Orient's manager at that time, Les Gore, put it to me: "A man as successful at kicking the ball between the posts as Tom Johnston does not need to even think about kicking the opposition."



LEYTON ORIENT, Third Division South champions, 1956: Standing—Les Gore (trainer), Nichols, Heckman, McMahon, Facey, Webb, Gregory, Lee, Welton, Bishop, Julians, Johnston, Smith, N. Collins (asst. trainer), Earl. Sitting—White, Blizzard, Aldous, McKnight, Woosnam, Hartburn. LEFT, Tom Johnston nearly lost an arm in a mine accident.