

By Albert Sewell

BETWEEN OURSELVES

Programme Editor

FOOTBALL is a game of comings and goings, with new faces arriving from time to time and others moving on. Sometimes they return—Dave Sexton, for example. No club was ever more sorry to lose one of its back-room staff than Chelsea when Dave gave up his position here as assistant-coach in January 1965 to manage Orient; no one was happier to welcome him back when he returned as manager in October 1967.

It is in the natural order of things for a club to follow with special interest the progress of someone who has served them well and then goes off to try his luck elsewhere. Which is why, just now, in Chelsea's board-room and dressing-room, the result that is listened for with increasing attention on match-days is Brentford's. There may be three divisions between Stamford Bridge and Griffin Park, but geographically they are only a few miles apart and one personality links them even more closely—Frank Blunstone.

It's just over two years since Frank decided that if he was to go into football management, then at 35 he had got to think seriously and soon about taking the plunge. So, after 17 years at Stamford Bridge—first as one of Chelsea's best and most popular players and then, when injury cut short his playing career, in charge of the Youth section—he left us for Brentford.

Now, in only his second full season with them, all fingers here are crossed that, come the end of April, he will be bringing his club up from the Fourth Division and, that being so, completing a promotion hat-trick for Chelsea "old boys" because two years ago Swansea, under Roy Bentley, climbed into the Third Division, and at the end of last season John Harris brought Sheffield United back to the First Division.

If Brentford make it, Frank will deserve a personal place somewhere in the season's honours list, because his club set the promotion pace for much of the season on a playing staff of 14. Just dwell on that figure for a moment—why, some of the big clubs, Chelsea among them, have more players than that in the Monday morning queue for treatment!

Frank Blunstone came into the game the hard way, beginning as a boy player with Crewe. You don't get many luxuries with clubs like that, for the simple reason that they can't afford them, but the experience can be turned to account by the fellow with the right sort of head on his shoulders. Roughing it at Crewe enabled Frank to appreciate the luxuries that go with playing for Chelsea; it also equipped him for the start of his managerial career at Brentford, where every new penny has to be counted. Every player, too.

Interested to see just what his Brentford team were all about, I looked in the other Saturday when they were playing promotion rivals Southport. As I arrived at Griffin Park an hour or so before the game, Frank and his top goalscorer John O'Mara were driving off. They were away to the local hospital, where O'Mara had a jab to relieve the pain of a bruised rib, and hurried back just in time for his name to go on the team-sheet.

"He's not really fit to play," said Frank. "But he's prepared to give it a go, and we do need him out there, even if he lasts only an hour." It wasn't one of Brentford's best days (they scratched through by an own goal), but that sort of attitude and spirit were certainly to be admired. So it was good to see them come out of their recent bad patch with three good wins in the space of nine days up to last Tuesday—helped, incidentally, by Stewart Houston, on loan from Chelsea. If the best of good wishes to Frank and his club from everyone at Chelsea mean anything, then at the end of the season the Fourth Division will be losing its only London members, and the cheers that go up over West London won't all be from Griffin Park. There will be quite a few from the direction of Stamford Bridge.