

DIVISION THREE

Torquay move out of reverse

Richard Bright on the veterans breathing new life into cause

ANY STRANGER walking into wet and windy Plainmoor at 4.45pm on Saturday could never have known that Torquay United were still eight points adrift of the rest of the Third Division.

The atmosphere felt, in the words of manager Eddie May, "more like promotion".

Torquay, written off by everybody except May, his rebuilt team and the club's die-hard fans, had just scored in the last minute against Leyton Orient to clinch their first win in 16 League games.

And the supporters had fallen hopelessly in love with May's latest signings, two veteran strikers.

Paul Baker (33) and Simon Garner (36) have played well over 1,000 senior games between them. But they tackled their unglamorous debuts like a couple of teenagers.

Baker, a £25,000 signing from York, headed Torquay's equaliser after 52 minutes. That cancelled out Orient's 10th-minute goal from a 12-yard shot by Ian Hendon.

Inspired by Baker and Garner, who was signed on loan from Wycombe after a distinguished career with Blackburn and West Bromwich, Torquay refused to accept another defeat.

Baker's equaliser set up a second-half onslaught

which seemed to have succeeded when Garner intercepted a back-pass by Kevin Austin and was then sent tumbling by keeper Ron Fearon.

Referee Alan Wiley ordered Fearon off, and 18-year-old midfielder Darren Purse donned his jersey. Purse promptly dived to his left to make a brilliant save from Ian Hathaway's penalty.

The winner eventually came when Torquay centre-half Alex Watson, another of the experienced players signed by May, headed in a free-kick by Hathaway.

Baker and Garner both agreed that Torquay could still beat the drop. May said: "Age means nothing to players like Paul and Simon. You don't have to shout things at them. They know what to do. That's why I went after them."

May's six signings in his eight weeks in charge have cost only Baker's fee in the transfer market but they have blown apart the club's wage structure. That price will be cheap to pay if Torquay beat the drop.

Torquay: Newland; Winter, Kelly (Stamps 70); Gore, Watson, Ramsey; Hall (Barrow 84), Oatway, Baker, Garner, Hathaway. Sub: Mateu. Goals: Baker (52), Watson (90). Booked: Kelly, Hall.

Leyton Orient: Fearon; Chapman, Austin; Brooks, Bellamy, McCarthy; Hendon, Purse, Inglethorpe, Currie (Gray 70), Kelly (Baker 90). Sub: Shearer. Goal: Hendon (10). Booked: Chapman, Brooks, Hendon. Sent off: Fearon.

Referee: A Wiley (Walsall).