



Matches – 2 September 1905 – Bradford City 1 Leeds City 0

Second Division - Valley Parade - 15,000

Scorers: Sadly none

Bradford City: Garvey; Easton, Halliday; Robinson, O'Rourke, Millar; Clarke, McGeachan, Smith, McMillan, Conlin

Leeds City: Bromage; Macdonald, Ray; Morgan, Stringfellow, Henderson; Parnell, Watson, Hargraves, R Morris, Singleton

As the eleven men of Leeds City lined up on 2 September 1905 along with all the other hopeful teams, ready for the challenge of a new Football League season, the men behind the fledgling club could reflect on a startling twelve months of progress. A little more than a year previously, Leeds City Association Football Club had been formed at a meeting in the Griffin Hotel on Boar Lane, and had appointed Gilbert Gillies its first manager in March, a few short weeks before being elected into the newly expanded Second Division. Gillies, fresh from setting his former club Chesterfield on their way to a best ever fifth place finish in Division Two, had spent the spring and summer building up a playing squad, and hopes were high for a good debut in first class football.



The Valley Parade stadium in 1908 - the picture was taken after significant improvement work was carried out at the ground

Their big time debut saw Leeds pitched against West Yorkshire neighbours, Bradford City, who had been trailblazers of Association football in the West Riding, and had already spent two seasons in the Second Division, finishing tenth and eighth. The Bantams, under manager Robert Campbell, had finished the previous season strongly, dropping just a single point from their last six matches. Their experience at the top level was expected to give them the upper hand over the novices of the Peacocks, as the Leeds Mercury noted: "To be candid, even those in the best position to appraise the capabilities of the eleven men who have been drawn from the four corners of the country to constitute the side, did not go so far as to anticipate victory - the advantages of Bradford City were so very pronounced. When it is remembered that Bradford have already experienced two years of strenuous League football, and that they were able to place in the field the strongest team they have yet possessed, with the additional advantage of playing on their own ground, the difficulties which confronted the Leeds men will be fully appreciated."

Nevertheless, locals flocked to see whether the newcomers could possibly spring a shock and the gate of 15,000 was well up on Bradford's normal attendance. The Valley Parade stadium, which had been hewn from a bare hillside in 1886, made an atmospheric venue, despite having a capacity of just 18,000.

Leeds lined up as expected with left-half James Henderson playing against the club he had left at the end of the previous season. Former Burton United goalkeeper Harry Bromage had built up a good reputation as a first-class custodian, while Welsh international Dickie Morris (Liverpool) and Bob Watson (Woolwich Arsenal) were noted inside-forwards with decent Football League

experience. Outside-right Fred Parnell had been a prolific provider of crosses to England international Steve Bloomer at Derby before losing his place there and Gillies had gone back to his former club Chesterfield to sign full-back Dick Ray, whom he appointed captain.

The same eleven had played the previous weekend in a practice match against the reserve XI, and had impressed local reporters. The Leeds Mercury had commented: "The first team had the best of matters, and the players had ample opportunities for displaying their skill. Morris, the Liverpool international, was much in evidence, and his trickiness and deft passing to Singleton, his partner on the left wing, pleased the crowd. Watson and Parnell, too, showed promising form, and Hargraves, who operated as centre in the first half, was responsible for opening out some good movements. The halves and backs also did well, and Bromage, in goal, brought off some clever saves."

Bradford City, however, were a formidable side and represented a significant step up for a team that had enjoyed so little time getting to know each other's style. Their ranks were packed with experienced and charismatic individuals who would test the Peacocks to the limit.

The no-nonsense approach of right-half George 'Geordie' Robinson had made him a firm favourite with the Valley Parade faithful. He had played in Bradford's first League game after joining from Nottingham Forest in June 1903 and was associated with the club for nineteen years.

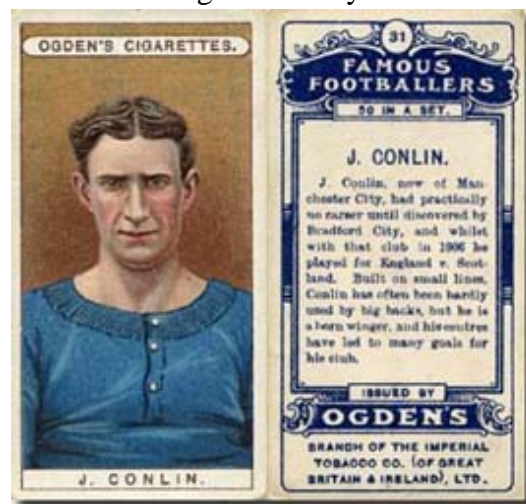
Scottish centre-half Peter O'Rourke was another who had appeared in the Bantams' first League game, signing from Chesterfield that summer. He was shortly after to become manager at Valley Parade, leading them to a Second Division championship in 1908 and an FA Cup triumph in 1911, returning to the club in 1928 and securing the Third Division North title a year later.

However, the real star of the show was tricky left winger Jimmy Conlin, a colourful and controversial forward who enjoyed the double distinction of being Bradford's first England international and their first player to be sent off. Born in County Durham in 1881, he started his career in Scottish football and moved from Albion Rovers to Bradford City for £175 in September 1904. He went on to become only the second player in the world to figure in a £1,000 transfer when he moved to Manchester City in July 1906.

There was an atmosphere of high anticipation as the sides lined up before an excited and packed Valley Parade crowd, with Bradford's claret and amber and the blue and old gold of Leeds presenting a vivid wash of colour.

Early season rustiness was much in evidence in the opening exchanges from both sides, and Leeds had also to contend with having only rarely played together previously. The Peacocks understandably took some time to settle, with the Yorkshire Post noting, "The display of the Leeds men was especially creditable, taking into consideration the fact that the players were practically strangers to each other's tactics in serious football."

After an opening fifteen minutes when the Bantams pressed Leeds City back, play was open and fast in the first half, with the advantage switching rapidly between the sides. Leeds hit the crossbar after a free kick by centre-half Harry Stringfellow, and might easily have broken the deadlock, although Bromage was the busier of the two keepers. The two teams reached the interval without a



Bradford City winger Jimmy Conlin was a real character

goal between them, with most of the action being confined to midfield sparring.

Play was more frenetic after the break, and the fitness of the Bradford men began to tell as time went on. It had seemed that the match was destined to finish scoreless, but the Valley Parade side finally managed to force home their advantage with fifteen minutes to go. The Bantams had been pressing Leeds hard for some time and had them penned back. The passage of play was untidy, but John McMillan provoked a real panic as he dribbled across the area, before feeding outside-right William Clarke. The winger's centre reached Conlin on the opposite flank, before being turned in again. There was a mad scramble in the goalmouth, ending when centre-forward Wallace Smith charged Harry Bromage, knocking the ball from his grasp to register a goal on his debut appearance for Bradford.

It should have been 2-0 shortly afterwards, but the Bradford forwards were too slow to capitalise when the ball passed right across in front of goal and the Peacocks were sweating.

Leeds City broke away in the closing minutes to exert some pressure on the home defence, without ever going particularly close and the Bradford backs withstood all of their opponents' attacks to ensure that it was their team that emerged victorious from the contest. The Leeds Mercury: "It was the first appearance of Easton for Bradford, and he must be said to be one of Mr Campbell's most notable captures. An extremely strong kicker, both off the ground and in the air, he plays with most disconcerting dash, and time and time again he cleared in a most brilliant fashion."



A Bradford City team group from 1903 - manager Robert Campbell is standing far left, George Robinson is second from the right at the back, James Millar and John McMillan are on the left of the middle row with Peter O'Rourke kneeling on the right

It had been a fascinating contest, even if not of a particularly high quality, with an enthusiastic crowd kept on the edge of their seats throughout.

The Peacocks had put up a strong showing and come close to a share of the points, prompting the Leeds Mercury to comment: "Leeds City have undergone their baptism with flying colours ... The directors of the Elland Road organisation were more than pleased with the display of their men. Every confidence has been placed in the manager of the club, Mr G Gillies, and that he has been able to achieve so much in building up the team must have strengthened his position materially. Taking everything into consideration, he has gained a great triumph."

The Yorkshire Post were similarly taken with events and said "the general play of the team was full of promise, and lack of experience of each other's play rather than any defect in ability was responsible for the defeat. Leeds City have no reason to feel disappointed with the first performance of their men. Their greatest fault was to finish in front of goal. Had they taken advantage of the chances that came their way, a very different story would have to be told. Bromage more than once proved himself a capable defender of goal."

Yorkshire Evening Post: "Truth to tell, the Leeds City were fully entitled to share the honours. They played the better game, and it was only a certain lack of finish in front of goal which prevented them scoring."

Leeds Mercury: "Ray, the captain of the Leeds team, ... played a sterling game, being cool and collected, and overcoming many difficulties by his sound judgement ... There could be no two minds as to the strength of the half-back line, the Leeds trio holding an advantage throughout. In Stringfellow, the Leeds club have got a highly skilled centre, who fully appreciates his duties, both as to attack and defence, whilst Morgan and Henderson hungered after the ball in a manner calculated to put any wing man off his game. It was rather a trying experience for Henderson appearing against his old club for the first time, and though he undoubtedly put a good deal of spirit into his play, the attitude of a certain section of the crowd towards him was unjustifiable.

"With regard to the Leeds forwards, whilst the inside men did their work creditably, the ball did not come smartly enough from the wings. Singleton did not appear to get into his right stride, and Parnell was not entirely happy with Watson, his partner. Accustomed to the go-ahead methods of Bloomer, whose great aim is to make straight for goal after receiving the ball from the wing, he was not always prepared for a return pass, and thus often appeared at a disadvantage. This defect, however, can be readily rectified, and taking the line as a whole, it gives promise of developing into a powerful force."

The talent of the City forwards had been much in evidence and they had put together some decent combinations. Clearly, there was much to learn for this new young club, but they had quickly managed to build some good team spirit and understanding of each other's play. Their debut in top-class football had gone as well as their supporters could have hoped, apart from the result, and a decent start had been made to their first season in top class football. There was every reason to look forward with confidence to the challenges to come.

Leeds City were very much up and running.



The Leeds Mercury of 4 September, the Monday after the game, carried extensive coverage