



## Players – Stan Cubberley – City’s Mr Versatility

Stan Cubberley was that rare commodity at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century - a footballer who could operate reliably in a number of positions. When he came on trial for Leeds City in 1906 it was as a centre-half; after signing for the club, he went on to play right across the half-back line and in both inside-forward roles. Such versatility made him a useful asset for the three managers under whom he played while at Elland Road. However, he was never as comfortable in the forward line as he was at half-back, where his full-blooded tackling and passionate will to win made him a firm favourite with both fans and team mates. He was a consistent performer in a Leeds City team that struggled to do itself justice.

Born in Edmonton, Middlesex, on 18 July, 1882, Stan Cubberley began his football career with Cheshunt FC. The club was a useful non-League outfit, winning the Hertfordshire Charity Cup in 1901, 1904 and 1906 and reaching the Amateur Cup semi-final in 1904.

Brother Archie, seven years older than Stan, was a forward who played for Tottenham Hotspur in the Southern League in the 1890's. He played in all of the club's first League, Amateur Cup and FA Cup games, scoring the winner in their first ever FA Cup victory, against West Herts in October 1894. His career was cut short by a serious knee injury suffered on Christmas Day 1894.

Cubberley made one appearance for the Crystal Palace club during 1905/06 and caught the eye of the Leeds City management when they sought reinforcements at the end of that season, their first as a Football League club. He was invited to Elland Road for a trial in Easter 1906, and turned out at centre-half in a friendly against Cliftonville. He played well, scored a goal and did enough generally to be offered a deal. A month later he signed a full time contract with the Peacocks and relocated to Yorkshire.

Secretary-manager Gilbert Gillies added Cubberley to the first team pool at the start of the season that followed and gave him his debut at inside-left away to West Bromwich Albion on 8 September 1906. Unfortunately City crashed to a 5-0 defeat. Nimrod wrote in the Leeds Mercury that “Cubberley strove hard, but he lacks polish”. Two days later he was switched to inside-right for the 1-1 home draw against Lincoln and scored his first goal. It was a wonderful effort, with Cubberley throwing himself full length at a Fred Parnell centre as it floated across the goalmouth “and ball and man went into the net amid a great outburst of applause” (Nimrod again).



Stan Cubberley in 1906, a few months after signing for City

Cubberley dropped out of the team thereafter, as more experienced players regained fitness, but he became a regular choice at the start of 1907, again at inside-right. He earned regular plaudits for his hard working displays, though he was never the most cultured of footballers and seemed ill at ease in the role of inside-forward. He stuck gamely at it, though, and contributed two goals in the closing stages of the campaign during victories against Wolves and Gainsborough Trinity. City finished the season in tenth spot.

He was eventually given an extended run at left-half, where he seemed much more comfortable, and by late 1907 Cubberley was a regular choice. He made a sterling contribution to City's cause in 1907/08, featuring in 29 games. After a draw against Burnley in November, Linesman wrote in the Mercury, "The display of Cubberley at left-half was one of the features of the game, and the authorities cannot do better than continue to play him in that position. He got through more work than any other half-back on the field". Flaneur reported for the same paper, "Cubberley is established at left-half. He nearly always does well, and his play yesterday was neat and effective".

Throughout the campaign, he was one of City's most consistent performers and regularly received fulsome praise from the critics.

By the spring of 1908, financial problems were coming to a head and the club parted ways with Gilbert Gillies, replacing him with Frank Scott-Walford. Cubberley was one of the few players to retain his place under the new man as he brought in a host of recruits from the Southern League. Indeed, he was to remain a fixture throughout Scott-Walford's four years at the helm.



Cubberley shields the ball from a Grimsby player in December 1907

Cubberley's biting tackles were a regular feature of City's performances and his presence brought a solid backbone to the midfield. Unfortunately, while attempting to backheel the ball in a game against Burnley in November 1908, he twisted knee ligaments and was out of action for a number of weeks. City lost seven straight games during his absence and turned in a series of insipid displays, making their dependence on Cubberley abundantly clear.

He fought his way back to regain a first team berth before the end of the season and was appointed club captain for 1910/11. He repaid that show of faith with a series of consistent displays as Scott-Walford experimented with a host of young Irish imports in an unsuccessful effort to revive City's fortunes. Cubberley was a rallying point for a struggling team.

He suffered another serious knee injury in November 1911 and missed the majority of the season before returning in the spring after a lengthy recuperation. When he regained his place it was far too late to make a real contribution. City finished in the bottom two at the end of a dismal season and had to apply for re-election with Scott-Walford resigning his position. As Wanderer observed in the

Mercury, “All who know Cubberley’s abilities will recognise what a big handicap this was to the team”.

Perhaps due to lack of mobility caused by his injury, Cubberley put on quite a bit of weight during the summer months and was not the same player in 1912/13 as he had been in earlier years, though he was still an automatic choice at the start of the campaign. Incoming manager Herbert Chapman was disappointed with the lack of impact made by new inside-left Andy Gibson, and turned to Cubberley for cover in the position. Chapman thought he would do a decent job in the role and was happy to deploy Mick Foley in Cubberley’s customary left-half position.

Though never lacking commitment, Cubberley struggled to make a telling contribution in the forward line. He did manage to score three goals, the first of which was enough to secure a 1-0 victory at Bradford Park Avenue in September. According to Old Bradfordian in the Leeds Mercury, it was “a beauty headed through by Cubberley after pretty combination on the part of Lintott, McLeod and Roberts.” Another successful strike came in the 4-1 defeat of promotion-chasing Burnley in October.

On the whole, though, Cubberley struggled. The Yorkshire Post: “Cubberley was not exactly a failure at inside-left, but he lacked speed and incisiveness ... Cubberley has been too long a half-back to be now converted into a successful forward”. In sharp contrast, when he did occupy a deeper role, he was often rated the “best of the half-back line”.

Committed to a programme of team rebuilding, Chapman recruited a number of new forwards around the turn of the year, including celebrated Bradford City inside-left Jimmy Speirs. Considering Cubberley's best days behind him, Chapman declared him surplus to requirements and sanctioned a move to Swansea Town in January 1913. After just over a season in Wales, Cubberley moved on to Swindon Town and a year later joined First Division Manchester United, where he ended his playing career, appearing twice in 1915/16.

Stan Cubberley made almost 200 appearances for Leeds City over a seven year period. He was a mainstay of the Elland Road club during its short existence, with only Billy McLeod, Fred Croot and George Affleck playing more games. He could never be described as a brilliant individualist or a flamboyant performer, but Cubberley was a selfless team man, who never surrendered possession without a fierce struggle. He was a determined opponent, committed and dedicated, and could always be relied upon to give of his best in the Leeds cause.

Playing at half-back for City was a thankless task and Cubberley and the various colleagues who partnered him there were often the butt of newspaper criticism. His perseverance and commitment in the face of such snide antipathy was admirable. Had Leeds contained more men like Cubberley in their ranks, it is conceivable that they would have been able to escape from their Second Division straitjacket. As it was, he had to be satisfied with the status of being one of City’s great stalwarts.



Stan Cubberley and City manager Frank Scott-Walford at the start of the 1908/09 season