Review of 1910/11 – Part 1 – Play up, Ireland!

When a group of well-to-do West Yorkshire businessmen formed Leeds City Association Football Club in August 1904, hopes were high of a successful and prosperous future. After six grim years, reality had set in; the team was customarily to be found in the bottom half of the Second Division table, with a 17th place finish in 1910 representing a new low. It had taken a run of six points out of the final eight to retrieve what has seemed a lost cause as the team conceded 80 goals, the worst performance in the division.

FOOTBALL FINANCE.

£12,000 Needed By Leeds City Club.

SHAREHOLDER AND THE MANAGER.

Considerable interest was evinced in the proceedings of the meeting of shareholders in the Leeds City Association Football Club, held last night in the Salem Hall, Hunslet road, for the consideration of business deferred from the annual meeting in July, in view of the financial position of the club. Mr. Norris Hepworth, who presided, said the first business was the election of directors, but before proceeding with this he thought the shareholders would like to know something as to the financial position of the club. They were aware by the balance sheet that they owed their bankers something like £7,000, which had increased with interest to the following

The Leeds Mercury of 2 September 1910 carries the news of City's financial problems

Their onfield problems were eclipsed, though, by their business record. After being floated in 1904 with an initial capital of £10,000 and enjoying a profit of £122 during the debut League season, the club had consistently returned losses. By November 1909 they were struggling under the yoke of a £9,000 overdraft. The board struggled in vain to raise new funds through a share issue and in the spring of 1910 shareholders pressed them to report on the dire financial position.

After a summer of rumbling discontent, the club's annual general meeting on 25 July gave the shareholders a long awaited opportunity to vent their spleen.

Vice chairman Joseph Henry presided over affairs in the absence through illness of chairman Norris Hepworth.

The Leeds Mercury: "The chairman, in moving the adoption of the report and balance sheet, said a loss of £1,904 took a lot of explaining away, but he thought he could say with conviction that the reason why the balance sheet was so bad was decreased income. The gate receipts were down last year by £2,300 and the sale of tickets showed a decrease of £269. But there would have been a very much worse balance sheet had there not been a great reduction in expenses. What was the cause of these smaller receipts? The shareholders might imagine that the shortcomings of the directors were at the root of the trouble, but his opinion was this, that the playing was so unsatisfactory that the public would not support the team. (Hear, hear.)"

Henry went on to say that the board had introduced new measures to get matters under control and that, "The directors had cut down expenses for next season, and they intended to maintain that limit, whatever they might suffer or whatever they might gain. The wage list would be cut down by £1,000 (Hear, hear) and the directors would not keep on their books any man who ought not to be there (Applause)." He hinted at a new scheme to raise funds, but declined to elaborate while the chairman was away, promising to reveal all in a special meeting.

Norris Hepworth duly arranged a second gathering, at Salem Hall at the beginning of September; he revealed the true size of the club's problems, reporting that they owed £7,000 to the bank, with interest increasing the liability by £300. Eleven members of the board had agreed to guarantee the debt, but the refusal of four directors to do likewise led to the bank declining any further overdraft. Secretary-manager Frank Scott-Walford was owed a further £3,500, incurred on operating expenses, including £340 for players' wages over the summer.

Hepworth's sad conclusion was that the club needed to raise £12,000 to clear the debts and provide sufficient working capital to cover day to day operations. The directors had decided that the only option was to raise the money by way of debenture loans; they had agreed to fund £8,000 themselves, the remaining £4,000 to be raised by shareholders and others.

LEEDS CITY CLUB.

An Appeal to Raise Four Thousand Pounds.

A SERIOUS POSITION.

The following appeal has been issued by Mr. Alf. Masser on behalf of the Leeds City Football Club :—

"At a recently held shareholders' meeting of the Leeds City Football Club a committee was appointed to meet the directors to devise some scheme to relieve the financial embarrassment of the club. At present the club are in debt to their bankers in the sum of £8,000, and to the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Norris Hepworth, and another gentleman, to a sum of about £3,000. The cost of purchase of the ground which the club hold has run out, but fortunately Mr. Norris Hepworth has a further option which he has yet exercise.

"The directors, through Mr. Hepworth, have expressed their willingness to pay off the bank and take Debentures for the sum, (£8,000) providing a sum of £4,000 to be secured also by Debentures ranking pari passu with theirs can be raised by the shareholders and the public of Leeds.

"The position is a serious one, as liquidation is the only alternative to a scheme such as the above, shortly of [illegible]

The Leeds Mercury of 24 September 1910 reports on the appeal for fans to fund debenture loans to solve City's money problems

Joseph Henry revealed that the problems originated from the time when the club began redeveloping the Elland Road ground. The bank had been reluctant to support the development and the club had been forced to switch banks, with the directors guaranteeing an overdraft of £7,000. Losses in 1909/10 had brought further pressure from the bankers.

The directors did not get an easy time of things at the meeting and both Alf Masser and Harry Riley voiced doubts from the floor. They bemoaned the lack of business acumen, claiming "the directors had been failures in regard to finance" and that "it was useless to expect the club to lift its head out of the hole into which it had got under the present board of directors". They demanded that the board be reduced to just "five efficient men." The debenture scheme was adopted, with a rider from Joe Henry "that the scheme be referred to a committee consisting of the directors and six shareholders chosen by the meeting with power to carry it into effect." Masser and Riley were put forward as shareholders' representatives along with Messrs S Bodlander, W A Metcalfe, W Bromley and J Harrison.

Chairman Hepworth confirmed that all the directors were prepared to retire except Mr Preston, with the object of the number being reduced, but it was agreed that they should remain in office for the time being.

A further meeting was held on Saturday 17 September at the Grand Central Hotel. Norris Hepworth confirmed that he would find £5,000 for the purchase of the ground, the freehold of which he would hand over to the shareholders, retaining a mortgage for the amount he paid for it. Alf Masser said that if the club was to continue, the proposed arrangement was "the best that could be devised. If it was carried through, the shareholders would in time see something for their money, while if the club was not continued the shareholders would certainly lose everything."

Masser also announced that "the directors had agreed to pass a special resolution at their next annual meeting reducing their number to five, and of these five only one was to represent the gentlemen who were finding the £8,000, while the other four were to be appointed by the shareholders, thus giving the shareholders full control of the club. It was probable that Mr Norris Hepworth would be the representative of those who were finding the £8,000, and he was certain that Mr Hepworth was a gentleman and a sportsman whom they did not want to lose. (Applause) With regard to the other four they did not want to lose Mr Henry, but the shareholders must be united in

choosing their representatives, or some of the old directors would be returned, and if they were the club would go back to a worse position than it was in even now."

There were some calls for the club to be wound up, allowing it to wipe the slate clean and start afresh. There was a recognition, however, that this would mean expulsion from the Football League and having to apply for re-admission: "That would be a tremendous disadvantage, and would set the clock back not hours but days."

The meeting was heated, but in the end the proposal was endorsed. Alf Masser issued a public statement on behalf of the club, appealing for contributions to the £4,000 required. Only time would tell whether there would be sufficient support for the scheme to allow Leeds City to continue, but for now at least they could totter on.

Against this backdrop of financial hardship, Frank Scott-Walford was struggling to find a way to revive the club's playing fortunes. He was accused during the shareholders' meetings of seeking players through the Glasgow Labour Exchange, something he strenuously denied.

The summer brought the retirement of Jimmy Burnett and the transfer out of Jimmy Gemmell (Sunderland), Tom Naisby (Luton) and John Watson (Clyde). In October 1910, John White was also on his way, to Merthyr Tydfil. Scott-Walford badly needed to rebuild his playing strength if City were to compete effectively. The previous season had made that much clear.

His initial strategy, when he arrived from Brighton in 1908, had been to recruit players from the Sussex club, but the approach was unsuccessful; Tom Morris was the only one of his imports who by now had an active role in the team.

Young Irish centre-forward Billy Gillespie was one of a clutch of players from the Emerald Isle signed by Frank Scott-Walford during the summer months

In 1909 Scott-Walford had signed two promising Irishman in Billy Halligan and Tom Mulholland; a year later he returned to the Emerald Isle in search of cheap recruits and brought in some youthful talent: Mick Foley, Joe Enright and George Cunningham from Dublin Shelbourne, Billy Gillespie from Derry Institute and full-back Alec Creighton from Belfast Distillery. Gillespie, an Irish junior international centre-forward, was about to sign for Linfield when Scott-Walford persuaded him to turn professional and cross the Irish Channel. Cunningham and Enright had both represented Ireland in games against the English and Scottish Leagues.

Other players signed were Scottish right-half John Harkins from Bathgate, two full-back brothers from Rhyl, A and R E Roberts, centre-half Chris Kelly from Denaby United and George Page, a forward from Broxbourne.

In preparation for the new season, City held a pre-season trial, the Reds against the Greens. For the Greens, Enright and Gillespie did well, with the latter netting a hat trick, though Billy McLeod, for the Reds, went one better, scoring four times as his side lost 6-5.

There was great excitement as City opened their campaign on 3 September at home to Blackpool. Creighton was at right-back and Harkins left-half, but the major changes were up front where Enright, Gillespie, Foley and Cunningham were selected, with only Fred Croot of the old guard

retaining his position.

Completing the line up were 20-year-old keeper Tony Hogg, preferred to the veteran Harry Bromage, George Affleck, Tom Morris and Stan Cubberley, newly instated as club captain.

The crowd of 12,000 was the highest to watch City at Elland Road since the visit of Bradford the previous November, and they were in high spirits.

The Leeds Mercury: "Mr Scott-Walford evidently had an eye to making his new men feel at home as well as to stage effect when he attired the team in green jerseys and supplied green flags to mark the centre line, and he apparently realised that the first match might go wrong when he thus addressed them in his official programme: 'Should your efforts deserve success, and it is denied you, we shall extend our sympathy, when you do badly we shall still think you have done your best.'"

The game opened tamely, though City had some promising openings and Cunningham went close with a fierce drive that passed narrowly over the top corner. Blackpool were the better team in the first half, but it was City who broke the deadlock four minutes after the break with a neatly created goal. The Yorkshire Post: "Morris initiated the movement which led up to it by passing to Gillespie in his own half, and the latter in turn presently swung it out to Enright. He dribbled straight for goal, and successfully recovered the ball after his progress had been impeded by Gladwin, and shooting hard with his left foot sent the ball high into the corner of the net – a success which occasioned a tremendous outburst of enthusiasm."

Blackpool keeper Fiske clears the ball from Mick Foley during the opening day clash against Blackpool on 3 September 1910

The goal should have breathed confidence into Leeds, but their advantage lasted only a few minutes as Blackpool equalised to quieten the crowd. Hogg fluffed his clearance and the ball fell to centre-half Connor, who fired home from long range.

The Seasiders dominated affairs from then on against a dispirited City eleven, with only the debutants, Creighton and Enright, coming out of the match with any great credit. Miller got an inevitable second for Blackpool and the home side never looked like equalising, finishing in disarray.

Flaneur in the Leeds Mercury: "The result was a bitter disappointment to the City directors, to the manager, who has staked his reputation as a judge of a footballer on these young Irishmen he has secured from the Dublin Shelbourne, Belfast Distillery and Cliftonville clubs, and to the public, who were present in very encouraging numbers indeed, and who tried their utmost, by means of the new battle cry, 'Play up Ireland!' to stimulate the young men on whom so much depends into putting forth their greatest efforts."

James Horsley and Billy McLeod were recalled in place of the injured Cubberley and Gillespie for the following Saturday's visit to Glossop, and again Joe Enright gave City a lead early in the second half. Again the goal seemed strangely to destabilise Leeds and they spent the rest of the game on the defensive.

Tom Morris was a rock in the rearguard and well supported by Creighton, Affleck and Hogg, but

could not keep the men from Derbyshire out for ever. After being on almost constant attack, Glossop grabbed an equaliser and ten minutes from time added a well deserved winner.

Two more single goal defeats followed, 1-0 at Elland Road against Lincoln and 3-2 away to Huddersfield, to leave a dispirited City rooted to the bottom of the Second Division table after four games, the only club in either division in England without a point to their credit. It made for dismal reading.

The team played with far more enterprise on October 1 at home to Birmingham and led from a sixth minute goal by Gillespie. City seemed certain to take the points, but conceded a penalty five minutes from time and had to be content with a 1-1 draw.

The setback crushed the spirits and the Peacocks slumped back into their shells a week later when facing West Bromwich Albion. Bowser gave the Midlanders the lead after five minutes and Leeds never looked like getting back on terms. Albion added a second in the thirtieth minute and assumed complete command. Only a combination of a lack of composure on the part of the West Bromwich forwards and a splendid performance in goal by the reinstated Harry Bromage prevented a landslide.

Things looked bleak, but in midweek the West Riding Cup semi final at home to Castleford Town brought a morale booster. Billy McLeod scored five times as City ran out 8-2 winners. The task was rendered a formality when an injury to goalkeeper Whelpion saw him leave the field.

The players displayed new spirit in their Elland Road derby on 22 October against Hull City. The East Yorkshire team had the better of the first quarter as the Peacocks started tentatively, despite having the wind at their backs, but the home eleven ended the half on top with Fred Croot threatening a breakthrough. The game seemed to be drifting towards a goalless draw, but Leeds secured both points with a goal from Billy Gillespie ten minutes from time. Hull defender McQuillan tried to head away but saw his clearance fall to Hugh Roberts. The winger centred to Gillespie, who dribbled past McQuillan and Nevison and hammered the ball past the advancing keeper to settle matters.

Welsh winger Hugh Roberts was a regular in the 1910/11 season and scored some valuable goals, making many more

Sportsman in the Leeds Mercury: “Leeds City … displayed better football than they had previously done on their own ground this season, and well deserved their victory by the only goal the game produced. True, ‘one swallow does not make a summer,’ but, if only for a brief space, the darkness has been pierced, and the club’s supporters are thankful in that a little light has burst through the surrounding gloom.

“Bromage gave a most capable exhibition in goal, and Creighton … was much the better back, for Affleck miskicked repeatedly and often gave cause for anxiety. Morris, though lacking in speed, and on occasion retaining the ball too long, gave a useful display at centre-half; whilst Cubberley, though beaten in more than one instance, did a few good things, and Harkins, who is an advance on Kelly, was very serviceable. Of the forwards, the outside men, Croot and Roberts, were the best. The former was particularly prominent prior to the interval, with a number of good runs, whilst Roberts was often to the fore afterwards. The failings of the inside men have been alluded to, but nevertheless they accomplished some creditable work, and Gillespie’s goal compensated to a large extent for a number of missed opportunities.”

The win was not enough to take City off the bottom of the table, but the mood was lightened and the same team took the field at Fulham a week later with high hopes. They gave a good display at Craven Cottage and had some decent moments in front of goal, but, despite Harry Bromage's first half penalty save, lost 3-1.

Wanderer wrote in the Mercury: "I do not think I am exaggerating for a moment when I say that the team showed an improvement on their form in the Hull City match, and they were a good side on that occasion. Both fore and aft, the work was always sound, and had there been even the slightest weakening in the Fulham defence, I am certain that at least one point would have been secured.

"The improvement in the City half-back line accounted for a great deal. Morris, Cubberley and Harkins were always a thorn in the side of the Fulham forwards, and they never forgot their own front line. Morris was particularly noticeable, especially as regards his head work, and his placing of the ball was always accurate. Another welcome improvement was at right-back, where Affleck has in the past been performing somewhat indifferently. He came out of his shell in no uncertain manner, and with Creighton right on the top of his form and Bromage as agile as a cat in goal, it will be readily understood that the defence was a good one.

Ace goalscorer Billy McLeod played many games in 1910/11 as inside-right with Billy Gillespie at No 9, but his best displays came when he was restored to the centre-forward role

"With regard to the forwards, a few lines will suffice. Their work was quite equal to anything I have seen this season, although there was, perhaps, just a slight lack of shooting power. Enright was as good as any of the quintet. He sorely puzzled the opposition at times with his neat footwork and was responsible for many of the openings that came Leeds City's way."

The home derby against Bradford Park Avenue on October 29 was witnessed by a crowd of 13,000, the best attendance since February 1909, and they enjoyed an exciting contest. City took the lead after 35 minutes from a corner by Croot. Morris got possession and hammered in a shot. Bradford keeper Mason could only parry the ball and to resounding cheers Billy McLeod managed to flick it home from two yards.

The visitors mounted frenzied attacks after the resumption and threatened an equaliser on several occasions, though the City rearguard withstood all that was thrown at them. The forwards rallied towards the close and Billy Gillespie snatched a second goal ten minutes from the end to secure the win.

The two teams clashed again three days later in the West Riding Cup final at Valley Parade. City sustained a 5-1 hiding. They did well enough early on but lost heart after Harry Bromage let a greasy ball slip through his hands for the first goal and were overwhelmed by inspired opponents.

The Selection Committee were now persisting with both Gillespie and McLeod in the forward line, though they did not combine particularly well, as noted by Flaneur in the Mercury after the defeat against Bradford: "The forwards, with limited opportunities, were not a bad lot, but Gillespie, in the centre, had not much idea of feeding his colleagues, and the best work came from the wings, Roberts and Croot. McLeod is better in the centre than at inside-right." The two main strikers both

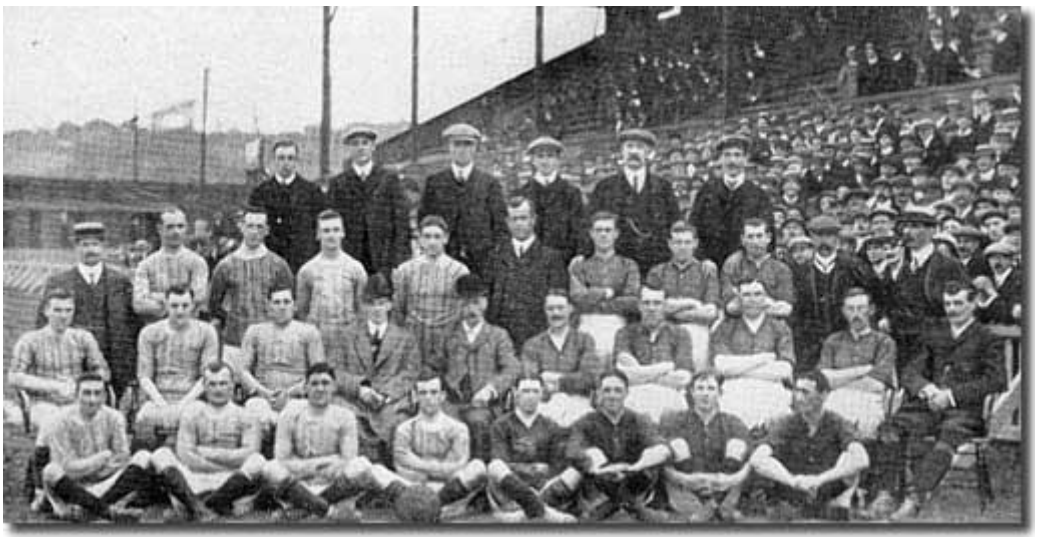
wanted to lead the attack and their styles did not seem to be compatible.

When the trip the following weekend to Burnley brought a 4-1 reverse, there was a fear that the improvement over the previous month had been a false dawn, but matters improved when City entertained Gainsborough Trinity on 12 November.

Sportsman: "Not since they defeated Lincoln City on the opening day of last season have Leeds City prevailed by such a substantial margin as on Saturday, when they routed Gainsborough Trinity by the decisive score of four goals to none.

"When all due allowance has been made for the shortcomings of Gainsborough, it must be admitted that Leeds City succeeded by really good football, the forwards, who combined most effectively, giving an excellent display. The Gainsborough halves simply could not hold them, and consequently their backs experienced a most unenviable afternoon, spent for the most part in a vain endeavour to check an elusive front rank, who played with a method and judgement which might easily have penetrated a more skilful defence.

"City's first goal was obtained by Enright, who beat Webster and scored with a slanting shot which struck the far post and glanced inwards, whilst Gillespie registered the second with a long drive. Resuming with an advantage of two goals, Leeds City for a considerable period altogether outclassed their opponents, and hardly had McLeod put on the third point from a centre by Roberts, ere Gillespie, rushing in, netted the final goal following a free kick just outside the penalty area awarded for a foul on the right winger.



Leeds City team group from 1910/11 with manager Frank Scott-Walford sitting on the right

"Bromage experienced a comparatively easy afternoon. Affleck and Creighton, though seldom severely tested, were a reliable pair. The halves were satisfactory, though … they were rather inclined at times to hang back and devote their energies to defensive work when they might reasonably have adopted a forward policy. The bright particular star in the forward line was McLeod, who gave a fine exhibition and well deserved the applause which greeted his efforts at the close."

The victory saw City move off the foot of the table, albeit only on goal average. They were back at the bottom again after a 3-0 defeat at Bolton, but returned to form with a heartwarming 4-0 victory at Stockport County.

The game brought the first change in the line up in seven matches with Harold Bridgett replacing Croot to make only his second appearance since moving from Stoke in May 1909. He scored one of the goals, with Gillespie (2) and McLeod supplying the others, though he pulled up no trees. The

win was based on a sound defensive display, with Joe Enright supplementing the half-back line for most of the game.

Another win came on 3 December when City entertained Derby County, succeeding by the odd goal in five, with Roberts scoring twice. Sportsman: "The City fully maintained their improved form on Saturday … to the obvious delight of the majority of the ten or twelve thousand spectators present. And let it be recorded that they thoroughly deserved their success, which was a just reward for the determination and persistence they displayed in the face of events which pointed to their failure.

"Viewed from a purely scientific standpoint the game never rose to great heights, but it was hard, fast and interesting football that we saw, and the excitement was maintained almost throughout. Leeds City's success was attained rather by the whole hearted efforts of the team than by the individual brilliance of any of its members, and if Roberts, Enright, Cubberley and Creighton were somewhat more prominent than their fellows, they were given satisfactory assistance. True there were defects. One or two lapses cost them dearly. But such perseverance and determination more than compensated for any deficiencies, and few, indeed, must be those who would withhold from them that credit to which they are entitled."

Three wins in four games had seen City ease their way up the Second Division rankings and they were now fourteenth.

Unfortunately, the team's form was fluctuating wildly, veering haphazardly from the sublime to the ridiculous: on 10 December they faced Barnsley at their Oakwell ground with the South Yorkshire side three places below them. In wretched conditions and gathering gloom, City were routed 4-0, with only Tom Morris standing between them and utter humiliation, as observed by Oakwell in the Mercury: "Morris, the City's veteran centre-half, (rose) to such a height that, despite his side's heavy reverse, he may with justice be described as the best man on the field. At least he was the most prominent.

"From the first he took the measure of Barnsley's attack, and playing as though by instinct he single handed repelled rush after rush, using both head and feet in a manner which often suggested that he was carrying the Leeds team on his back. During the first half Morris played a brilliant game. He broke up every short passing movement that was initiated by the home forwards, and it was only a stroke of ill luck which turned a fine header from him over instead of under the Barnsley crossbar.

"Towards the end of the game Morris tired. It was impossible for him to do three men's work without feeling the strain, and it was when this point of the game arrived that Barnsley went straight ahead. But if the other men on the Leeds side had done half so well as Morris did, Leeds would not have been beaten by four clear goals."

When City recovered from 2-0 down at home to Leicester Fosse a week later to draw level through goals from Morris and Enright, it seemed they might secure an unlikely draw, but a late misunderstanding undid a sterling fightback. Sportsman: "In the last minute of the game came the disheartening climax which completely extinguished the enthusiasm of the bulk of the five or six thousand spectators present. Leicester worked their way down the field, and Owen crossed the ball from the left wing. The ball was travelling towards the goal, but doubtless Bromage would have had little difficulty in clearing had not Creighton intervened. The Leeds left-back attempted to kick away, but the greasy ball turned in an opposite direction to which he intended and entered the net, Bromage, who had a melancholy task to perform, being obviously quite deceived by the turn of events. There was just time to resume the game ere Mr J T Howcroft blew his final solo, and

Leicester had triumphed somewhat luckily, yet deservedly, by the odd goal in five."

Tom Mulholland returned for his second appearance of the season in place of the injured McLeod when City faced promotion chasing Wolves at Molineux on Christmas Eve; the Peacocks fought hard and gave the Wanderers a hard game before losing 3-1.

Boxing Day saw McLeod and Fred Croot back in the side for a home game against Chelsea, also in the running for the title. The Londoners had much the better of the contest, according to Sportsman in the Mercury, "proving themselves the cleverer exponents of the finer art of football." George 'Gatling Gun' Hilsdon, the first Chelsea player to score 100 goals for the club and also their first England international, notched a hat trick, but on each occasion City managed to equalise, Roberts, Croot and McLeod getting the goals.

The draw owed more to Chelsea complacency than City tenacity, but nevertheless the Leeds men had shown up well in games against top class opposition and the mood was much more optimistic as the year drew to a close.

A first half injury to Clapton Orient custodian Bower the next day meant that the Londoners were always struggling after Mulholland gave City the lead and Leeds ran out more comfortable winners than the 1-0 score suggested.

A 2-1 victory at Blackpool on New Year's Eve was rather more impressive. The Seasiders were another side in the top six and were previously undefeated at home. The City selection was disrupted by injury, with Enright, Gillespie and Croot all absent. Bridgett covered for Croot and Stan Cubberley was forced to play out of position up front. According to the Yorkshire Post, "Cubberley was hopelessly out of place, and occasionally went back to his proper position in the half-back line, but the appearance of McLeod at centre was a very important factor in the City's success."

Stan Cubberley, who captained City in 1910/11, was forced to play out of position at inside-forward during the win at Blackpool on New Year's Eve

Leeds went ahead in the third minute when McLeod scored from a Bridgett cross. The forward had a second effort disallowed, seemingly for handball. Bridgett made it 2-0 before half time, firing a Roberts cross in off the post. Wolves pulled one back before the break, but the second half was goalless and City thus avenged their opening day defeat by securing a second victory on the bounce.

The win was the consequence of another sound defensive display by Morris, Creighton and Bromage, with City making better use of their attacking moments.

14th place in the table was not what City had hoped for at the start of the season, and they were too many points removed from the upper reaches of the division to harbour realistic hopes of a late promotion chase. However, after their inauspicious opening run of four straight defeats they had at least achieved a measure of respectability.