

Jimmy Speirs' - Footballer



Bradford City's 1911 FA Cup winning team. Jimmy Speirs is seated in the centre of the middle row.

James (Jimmy) Hamilton Speirs, born on 22 March 1886 at Govan, Glasgow, was the second son of James Hamilton Speirs, and Janet Shields Speirs (née McLean),

His siblings were Margaret, Archibald, Annie, John and Robert,

By 1901, the family had moved to nearby Govanhill, and Jimmy worked as a clerk. It was in Govanhill that his football ability was first shown, when he played in the junior football circuit on the ash pitches of Glasgow, for Annandale, during summer tournaments. An inside forward, he moved to Maryhill in the Glasgow Junior League in 1905. Maryhill, whose Lochburn Park ground was five miles north of his home, were among the top sides in the junior leagues, and lifted 13 trophies in eight seasons at the turn of the 20th century. The 1904–1905 team contained six junior internationals, and the side won three titles that season. Jimmy's first recorded scoring appearance was on 29 April 1905, when his two goals helped Maryhill beat Parkhead 2–0. Speirs scored again in a 3–3 draw against Ashfield in the Glasgow Junior Cup final, and scored the only goal of the replay to help Maryhill win the competition. Maryhill also won the Glasgow Merchants' Charity Cup. He moved to Glasgow Rangers in 1905, spending three years with the club, before joining Clyde.

After one season, he left Clyde and Scotland during the summer of 1909, to head for Yorkshire and sign for Bradford City, under the management of his countryman Peter O'Rourke. It would be City's second season in the First Division following their promotion in 1907–1908, and O'Rourke wanted to strengthen his side after they narrowly avoided relegation in their first season in the top flight.

He assembled a team which contained eight Scottish-born players, and also brought in England international outside right Dicky Bond. Jimmy Speirs made his debut on the opening day of the 1909–1910 season, as City lost 1–0 to Manchester United. His first goal came three months later, in a 3–1 victory over Sunderland, during the middle of a ten-game undefeated spell. Speirs played in all 38 games during his first season, scoring six times, as City finished seventh. He also played in both the club's FA Cup games that season, scoring in a 4–2 victory over Notts County in the first round.

It was the following season that Jimmy wrote his name in the club's record books, with his performance in the same competition. He played 25 league games, scoring seven goals, to help City to fifth place, a position which the club has not yet bettered. The club also reached the FA Cup Final in the same season, with Jimmy playing in all but one of the games along the way, scoring in a 2–1 second round victory over Norwich City. Jimmy, along with Frank Thompson and George Robinson, was censured by the Football Association following a scramble for the match ball at the end of the semi-final victory against Blackburn Rovers. He was captain of the side and in the days up to the final he wrote to his opposite number, Colin Veitch. The contents of his letter are not known, but in his reply, Veitch said Jimmy had "expressed in sound terms the true spirit of comradeship, and the proper sentiments one would expect to see associated with the sportsman, and the sport". Jimmy led out a team which contained eight Scots for the final at the Crystal Palace on 22 April 1911 against Newcastle United. The game ended in a 0–0 draw, in what was described as a "decidedly dull and uneventful game". The final replay was played four days later at Old Trafford, Manchester, with City making one change to the team, bringing in Bob Torrance for fellow Scottish defender Willie Gildea. After 15 minutes, Speirs scored what turned out to be the only goal of the game to win the cup. Robinson shot at goal, but the wind caught the ball, which was headed on by Frank Thompson. Speirs himself headed the ball at goal, and Newcastle's goalkeeper Jimmy Lawrence was distracted by City striker Frank O'Rourke and the ball rolled into the net. Speirs lifted the newly-cast trophy, which had been made by Bradford jewellers Fattorinis, and displayed it on the club's victory parade later that evening in Bradford. The following day, Speirs was pictured on the front page of the *Daily Mirror* newspaper, holding the cup.

The club's attempt to defend the victory came to an end after six consecutive clean sheets, when they were defeated 3–2 by Barnsley with Jimmy scoring one of the goals. However, he was limited to ten league games, not playing from September until March, and finished the season with seven goals. They included his second senior hat-trick during a 5–1 victory over Sheffield Wednesday on 30 March 1912. Jimmy started the following season, but after playing 13 of the first 15 games, he left. He had played 96 games in total, scoring 33 goals.

Jimmy joined neighbours Leeds City, which played in the Second Division, for a fee of £1,400 in December 1912, becoming one of Herbert Chapman's first signings. His debut came on 28 December in a 3–2 defeat to Fulham, and although his first goal did not come until his fifth game against Bradford (Park Avenue), he finished second highest scorer with 10 goals, behind Billy McLeod. Their goals helped Leeds finish in sixth position, 10 points off the promotion places.

The following season, Leeds came closer to promotion, but despite Jimmy, as captain, scoring 12 goals and McLeod netting 27, they came fourth, two points behind Park Avenue in the second promotion spot. Despite the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, league football continued, but Leeds lost their first four games of the season and were unable to recover, finishing a lowly 15th. Jimmy scored the only goal of the West Riding Cup final against Hull City on 11 November 1914 to give what was Leeds City's only ever trophy before the club was expelled from the league in 1919 and subsequently dissolved. League football was suspended at the end of the season, and the last game of Speirs' career was a 2–0 defeat to Barnsley on 24 April 1915. He played 73 league games for Leeds, scoring 32 goals.



The Leeds City team of 1913–14. Speirs is seated second from the right on the front row.

In total, Speirs had played 226 league games, a further 30 Scottish and English FA Cup games, and several other appearances in other cup competitions. During his career, he scored 92 league goals, and 12 senior cup goals.