

The 1920–21 season was Burnley's 29th season in the Football League, and their 4th consecutive campaign in the Football League First Division, the top tier of English football. Burnley were confident of success ahead of the season, having finished as First Division runners-up in 1919–20. After losing their first three games, Burnley embarked on a 30-match unbeaten league run from 4 September 1920 until 26 March 1921, winning the First Division and becoming English champions for the first time in their history. Burnley's unbeaten run stood as a Football League record for over 80 years, until it was bettered by Arsenal in the 2003–04 season. Burnley ended the 1920–21 season on 59 points, having won 23 games, drawn 13, and lost 6.

The team reached the third round of the FA Cup, defeating Leicester City away and Queens Park Rangers at home, before unexpectedly losing away to Second Division side Hull City. Burnley won the East Lancashire Charity Cup, beating Blackburn Rovers 8–2 over two legs, but were eliminated from the Lancashire Senior Cup at the semi-final stage by Manchester City. As league champions, Burnley qualified for the Charity Shield, in which they were beaten 2–0 by FA Cup winners Tottenham Hotspur. Burnley also played two friendly matches during the season. The first, against Blackburn Rovers, marked the opening of Accrington Stanley's new stadium; the other was a benefit match for Patsy Gallacher, against a representative team from the Scottish Football League.

Burnley used 23 players during the season and had nine goalscorers. Their top scorer was Scottish forward Joe Anderson, with 31 competitive goals, including 25 in the league. Eight new players were signed by Burnley during the season, and eleven were released or transferred. Match attendances were the highest they had been at the club's home ground, Turf Moor, with an average gate of over 30,000. The highest attendance of the campaign was 42,653, who saw Burnley beat Bolton Wanderers 3–1 on 26 February 1921; the lowest was 22,000, for the match against Sunderland on the final day of the season.

Burnley's league campaign began on 28 August 1920 with a home match against Bradford City, who had finished 15th in the league in 1919–20. The season began inauspiciously for Burnley as they lost 4–1, but the match did see eventual top scorer Joe Anderson score the first of his 25 league goals of the campaign. Two further away defeats followed, 1–0 at newly promoted Huddersfield Town and 2–0 at Bradford City, leaving Burnley at the bottom of the league table. This run of defeats was Burnley's worst start to a league season since 1906–07, when they also lost their opening three matches. Haworth subsequently made several changes to the team; goalkeeper Jerry Dawson and full back Tommy Boyle were reinstated, and Freeman and James Lindsay were dropped in favour of Billy Nesbitt and Benny Cross respectively. Burnley picked up their first win on 6 September 1920, beating Huddersfield Town 3–0 at Turf Moor with goals from Bob Kelly, Boyle, and Nesbitt. The Burnley News praised the team's "brilliant forward work" and singled out Boyle for particular praise, while noting that Cross had made an "excellent impression" on his debut.[21] Burnley went on to defeat Middlesbrough 2–1 at home, and to draw with them 0–0 at Ayresome Park.[22] On 25 September 1920, four players scored in a 4–0 victory against a weakened Chelsea team,[23] giving Burnley their third successive home win.

October began with a 1–1 draw with Chelsea at Stamford Bridge,[24] after which the team recorded four straight wins throughout the remainder of the month. Burnley achieved home and away victories against Bradford (Park Avenue), and repeated that feat in the next two matches against Tottenham Hotspur. The 2–0 victory on 30 October 1920 was the first time in the season that any team had been able to prevent Tottenham from scoring in a league match,[25] but Burnley's performance at White Hart Lane was met with disapproval from the correspondent from the Daily Mail, who considered they had set out to stifle their opponents and in doing so "spoil the match".[9] Burnley's winning streak carried on into November, with goals from Kelly, Boyle and Cross helping the side to defeat Newcastle United 3–1 at home and 2–1 away to lift them to second place in the league.[1][26] The home fixture was marred by tragedy when a charabanc transporting Burnley supporters from Grassington overturned, killing five people. After the next game, a 2–2 draw with Oldham Athletic at Boundary Park on 20 November 1920, Burnley moved to the top of the table on goal average, 11 weeks after having been at the bottom. In the return match at Turf Moor a week later, Oldham were comfortably beaten 7–1; Kelly scored four goals, and the others were added by Cross (two goals) and Boyle.

A win and a draw against Liverpool, followed by a 2–0 victory over Preston North End, took Burnley into the Christmas period three points clear at the top of the league.[29] The convincing 6–0 win over Sheffield United on Christmas Day,[6] in which Anderson scored four times, set a new club record unbeaten streak of 17 games, beating the record set during the 1897–98 campaign.[30] Burnley continued their good form into 1921, beating Preston North End away before achieving two victories against local rivals Blackburn Rovers. The first of these wins, a 4–1 success, was watched by 41,534 spectators, the biggest home crowd of the season until then.[17]

The victory was followed by a 3–1 away win a week later. On 5 February 1921, Anderson scored five goals in a "brilliant" performance against Aston Villa as Burnley recorded their second 7–1 win of the season.[31] The result saw Burnley equal the Football League record of 22 matches unbeaten, held by Sheffield



United and Preston North End. A new league unbeaten record was set with a 0–0 draw with Aston Villa four days later. Despite losing George Halley to an illness which forced him to miss the remainder of the season, Burnley secured a late home win over Derby County in the following game,[17] sending Derby to the bottom of the league table. February ended with a 3–1 victory against Bolton Wanderers in front of a crowd of 42,653, the largest league attendance ever at Turf Moor at the time. The team took four points from the next three matches. Moor.[37] The following week Burnley secured an away draw at Arsenal, despite their opponents attacking for much of the game.