

# Dixie Dean - Life after Everton



This afternoon we are remembering the passing of the legendary William Ralph 'Dixie' Dean exactly forty years ago today.

The greatest goalscorer the world has ever seen died at his beloved Goodison Park on 1 March 1980.

His record of 383 goals for the Blues in 433 games will never be beaten and he is quite rightly revered as a genuine Club legend.

His Everton story has been told many times but here, Ken Rogers and Rob Sawyer from the Everton FC Heritage Society, tell us about Dixie's life AFTER he left the club...

**W**ith Tommy Lawton established in the Everton first team, 'Dixie' was ushered without ceremony through the Goodison Park exit in March 1938. He was just one League appearance short of 400 for the club he loved and was loved at. An injury-curtailed spell at Notts County (9 appearances) was followed by happier times at Sligo Rovers where he became a local hero. Returning to Merseyside in the summer of 1939, Dean was offered a lucrative last hurrah by the ambitious Hurst FC (now Ashton United).

As the highest paid player in the land, Dean debuted in Tameside on 26 August 1939. Record gate receipts of £140 from the 5,600 spectators softened the blow of a 4-0 defeat. With crumbling joints, Dean could not be expected to run around the pitch, but the finishing instinct was intact. Sure



enough, three days later against Hyde he contributed a textbook header in a 4-1 victory. Sadly, Dixie chipped his ankle bone in that fixture and within days the outbreak of the Second World War brought the curtain came down on an unparalleled professional playing career.

Dean had set up a sports outfitters shop on the Wirral but it did not prosper. He briefly worked in an abattoir and for munitions manufacturer Fawcett, Preston and Co. (for whom he made some charity football match appearances) before enlisting with the British Army in 1940, serving on the home front. When hostilities ceased he became the licensee at Chester's Dublin Packet pub and turned out for the Northgate Brewery football team. In late 1949 the Lord Mayor of Liverpool and South Liverpool FC approached the famous publican for support in staging a charity exhibition match under the floodlights at Holly Park With Dixie on board the date was set for Everton and Liverpool veterans of the 1930s to play each other on 25 January 1950.







With Dean as the star attraction, all 14,000 tickets were sold.

Playing under floodlights for the first time - the former England man led the likes of Cliff Britton, Albert Geldard and Tommy Johnson against Matt Busby and his former Liverpool teammates. As they entered the field one supporter shouted: 'Is it true what they say about Dixie?' He soon answered the question in the affirmative - in spite of playing with stitches in his head following a car accident. He set up Charlie Leyfield for the opening Blues' goal, scored

himself and also hit the post before taking his leave at half time. Everton ran out 5-1 winners. The veterans match was restaged at Holly Park three months later - Dean scoring again - with a third and final match played before 17,000 at Bootle FC's ground. Afterwards the players celebrated at a civic reception held in Bootle Town Hall - a joyous end to Dean's playing days.

The Deans gave up the Dublin Packet in 1961, returning to live on Wirral. John Moores stepped in and offered his footballing idol a job with the Littlewoods organisation in Birkenhead and, later, Liverpool. It was here that cub reporter (and future *Liverpool Echo* Sports Editor) Ken Rogers encountered the great man.

He said: "In 1968 I was a young journalist working for the *Liverpool Weekly News* in Bold Street. A few hundred yards away, at the back of nearby Ranelagh Street, was a cavernous garage used by Littlewoods. I had heard that the legend of 60 goals was working at the site as a kind of caretaker/watchman. I wasted little time in heading over to try and secure an interview for my series entitled 'The Merseyside Football Hall of Fame'.

"To see him sitting in his little

hut in the entrance of the garage, initially upset me. But I realised that he wasn't there on sufferance, but was simply the football superstar of his day confirming his place as a true working-class hero. I reminded myself that early in his career he would get the train and tram from his home in north Birkenhead to Goodison Park where he would weave his magic.

"Later, for the 'Goodison Glory' book, I would analyse in forensic detail his record-breaking 1927/28 season to check if the folklore matched the reality. I also researched his broader input into every single match during that landmark title-winning campaign. Could anyone be that good? Was he really football's undisputed king of the air? Was his left foot as potent as his right foot when shooting from all distances and angles? Was he a true team player and inspirational leader? I read every Football Echo match report for that special season and I can tell you from the heart, Dixie Dean truly was and will forever be the greatest of them all."

■ Images courtesy of the Everton Collection Charitable Trust, the Everton FC Heritage Society and the family of the late, great Joe Mercer.

