



BOBBY IRVINE

By Brendan Connolly

One hundred years ago this month, Bobby Irvine signed for Everton from Northern Irish club Dunmurry for £500.

Two months later he made his debut in a Merseyside derby at Anfield that ended in a 1-1 draw. His bravery and skill quickly endeared him to the Goodison faithful and many years later, he was described by Dixie Dean as 'a better dribbler than George Best'. Like his countryman, Irvine took his share of rough treatment from defenders, and one observer noted: 'There is no man who takes harder knocks and squeals less than Irvine'.

Within six months of his move to Goodison, Irvine made his debut for Ireland and in 15 appearances for his national teams (IFA and FAI), he scored three goals, including one in a 3-3 draw with England at Anfield in October 1926. In 214 appearances for Everton, he scored 57 goals playing mainly at inside forward or centre forward. A personal highlight was a hat-trick in five minutes against Aston Villa in January 1922, to secure a 3-2 victory after Everton had been 2-0 down.

Irvine started the 1927/28 season alongside Dixie Dean in a 4-0 defeat of Sheffield Wednesday, but was injured and his place was taken by Ted Critchley. The Irishman struggled to get back in and played only nine league games in the season that saw the Championship trophy return to Goodison after a gap of 13 years and Dean famously plunder 60 goals.

Before the campaign ended, Irvine left Everton for Portsmouth for a fee of £3,000 and was left one appearance short of qualification for a Championship medal.



His run of poor luck continued when injury deprived him of a chance to play in the 1929 FA Cup final when Portsmouth lost against Bolton Wanderers, and he soon returned north to play for Connah's Quay and then Shotton before returning to Northern Ireland to join Derry City. Irvine crossed the Irish Sea again in 1933 for a brief spell at Watford before settling with his wife Emily in Leicester, where he worked for the General Post Office (turning out for the works' football team).

His grandson, Bobby Brown, who is a guest of Everton at today's game, fondly recalls his grandfather during the Second World War, when following some localised German bombing, he was checking the roof space of his flat for incendiary bombs and he fell through the ceiling. Bobby also tells of Irvine inviting Italian prisoners of war into his home on a snowy Christmas morning to offer them cups of tea. Bobby Irvine continued to live in Leicester until he passed away in 1979.