



JACK KIRWAN - THE AJAX CONNECTION



By Richie Gillham

The iconic design featuring a single red stripe down the front of a white shirt – in which Johan Cruyff inspired Ajax to three successive European Cup wins in the early 1970s – has an unlikely link to Everton and today's visitors, Tottenham Hotspur...

Born in the year of our club's formation, 1878, Jack Kirwan was an outside-left forward who, just like our current captain Seamus Coleman, flourished in the game of football after starting out as a star of the Gaelic game. Jack played Gaelic football for County Dublin, with whom he won an All-Ireland medal in 1894.

He moved across the Irish sea to join Southport Central FC of the Lancashire League and was soon scouted by two of the northern powerhouses, Everton and Blackburn Rovers. Jack chose the Toffees in July 1898, replacing John

Cameron who had been sold to Tottenham Hotspur. In September of that year, he made his Football League debut against Preston North End and during his one season with the Blues, he played 26 League and FA Cup games, scoring five goals.

Cameron then enticed Jack to join him at Spurs, where he helped the club win the Southern League in 1900 and was part of the first non-league team to win the FA Cup in 1901, beating Sheffield United in a replay at Bolton's Burnden Park. Jack kept the match ball used in the final until his death in 1959 and it now sits in the Spurs museum.

Jack became the first Spurs player to be capped by Ireland when he helped his country to become joint winners of the 1903 British Home Championship, scoring his first goal in the 2-0 win against Scotland in Glasgow.

In 1905, Jack crossed London to join newly-formed Chelsea, helping them to promotion to the First Division in 1907 and before retiring he went on to play for Clyde in Scotland and Leyton FC back in London.

In September 1910, Jack became the first professional manager of Ajax of Amsterdam. He led Ajax to the Dutch Second Division title, guiding the club into the top-flight for the first time via a play-off. The club's red-striped shirts could no longer be used, due to a clash with Sparta Rotterdam's colours, so Jack chose the single striped shirt design that the team plays in to this day.

The outbreak of war saw Jack return to Ireland, where he managed Bohemians before ending his footballing days with two seasons at A.S. Livorno in Italy. He then settled in the London area, where he lived until his death in 1959.