

IRISH HEROES WHO PAID THEIR OWN WAY TO BE ORIGINAL BOYS IN GREEN

EXCLUSIVE by ADAM HIGGINS

THEY were the first football team to fly the Irish flag and, 100 years later, they are still not recognised by the FAI – but that could be about to change.

In 1924, Ireland was still recovering from a divisive and bloody civil war.

It was the year Irish was first made compulsory in schools, the Defence Forces were officially given legal status and Sackville Street was renamed O'Connell Street.

In the middle of this historic year, the Irish Free State fielded its first ever football team at an international tournament – the Olympic Games in Paris.

However, these trailblazers, who first flew the Irish flag for a football team, have not gone down in the history books as the official start of our love affair with the Beautiful Game.

Roy Keane, Liam Brady and John Giles have gone on to make the green jersey famous across the globe during tournaments like Italia '90, USA '94 and Japan '02.

But the first ever Irish team actually played in blue jerseys because that is the official State colour.

The Football Association of Ireland was broke at the time (not much has changed there) so the players paid for their own travel and accommodation to France through fundraising.

The group got Ireland's football history off to a winning start with a one-nil victory over Bulgaria. Dubliner Paddy Duncan scored our first ever goal.

This win took us through to the quarter-finals where we were beaten 2-1 by Holland – who would go on to lose to the eventual champions Uruguay.

Give squad recognition

The football part of the 1924 Olympics was run by Fifa – long before the European Championships or World Cup existed.

In fact, three-time World Cup winners Uruguay have four stars on their jerseys today – one for each World Cup and another for the 1924 Olympics, which are considered the first ever world championships in football.

So while Fifa recognise this tournament as a full international competition, the FAI does not recognise the Irish team that competed in it as our first senior internationals.

This is because the team were amateurs and so did not receive full senior international caps.

This team of amateurs would go on to play two more friendlies against Estonia and the US before the Ireland vs Italy game in 1926 which the FAI deems our first official international game.

The grandson of one of the players who played in the 1924 Olympics believes the FAI should give his grandfather and his team mates the recognition they deserve to mark a century of Irish football.

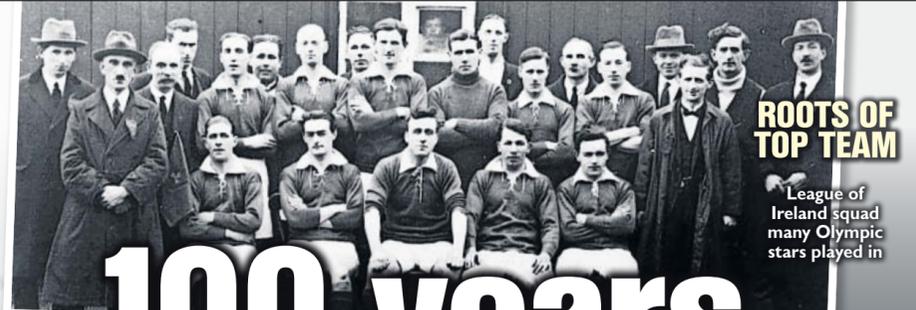
Christy 'Boy' Robinson was a barman who played for Bohemians and flew out with the squad to Paris. He later scored against Estonia in a friendly when they returned home.

His grandson Kevin Robinson told The Irish Sun on Sunday that Christy was due to go on trials with Arsenal but this was cancelled due to concerns about his Republican link.

Dubliner Christy was part of the old IRA and even stood as a look-out during an attack on a British

DID US PROUD

Free State Olympic team in France 1924



ROOTS OF TOP TEAM

League of Ireland squad many Olympic stars played in

100 years after Olympic game in Paris, Ireland's first football team is still waiting to be capped

'Granddad should be recognised, it's the honourable thing to do'

'It's been 100 years and it would be a fitting tribute to the team'



HISTORIC-OLYMPIC MATCH

Quarter-final between Holland & Ireland at Stade de Paris on June 2, 1924, and player Frank Ghent, left



STAR... Christy 'Boy' Robinson

Army supply truck for which 18-year-old Kevin Barry would later be executed. The talented footballer named his son Kevin in honour of his comrade whose death made news across the world and escalated the war of independence.

Christy's grandson Kevin (who is also named after Kevin Barry) told The Irish Sun on Sunday: "These games were recognised as amateur so they were given amateur caps. "Fifa recognises these games as full international but the FAI don't.

My grandfather and his teammates paid their own way over and represented the country abroad, which I think is a great feat. They should be recognised as full internationals. "Considering it is 100 years exactly and the Olympics is in Paris again this year, I think it would be an honourable thing to do to recognise them." Labour TD Aodhan O'Riordain has written to FAI PREZ... Cooke

FAI president Paul Cooke with a proposal to correct the record and issue full senior caps to the families of those first 14 men to represent Ireland on the football pitch. The Dublin TD – who's a football fanatic – says the families should be awarded the full senior caps on the pitch before an Ireland game this year. He told The Irish Sun on Sunday he believes the FAI will go ahead with the motion. He said: "They were never afforded full

international status and I understand that the FAI are now going to award senior caps, we hope, to those internationals who played 100 years ago. "I think, 100 years on, this would be a nice, fitting tribute to those players and their families as a reflection back on the first Irish team that took to a pitch under an Irish flag." Kevin Robinson told The Irish Sun on Sunday that he would be delighted to take to the pitch and accept a cap on behalf of his

grandfather. He said: "God, it would be an absolute honour. I think it's only right they should be recognised, the whole panel of players. "I would be absolutely thrilled if they were recognised with FAI honours and full caps. It would be a good thing to do. They were heroes when they came home. "This is the first Irish team to ever travel away to an official international competition and what they did for the development of soccer in Ireland is huge." The Irish Sun on Sunday con-

tacted the FAI about any plans to recognise these players but we received no reply. ●The 14 players in the first Irish squad were: Paddy Duncan, Ernie MacKay, Michael Farrell and Thomas Murphy from the St James' Gate team, John Joe Dykes, Denis Hannon, Paddy Reilly and Frank Ghent from Athlone Town. Bertie Kerr, Johnny Murray, Christy Robinson, John Thomas and Ned Brooks from Bohemians completed the squad alongside Tony Hanston from a team named Jacobs.

