



PRESS RELEASE

**FC BARCELONA TO PARTICIPATE IN EVENTS TO HONOUR THE NAME OF
PATRICK O'CONNELL**

The club will be donating a signed shirt to an auction on Saturday to raise funds to restore the gravestone of the manager of FC Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War



Iniesta signed the shirt that the club is donating to raise funds to honour the memory of O'Connell.



FC Barcelona is collaborating with the Patrick O'Connell Memorial Fund, an organisation whose main objective is to remember and honour an Irishman who coached the first team between 1935 and 1937. The Fund is seeking to raise awareness of a man who has is largely forgotten even among his own countrymen, and one of the main projects is to build a memorial befitting Mr. O'Connell's sporting achievements at St Mary's Cemetery, Kensal Green, London, now that it has been discovered that he died in poverty in London and is buried beneath an unmarked tombstone.

The events being held over the next few months include an auction of shirts donated by football legends from around the world, which is being organised by the Memorial Fund in conjunction with Sheffield Wednesday, one of O'Connell's first clubs as a player. The first event is taking place this Saturday at the Owls' Hillsborough Stadium on occasion of their league fixture with Middlesbrough, the team he played in his last game for Wednesday.





César, in 1939, with O'Connell, Vallés and Pedrol.

Half an hour before the game starts, the crowd will be shown the different items up for auction, which include an FC Barcelona shirt signed by the whole of the first team. Other players with a Barça past that have signed donated items include Johan Cruyff, Samuel Eto'o, Patrick Kluivert, Ronald Koeman, Frank Rijkaard and Gary Lineker. They will be auctioned at a special pre-match lunch before the match and will also be put online for auction through the Sheffield Wednesday and Patrick O'Connell Memorial Fund websites to allow supporters to bid for the shirt who may not be attending on Saturday. Wednesdayite (the largest SWFC supporters group) will be making a donation of £1,000.00 to the restoration of the grave.

More information: www.pocfund.com

Patrick O'Connell, football adventurer

Irish coach Patrick O'Connell is one of many historical figures that is often overlooked in the annals of FC Barcelona history, but who deserves special recognition because of his professional and human qualities, even more so if we consider the tragic circumstances in which he worked both as a player and later as a coach. Born in Dublin on 8 March 1887, when Ireland was still part of the United Kingdom, O'Connell played for a long series of different clubs in his home nation, in England and also in Scotland: Strandville Junior Team Dublin, Belfast Celtic, Sheffield Wednesday, Hull City, Manchester United, Rochdale, Clapton Orient, Dumbarton and Ashington. Those were very different days, when football was a rough, tough game to play, and when many of O'Connell's playing peers perished in the First World War (1914-1918).

In 1922, and while the country was engulfed in Civil War following the creation of the Irish Free State, O'Connell went to Racing Santander, the first of several clubs that he coached in Spain. After Santander (1922/29), he was later at Oviedo (1929/32) and Betis (1932/35), at the latter guiding the club to its only ever Liga title in the 1934/35 season.





FCBARCELONA
més que un club

In 1935, Barça were recovering from a serious sporting crisis and called on the services of O'Connell, considered the most prestigious coach in Spanish football at the time, where he was given a salary of 1,500 pesetas a month. He led the team to the Catalanian Championship in 1935/36 and also took the team to the Spanish Cup Final, which they lost 2-1 to Real Madrid in June 1936. He was in the process of putting together a fine side, but everything changed with the start of the Spanish Civil War on July 18.

Loyal through the war years

The outbreak of hostilities stunned O'Connell while he was on holiday in Ireland. On September 24, the club sent him a letter explaining that given the troubled situation he was under no obligation to report back for duty, and if he was to return, the club was in no position to guarantee that they would be able to pay his salary. However, O'Connell, who never concealed his Republican sympathies, didn't think twice about coming back to Barcelona to continue his work despite the country being engulfed by war. In fact, he voluntarily accepted a wage cut to 500 pesetas a month.

Meanwhile, despite the raging warfare around them, the players returned to training on August 26. The message was clear. They were not to allow the war to stop football. A Barça team featuring the likes of Escolà, Balmanya, Ventolrà, Zabalo, Pedrol and Munlloch went on to win the 1937 Mediterranean League, a forcibly reduced version of the regular National League Championship. Shortly after, from June to September, the club embarked on a highly politicised tour of Mexico and the United States, where O'Connell made a very clear point of acting as a spokesman for the Republican cause.

The team returned to Barcelona with several players missing, exiled in Mexico and France, but O'Connell stayed loyal to his club. But given the terrible chaos in Barcelona at the time, in 1938 he returned to Ireland. When the war ended, Barça sent him a letter on 22 May 1939 saying that they wanted him to come back and continue his good work. That is precisely what he did, but only for a year, for in 1940 he returned to Betis, where the fans welcomed him with open arms. He stayed until 1946 and then ended his long managerial career back at Racing Santander (1947/49). Patrick O'Connell, a footballing gentleman and adventurer, died in London on 27 February 1959.

