

Vale: Kenneth John IRVINE

5 Mar 1940 – 22 Dec 1990

Ken, besides a prolific points scorer in Rugby League and Hall of Fame inductee, was a driving force in the establishment of the Manly Warringah Touch Football Association in the early seventies.



He, along with several others met at the Harbord Hotel one evening and decided to organise the 'rag-tag' Sunday game they were playing into an organised competition. He was elected the first President of the organisation and after years of leading the Club to Vawdon Cup and State Cup victories he was awarded the Clubs second Life Membership in 1981.

Ken represented NSW in the Mens Open division at the First Interstate Touch carnival in 1976 and the following year he starred in the Touch exhibition game at the Sydney Cricket Ground prior to the replay of the St. George v Parramatta Grand Final.

One of the great highlights of his Touch Career was in 1979 when he captain/coached Manly 35 years team to victory in the State Cup and having nine of his players (out of a team of 11 players) selected to represent NSW at the inaugural National Championships 1980. NSW defeated the ACT in the final 4-1.

The Touch fraternity and indeed the National and International sporting world have lost a great sportsman and a great personality.

Irvine, Kenneth John (Ken) (1940–1990)

by Andrew Moore

Kenneth John (Ken) Irvine (1940-1990), Rugby League footballer, was born on 5 March 1940 at Cremorne, Sydney, son of Sydney-born parents John Bernard Irvine, butcher, and his wife Doris May, née McCabe. Ken grew up at Cammeray, was educated at Marist Brothers' Boys' School, Mosman, and

worked briefly as a beer plumber. Initially attracted to baseball, he was talent-spotted at a local Rugby League schools' carnival by a North Sydney official.

He played his maiden first-grade game for the club in 1958. The following season 'Mongo', nicknamed apparently because of his slightly Asiatic appearance, scored twenty-three tries. He was a member of the 1959 Kangaroo tour to England and France, quickly overcoming the negative connotation attached to the sobriquet 'Better Brakes' that he had attracted (implying a proclivity to slow down before tackles).

Of nuggety build (5 ft 8 ins or 173 cm; 11 stone 8 pounds (73.5 kg) Irvine was blessed with scorching speed, flawless positional sense and safe hands. Together with Brian Bevan, the expatriate Australian who played for Warrington in the British competition, Irvine was the code's most outstanding winger after World War II, of comparable status to Harold Horder in an earlier era. In fifteen years in the game, twelve with North Sydney, Irvine scored some 300 tries in about 340 games, including 33 in 31 Test matches.

He retired from football after winning the premiership with the Manly-Warringah club in 1972 and 1973. At Dubbo in 1963 he had run 100 yards (91 m) in 9.3 seconds, setting a world professional sprint record. A celebrated attempt to outrun a racehorse was predictably unsuccessful—though popular memory of the contest against Gili over 60 yards (55 m) at Kembla Grange racecourse in August 1963 often suggests otherwise. He also enjoyed all forms of water sports.

Irvine had married Mavis Marguirite (Valerie) Simmonds, a typist, on 25 November 1961 at St Mary's Catholic Church, North Sydney. Outside professional sprinting and football, he worked as a sales representative for sporting goods companies and as a sports journalist. His rugged good looks led to some modelling and made him a 'natural' for the game's increasing commercialism. Despite his contractual battles with the club, North Sydney fans likened him, as the journalist Mike Gibson quipped, to 'Captain Marvel, Superman, Brick Bradford and Batman and Robin all rolled into one'. An unassuming, likeable and knockabout Australian, Irvine was an enthusiastic punter and part-time larrikin.

In 1982 Irvine moved to the Gold Coast, where he worked as a sales representative with a poker-machine manufacturer and as a journalist. Part of a robust community of retired Sydney footballers, he played touch football with a local hotel team, briefly acted as sprint trainer for a Gold Coast league team and led Kangaroo supporters' tours to England. In 1983 he was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia. Survived by his wife and their daughter and son, he died on 22 December 1990 at Brisbane and was cremated. The scoreboard at North Sydney Oval, named in his honour in 1991, is a fitting testimonial to his try-scoring prowess.

MILESTONES

- PREMIERSHIPS: 1972-73
- KANGAROO TOURS: 1959-60, 1963-64, 1967-68
- AUSTRALIAN RUGBY LEAGUE TEAM OF THE CENTURY: 2008
- NEW SOUTH WALES TEAM OF THE CENTURY: 2008
- RATED NO. 15 IN RUGBY LEAGUE WEEK'S TOP 100 PLAYERS: 1992
- NAMED IN NRL TEAM OF THE 1950S: 2007
- NAMED IN NRL TEAM OF THE 1960S: 2006
- HOLDS RECORD FOR MOST TRIES IN PREMIERSHIP CAREER (212)
- FIRST CLASS GAMES 432
- POINTS 1361
- HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE NUMBER 61 IN 2004

Tribute

Ken Irvine was the fastest player of his age. He was an athletic try-scoring machine whose place in league's Hall of Fame will never be disputed. Irvine maintained his place at the highest level of the game for a decade by sheer weight of tries.

His tally of 212 premiership tries is almost 30 more than Billy Slater - who is second on that list. His 33 tries in 31 Test matches is another record that is likely to stand the test of time. Ironically, it is a single goal that Irvine is remembered for more than almost any of his phenomenal tally of 356 career tries. It came in the third Test of 1962 when he landed a goal from the sideline to give Australia a face-saving 18–17 victory over Great Britain. It is said that Norths' official Tom Hicks saw Irvine in action in a sports carnival when he was 14 and declared, "If ever I saw a champion on the way, it's this kid ... He has everything".

Irvine played for 13 seasons with the North Sydney club and scored 171 tries from 176 games, a stunning achievement considering Norths were moderate performers for much of that period. Irvine left the club in search of a premiership at neighbouring Manly late in his career and featured in back-to-back grand final wins in 1972 and 1973. Irvine toured three times with the Kangaroos and remained one of league's most popular figures until his death in 1990.

I've never seen a better winger in an Australian jumper.” - John Raper

WIKIPEDIA

Kenneth John Irvine (5 March 1940 – 22 December 1990), also nicknamed **"Mongo"**, was an Australian professional rugby league footballer who played in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. He holds the standing Australian record for the most tries in a first-grade career – 212. No other player has yet managed 200 tries in their Australian club career, with the closest to Irvine's tally being Melbourne Storm player Billy Slater, who scored 190. He is also the 2nd all-time top try-scorer for the Australian national team with 33, two behind Darren Lockyer's 35. Irvine's great speed is legendary and he is regarded as Australia's greatest ever winger, being named in 2008 in the list of Australian rugby league's 100 greatest players, as well as being an automatic selection for the Australian Rugby League's "Team of the Century".

Irvine played his club football for the North Sydney and Manly-Warringah clubs in the New South Wales Rugby Football League premiership, winning the premiership with Manly in 1972 and 1973. His great speed saw him play primarily on the Wing.

Early life

Born in Cremorne, Sydney, to John Bernard Irvine, a butcher, and his wife Doris May (née McCabe), Irvine attended Marist Brothers College Mosman.[4] He originally excelled in both baseball and sprinting, playing in the New South Wales junior baseball side alongside future New South Wales and Australian teammate Reg Gasnier, while also competitively running for the Randwick-Botany Club. After deciding to attend a trial at Wentworth Park for the North Sydney Bears rugby league club as a 17-year-old, their first grade coach Ross McKinnon stated, "sign that kid for life", and Ken was signed and playing for the club the following year.

Playing career

North Sydney Bears

Making his debut for the club on the wing in 1958, he was an instant success for the club, proving to be a frequent try scorer. After only one full club season with Norths, Irvine was selected for New South Wales in 1959. He was the 1959 NSWRL season's leading try-scorer with 19 and was rewarded with selection in the Australian side for the 1959-60 Kangaroo tour.

Irvine made his Australian debut on the tour against France at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris on 31 October 1959. In 1961, Irvine showcased his speed at a specially-arranged event specifically in an attempt to break professional world record over 100 yards. Irvine won the event and equalled the record of 9.3 seconds. During the same event he would also win the 120-yard Dubbo Gift after starting a yard behind scratch, again displaying his much-publicised speed.

Irvine's speed was such that he is still considered by many to be the fastest player ever to lace on a boot and is favourably compared against other noted rugby league speedsters such as Johnny Bliss, Michael Cleary (a 1962 Commonwealth Games 100 yards Bronze Medallist who beat Irvine in a A£2,000 match race at Sydney's Wentworth Park in 1964), Martin Offiah and Darren Albert.

In total, Ken Irvine was selected for three Kangaroo Tours. He toured in 1959-60, 1963-64 where he repeated his feat from 1962 of being the only Australian to score a try in each test of an Ashes series against Great Britain including 3 tries in the 50-12 second test win at Station Road in Swinton in a game that became known as the "Swinton Massacre", and finally 1967-68. Irvine's feat of scoring a try in each test of an Ashes series against Great Britain was later equalled by Sam Backo in 1988 and Mal Meninga in 1990.

Ken Irvine was involved in one of the most talked about and controversial passages of play in rugby league test match history in 1962. In the third Ashes test against Great Britain at the Sydney Cricket Ground, referee Darcy Lawler awarded a try to Irvine late in the game, ignoring a forward pass from Bill Carson amid howls of protest from Lions players.

Australian captain Arthur Summons then gave him the goal kicking duties leaving him with a sideline conversion. As he lined the ball up for the kick, Lawler allegedly gave Irvine some 'advice' about how the ball was placed, telling him that he would miss the kick if he didn't line the ball correctly (Irvine denied this in his memoirs, though Lawler maintained until his death in 2004 that it was true).

Irvine then moved in and re-adjusted the ball, walked back to his mark and kicked the goal. The goal gave Australia a 17-16 win and in doing so saw to it that they avoided losing the series 3-0 to the tourists after the Lions had won the first test 31-12 in Sydney and the second 17-10 at Lang Park in Brisbane.

Irvine's Test career ended in 1968 when he suffered a broken leg against in the first test against France on the 1967-68 Kangaroo tour at the Stade Velodrome in Marseille, ruling him out for much of the 1969 NSWRL season.

Irvine had the honour of captaining the Bears on occasions, although he infamously threatened to lead his team off in protest of referee Keith Page during a 1970 match against Canterbury-Bankstown at Belmore Sports Ground (Norths won the game 9-8). He would go on to make 176 appearances for the side, scoring 171 tries. His stint with the Bears ended at the end of 1970 after disagreements with head coach Roy Francis.

Ken Arthurson who was the club secretary at Manly spoke to the media in 2016 and talked about Irvine's defection to The Northern Beaches club saying, "I asked Ken if he had given careful thought about the repercussions if he left Norths, I said you are a legend there and you are sacrificing so much, I won't be happy until you have given it a lot of deep thought and talked it over with your family". Irvine reportedly replied that he had burnt his bridges at Norths and there was no going back.[10]

Manly-Warringah Sea Eagles

Irvine was quickly signed by Manly club secretary Ken Arthurson in 1971. The Sea Eagles club Secretary knew the value of adding the game's best winger to what was already a quality team that included the likes of Bob Fulton, Fred Jones, Mal Reilly, Bill Hamilton, Graham Eadie and Terry Randall. Irvine went on to make 60 appearances for the club, scoring 41 tries and showed he had lost none of his speed at the end of his career.

He overtook Harold Horder as the NSWRL's all-time top try-scorer and was finally able to win a premiership when he helped Manly to claim successive premierships in 1972 (19-14 over Eastern Suburbs) and 1973 (10-7 over Cronulla-Sutherland). Irvine didn't score a try in either of his Grand Final wins with the Sea Eagles.

Ken Irvine retired after the 1973 Grand Final win over Cronulla, becoming the first player to score 200 tries in NSWRL Premiership history. As of April 2018 Irvine holds the record for tries scored in the premiership (212) in front of Steve Menzies (180), Billy Slater (188), Andrew Ettingshausen (165), Terry Lamb (164) and Brett Stewart (162).

Records and statistics

Irvine's 212 career tries is the standing NSWRL/NRL career record for the most first grade tries. This tally was achieved in only 236 first grade games and is 22 tries clear of his nearest rival in the rankings: Billy Slater, 32 ahead of Steve Menzies, and almost 50 ahead of Andrew Ettingshausen, Terry Lamb and Brett Stewart. Menzies, Ettingshausen and Lamb achieved their 160+ totals in 349, 328 and 350 first grade games respectively.

Irvine held the record for the highest number of tries scored for a single club, recording 171 tries during 176 games at North Sydney between 1958-1970. However, this was surpassed in 2015 by Melbourne Storm's fullback Billy Slater.

Irvine's 33 tries for Australia was eclipsed by Darren Lockyer during the 2010 Four Nations tournament against Papua New Guinea. Lockyer, who started his test career at Fullback before moving to Five-eighth, broke Irvine's record while playing in his 52nd test. Ken Irvine scored his 33 tries in 33 test matches, scoring at the remarkable rate of one try per test.

Point scoring summary

Games	Tries	Goals	Field	Points
236	212	70	1	778

(Note - the above total represents points the total for points at the value they were during Irvine's playing days. Since his retirement, field goals have been reduced from two points to one while tries have increased from three points to four. Adjusted for 2016 figures, Ken Irvine would have scored 989 points in club football)

Career Statistics

Team	Matches	Tries	Goals	Field Goals	Points	Years
 North Sydney	176	171	59	1	633	1958–1970
 New South Wales	24	30	4	–	98	1959–1967
 Australia	31	33	11	–	121	1959–1967
 NSW City	8	7	–	–	21	1960–1967

 Manly-Warringah	60	41	11	–	145	1971–1973
Total	299	282	85	1	1,018	1958–1973

Post-playing

Irvine was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia in 1983. On 22 December 1990, Irvine died of the disease at the age of 50 in Brisbane. North Sydney Oval's Ken Irvine Scoreboard was named in his honour in 1991.

Accolades

Irvine was inducted into the Australian Rugby League Hall of Fame in 2004.[11] In August 2006 he was named at winger in the North Sydney Bears' *Team of the Century*.

In 2006 Ken Irvine was named on the wing for the Manly Sea Eagles **Dream Team** to celebrate the club's 60th anniversary. The team, selected by a panel of selectors which featured former Manly-Warringah administrator Ken Arthurson, respected rugby league writer Ian Heads, the club Chairman Kerry Sibraa and journalist Phil Rothfield, included six of Irvine's teammates from the 1972 and 1973 premiership teams.

In 2007 Irvine was selected by a panel of experts as a winger in an Australian 'Team of the 50s'.

In February 2008, Irvine was named in the list of Australia's **100 Greatest Players (1908–2007)** which was commissioned by the NRL and ARL to celebrate the code's centenary year in Australia.[13][14] Irvine went on to be named as one of the wingers, along with Brian Bevan, in Australian rugby league's *Team of the Century*. Announced on 17 April 2008, the team is the panel's majority choice for each of the thirteen starting positions and four interchange players. In 2008 New South Wales announced their rugby league team of the century and Irvine was again named on the wing.[17]

Irvine held the world sprint 100 yards record in 1963, running 100 yards (91 m) in 9.3 seconds at Dubbo, setting a world professional sprint record. He is the only rugby league player to hold a world sprint record.

In 2018, the award for the NRL's top try scorer for the season was named the Ken Irvine Medal, with David Fusitu'a from the New Zealand Warriors being the inaugural winner (with 23 tries)