

= Danny Higginbotham =

Daniel John " Danny " Higginbotham (born 29 December 1978) is a former professional footballer who played as a defender .

Born in Manchester , Higginbotham started his career at his local club Manchester United . He made seven appearances at Old Trafford as well as a loan spell with Belgian side Royal Antwerp before joining Derby County in order to play more matches . He spent three years at Derby but handed in a transfer request when the club was relegated from the Premier League . Southampton signed Higginbotham for a £ 1 @. @ 5 million fee in February 2003 , and he helped them reach the 2003 FA Cup Final . When Southampton were relegated in 2005 , Higginbotham rejected a new contract and was placed on the transfer list .

He joined fellow Championship side Stoke City for a £ 225 @, @ 000 fee in August 2006 . He was made captain when Michael Duberry left in January 2007 and Stoke went on to narrowly miss out on a play @- @ off place . With Stoke not being promoted Higginbotham again decided to hand in a transfer request to help force through a move to Sunderland . He spent one season at the Stadium of Light before returning to Stoke in 2008 . He became a vital member of Tony Pulis ' squad as Stoke established themselves in the Premier League . He scored the winning goal in the FA Cup quarter @- @ final against West Ham United but missed out on both the semi @- @ final and the final due to a knee injury . After his recovery he struggled to force his way back into the side and spent time out on loan to Nottingham Forest and Ipswich Town before joining Sheffield United on a free transfer in January 2013 . After eight months at Bramall Lane , he left to join Conference Premier side Chester before ending his career with a short spell at Altrincham .

Higginbotham made his international debut for the Gibraltar national team in a friendly against Slovakia in November 2013 at the age of 34 , qualifying through his maternal grandmother . In January 2014 , Higginbotham retired from club football after a 14 @- @ year career , but made two more international appearances for Gibraltar until his international retirement in March .

= = Early life = =

Born in Manchester , Higginbotham grew up in nearby Altrincham . Despite passing his eleven plus exam he was denied entry into Altrincham Grammar School for Boys . His elder brother , Paul , played non @- @ League football for Witton Albion .

= = Club career = =

= = = Manchester United = = =

Higginbotham started his career at his local club Manchester United , but was not highly rated during the first year of his apprenticeship and his career was almost ended when he broke his femur in a B team match . However , he recovered well from the injury and was given a two @- @ year professional contract in 1998 . He made his Premier League debut on 10 May 1998 , coming on for Michael Clegg 60 minutes into a 2 ? 0 win over Barnsley at Oakwell .

He was sent to Belgian Second Division side Royal Antwerp on a loan spell . He got off to a bad start at the club and asked to return to Old Trafford after being abused by Antwerp supporters outside the Bosuilstadion , and had to be talked into staying by manager Regi Van Acker . Following this start the club then won 15 matches in a row and Higginbotham become popular with the fans . However , the season ended with defeat in a play @- @ off game , and after the final whistle there was an alleged attack on referee Amand Ancion by teammate Ronnie Wallwork . Higginbotham was subsequently banned from football for a year for his involvement . In September 1999 , a Belgian court reduced Higginbotham 's ban to four months . Ancion maintained that Wallwork had grabbed him by the throat and that Higginbotham had headbutted him . Higginbotham always maintained his innocence , stating that he had tried to intervene peacefully after Wallwork had confronted Ancion in

an aggressive manner . Alex Ferguson believed the player 's innocence and handed both players four @-@ year contracts as the club appealed their suspensions .

Higginbotham played six games for United during the 1999 ? 2000 season , including appearances in the UEFA Champions League and at the Maracanã Stadium in the FIFA Club World Championship . He made his full debut in a 3 ? 0 defeat to Aston Villa at Villa Park on 13 October 1999 , in what was described as a blow to the credibility of the League Cup as United had fielded a number of young players . He suffered with concussion during the match after a clash of heads with Dion Dublin . He failed to break into the first team on a regular basis as Denis Irwin , Phil Neville and Mikaël Silvestre were all preferred ahead of him at left @-@ back .

= = = Derby County = = =

Higginbotham 's desire to play regular first @-@ team football led to him joining Derby County for a £ 2 million fee ? a large sum for a young player with just four top @-@ flight appearances to his name . His decision to leave Manchester United was praised by the player he failed to displace , Denis Irwin . Higginbotham made his debut in a 2 ? 2 draw with Southampton , and had a good start to his Derby career until he was substituted at half @-@ time during his third appearance after struggling to contain Everton 's Niclas Alexandersson . Manager Jim Smith soon switched to a new system without any full @-@ backs but Higginbotham adapted well to playing on the left @-@ side of a three @-@ man defence . Derby avoid relegation out of the Premier League on the penultimate day of 2000 ? 01 with a 1 ? 0 victory over former his club Manchester United at Old Trafford .

He began 2001 ? 02 on the left @-@ side of central defence despite Smith reverting to a 4 ? 4 ? 2 formation . Smith was sacked after a poor start , but his replacement Colin Todd failed to improve the club 's form , and Todd was sacked and replaced with John Gregory , with similarly poor results . Higginbotham scored his first goal in English football on 16 March 2002 , converting a penalty to secure a 3 ? 1 victory over Bolton Wanderers after striker Fabrizio Ravanelli backed out of taking the penalty . This would prove to be the last win of a relegation campaign , with the only remaining positive to the season for Higginbotham coming when he was voted as the fans ' Player of the Year .

On 17 August 2002 , he collided badly with Grimsby Town forward Steve Livingstone and knocked Livingstone unconscious ; this left Livingstone with a skull fracture injury that would see him out of action for two months . It was expected that Higginbotham would eventually move unless Derby did well enough to gain promotion back to the Premier League , and so in January 2003 , with Derby struggling in the First Division , he moved to Southampton on loan , joining permanently in February .

= = = Southampton = = =

Following Derby 's relegation from the Premier League , Higginbotham moved to Southampton in January 2003 on loan until the end of 2002 ? 03 . The move was made permanent in February 2003 for a £ 1 @.@ 5 million fee . He featured in Southampton 's FA Cup run in 2002 ? 03 , playing once in the fifth round against Norwich City , but was an unused substitute for the final against Arsenal .

The 2003 ? 04 season was difficult for the club , and Gordon Strachan resigned in March . Higginbotham felt that his replacement , Paul Sturrock , was unable to handle the pressure at St Mary 's , but denied press rumours that Sturrock had lost the confidence of the players . Steve Wigley took charge for 2004 ? 05 and the club 's decline continued . Wigley demoted Higginbotham to the reserves after following a falling out between the pair , though he soon reversed the decision and returned him to the first team . Harry Redknapp replaced Wigley as manager in December 2004 but failed to arrest the decline , and Southampton were relegated in last place . Higginbotham had scored the equalising goal in the penultimate match of the season at Crystal Palace , but a final day defeat to Manchester United left Southampton two points from safety .

George Burley took over from Redknapp in December 2005 , though neither manager was unable to put together an effective promotion campaign and Southampton ended the season 12th in the

Championship . Higginbotham rejected a new contract and as a result was placed on the transfer list in July 2006 . He told the local press that he felt disrespected the way Southampton chairman Rupert Lowe had handled his contract ? he had taken a pay cut to move from Derby , a 40 % pay cut following relegation , and then the new contract offer was lower still than his current contract .

= = = Stoke City = = =

Higginbotham joined Southampton 's Championship rivals Stoke City on 3 August 2006 for an initial £ 225 @, @ 000 fee , and quickly cemented a regular place in Tony Pulis 's starting line @-@ up . He began 2006 ? 07 at left @-@ back , but soon established himself at centre @-@ back after initially filling in for Clint Hill following Hill 's sending off at Wolverhampton Wanderers on 23 September 2006 . Pulis gave Stoke a reputation as a " Battersea Dogs Home " club , and Higginbotham proved to be a typical signing in this regard as he felt unwanted at Southampton and said that his career had been reinvigorated by the move to the Britannia Stadium . Stoke went seven games without conceding a goal , and during this run Higginbotham scored the only goal of the game against local rivals West Bromwich Albion after deposing Carl Hoefkens as the club 's penalty taker . In February 2007 , he was awarded the club captaincy following Michael Duberry 's departure to Reading . Over the course of the season he scored a career @-@ high seven goals in his 46 appearances . Though Stoke narrowly missed out on the play @-@ offs , a successful personal campaign culminated in Higginbotham being voted the club 's Player of the Year .

= = = Sunderland = = =

On 28 August 2007 , it was announced that a bid from Sunderland had been accepted by Stoke , after Higginbotham had handed a transfer request to the club . Higginbotham wrote in his autobiography that Pulis would only authorise the deal if he handed in a transfer request . Higginbotham signed a four @-@ year deal with Sunderland the following day , moving for a £ 2 @. @ 5 million fee , possibly rising to £ 3 million dependent on appearances . He said that the chance to play Premier League football under Roy Keane was too good to refuse . On 10 November 2007 , Higginbotham scored the opening goal for Sunderland which was believed to come off his ear in a 1 ? 1 draw with their Tyne @-@ Wear rivals Newcastle United at the Stadium of Light . He was only a bit @-@ part player by the start of 2008 ? 09 , and Keane allowed him to return to Stoke for the same fee that he had paid to Stoke .

= = = Return to Stoke City = = =

Higginbotham re @-@ joined Stoke , now in the Premier League , in September 2008 for a £ 2 @. @ 5 million fee . On 19 October 2008 , Higginbotham scored the first goal of his second spell , with a penalty in a 2 ? 1 win over Tottenham Hotspur . He was the first choice at left @-@ back for manager Tony Pulis , playing in 28 league matches as the team successfully fought for survival . However , he missed the final five matches of the season due to a slipped disc . He later underwent surgery .

With the summer signing of Danny Collins , Higginbotham was dropped to the bench before regaining his place in the team , mainly being utilised in his more natural position in the centre of defence , and scored the first goal in a 3 ? 0 win over Blackburn Rovers on 8 February 2010 . He was praised by first @-@ team coach Mark O 'Connor for reclaiming his place in the side .

He started the first match of 2010 ? 11 away at Wolverhampton Wanderers , but was dropped for the next match in favour of Collins . Higginbotham signed a contract extension in October 2010 for a further 12 months , keeping him at Stoke until the summer of 2013 . He made his 200th top @-@ flight appearance against Manchester United on 24 October 2010 . He struggled with injury for the rest of the first half of the season , and was in and out of the first team .

" We wanted to cement Danny 's future with the club because he is such a good professional and it is important we look after certain players at the football club who started all this off . I 've got a lot of

time for Danny because he is one who falls into that category . He may not be in the side on a regular basis at the moment , but he still has a crucial role to play , as do a number of other players in a similar situation . The fabric of a football club is made up of the whole cloth , not bits and pieces , so we are delighted Danny will remain a part of that . "

After signing his contract extension , Higginbotham stated that he wanted to end his career at Stoke . He scored a rare league goal in January 2011 against Bolton Wanderers . He scored the first FA Cup goal of his career in a quarter @-@ final win against West Ham United in March 2011 . It proved to be the winning goal , thus earning Stoke their first semi @-@ final appearance in 39 years . He scored an identical goal against Newcastle United the following week . However , in the next league match against Chelsea , Higginbotham sustained a cruciate knee ligament injury that ruled him out for six months . Pulis spoke of his disappointment at losing Higginbotham but also stressed he would play a key role in the final few matches of the season due to his influence in the dressing room . Higginbotham later admitted that missing the FA Cup final made him " jealous " of his teammates .

Higginbotham targeted to return from his knee injury by October 2011 . He marked his return from his knee injury by scoring the only goal in a 1 ? 0 reserve team win over Sheffield United on 11 October 2011 . However , after failing to force his way back into the first team , Higginbotham joined Championship team Nottingham Forest on loan until the end of the season on 31 January 2012 . Upon signing for Forest , Higginbotham admitted that he was unsure of his future at Stoke . He was backed by Thomas Sørensen to make a return to Stoke 's first team . On 10 March 2012 , Higginbotham scored his first goal for a year when he scored the second for Forest in a 3 ? 1 home win over Millwall . His loan spell with Forest was ended early in April 2012 due to injury .

Higginbotham joined Championship club Ipswich Town on a one @-@ month loan on 21 September 2012 , which was later extended until January 2013 . He was expected to extend his loan until the end of the season but Higginbotham rejected the deal saying he wanted to be based closer to his home , and left Portman Road having played 12 matches . After his move to Sheffield United , Higginbotham has stated that his six @-@ year spell at Stoke was ' the best years of his career ' .

= = = Later career = = =

On 1 January 2013 , Higginbotham signed for Sheffield United on a six @-@ month contract , and made his debut for the club against their South Yorkshire rivals Doncaster Rovers the same day . Former Stoke teammate and current Sheffield United teammate Dave Kitson played a part in Higginbotham 's move to Bramall Lane , Higginbotham stated on his move to the club : " I was getting ready to go back to Ipswich on Sunday but after speaking to Dave I was optimistic something would be sorted here and thankfully it was ... I was very surprised and very happy when I got a phone call on Sunday to say that something could be happening here [Sheffield United] ... Dropping into League One isn 't a worry for me because this is a club on the up and I didn 't want to be stuck at Stoke just picking my money up because that isn 't me " On 18 June 2013 , having made sufficient first @-@ team appearances for Sheffield United , Higginbotham activated a clause in his contract to extend it for the following season .

On 29 August 2013 , Higginbotham joined Conference Premier club Chester on a one @-@ year deal after falling out of the Sheffield United first team . After making 17 appearances for Chester , Higginbotham left the club in order to forge a media career . After leaving Chester , Higginbotham signed for Altrincham of the Conference North , as he wished to continue playing on a part @-@ time basis with fewer travel commitments . Higginbotham had previously stated it was an ambition of his to play for Altrincham , as he had supported them as a boy . He announced his retirement from football on 8 January 2014 .

= = International career = =

Born and raised in England , Higginbotham was eligible to play for the Gibraltar national team

through his maternal grandmother . The former Gibraltar manager , Allen Bula , is his uncle . Higginbotham made his international debut in Gibraltar 's first ever match as a UEFA member , a 0 ? 0 draw in a friendly against Slovakia , on 19 November 2013 . He was praised for his performance and was named man of the match . He announced his retirement from international football in March 2014 , having earned three caps for Gibraltar .

= = Media career = =

In February 2013 Higginbotham began to write his own column in The Sentinel , a local newspaper in the North Staffordshire and South Cheshire area . Higginbotham also has a regular sports column in The Independent . He released his autobiography in April 2015 , entitled : Rise of the Underdog . He has appeared on several television and radio stations , including Talksport , BBC Radio 5 Live , BT Sport and Sky Sports .

= = Personal life = =

His first child , Jak , was born in 2001 . His second child , Jessica , was born on 12 October 2003 . His first marriage ended in 2008 .

In 2010 he married Nicole , an American woman , who gave birth to his third child , Joshua , in 2011 .

= = Career statistics = =

= = = Club = = =

= = = International = = =

= = Honours = =

= = = Individual = = =

Derby County Player of the Year : 2001 ? 02

Stoke City Player of the Year : 2006 ? 07