



Australian-born **Aaron Downes** came through the Australian Institute of Sport before coming over to England to try to make a career in professional football. Although this immensely likeable man is a proud Aussie, his father (who had a career in the Australian semi-pro game) was born in Leeds, so Aaron had family in England to support his efforts. A lengthy trial with Bolton Wanderers came to nothing and Aaron finished the

2003-4 season with non-league Frickley Athletic. Chesterfield offered trials at the start of the 2004-5 season and Aaron signed his first contract on August 16th, 2004. He made his first Chesterfield appearance on September 4th, coming off the bench to cover for a 27th minute injury to Steve Blatherwick against Milton Keynes Dons, and crashed his first Spireite goal into the Cross Street net in that very game.

Aaron was restricted to occasional games as cover as he felt his way through his first season here. He was notably mobile, with the gift of a well-timed tackle, and visibly improved with every game, although his heading ability was a work in progress. He was called up by Australia's youth side for their world cup qualifiers in the Solomon Islands in November 2004 and his contract was extended by two years in April 2005.

The following season started badly for Aaron, who missed half of it with an ankle injury before coming back to claim a regular place from January as injury robbed the side of Blatherwick and Reuben Hazell. Blathers lost his battle with injury in 2006 and Aaron became considered as a first-choice centre-half; but for a peculiar "resting" to the substitutes' bench against Millwall on February 10th 2007, Aaron would have completed the 2006-7 season as an ever-present, although the recruitment of Janos Kovacs sometimes led to Aaron being played on the right side of defence. Despite the team's relegation in 2006-7 it was a season of personal triumph for Aaron, whose aerial game matured and who was invited to train with the Australian national side and tour with Australia's Olympic team. Recognition of another sort came his way when he won Player of the Year honours with the club.

Oddly, 2007-8 started poorly for the young man. A partnership with Kovacs at the heart of defence simply did not work, with both similarly-styled players being unable to combine as a team on the pitch. Both centre-halves' contracts were due to expire at the end of the 07-8 season, and only Aaron was retained. A hoped-for partnership with new signing Rob Page didn't materialise in '08-9 but he found a more complimentary style of partner in Danny Hall, and Aaron responded with the best form of his Chesterfield career, developing the ability to read the game as he matured as a footballer.

Cruelly, then, Aaron suffered cruciate ligament damage in a game against Darlington in April of 2009. He was immediately awarded a new contract and he recovered to return to a shaky defence in January 2012, bringing a visible improvement to the back line, but the injury struck again only seven games into his comeback. Aaron missed the entire 2010-11 season but stayed “in the loop” at the club through his willingness to carry out community work on the club’s behalf, approaching this task with commendable enthusiasm. With an eye on a future career Aaron also used his enforced absences to train for work in the field of sports media under ex-Spireite Lawrie Madden at Staffordshire University and was a popular choice as a co-commentator on local radio.

Aaron returned to full fitness for the 2011-12 season, but this would prove to be his last at Chesterfield. Along with a number of other established pros he was rather oddly overlooked by a failing management as the team struggled, and was completely and unjustly marginalised after December 2011. Aaron was one of three injury-blighted pros released by manager John Sheridan in the summer of 2012, around the time that he received his degree in sports journalism.

After trials with two West Country sides Aaron signed for a third, in Torquay United, was given a place in their first team from the start and was voted Player of the Season in his first year. His 2015 transfer to Cheltenham Town saw Aaron forge a relationship with manager Gary Johnson that continued beyond his retirement as a player in 2018, when Johnson took Downes back to Torquay United as his assistant. Aaron was appointed caretaker manager of the Gulls in February 2024, but only remained in post for three months before he joined Cheltenham Town as assistant manager in June 2024.

For Chesterfield: 165 + 9 Football League appearances, 10 goals.

Career: 241 + 11 Football League appearances, 9 goals.