



That Exeter-born **Tom Curtis** saw any success at Saltergate was remarkable when one remembers that, for the first three years of his Town career, he was a full-time student at Loughborough University and only trained with the team on Fridays. He had gone to university after an apprenticeship at Derby County had come to nothing and, despite the disruption that university life must have posed to his football career, he soon established himself and became a key member of the side.

His tigerish, ball-winning qualities were noticed first as the team battled through the Third Division play-offs, and the passing side of his game blossomed in the higher class of Second Division football. It was rumoured that West Bromwich Albion made an unsuccessful six-figure bid for him in 1995-6. He enjoyed shooting from distance and his long throw was a regular feature of Chesterfield attacks. Great composure was usually evident in his play, never more so than when dispatching the penalty kick that knocked Nottingham Forest out of the FA Cup in 1997.

Tom was preparing for life in Division Three with relegated Chesterfield in 2000 when Portsmouth came in with a £50,000 bid, with enhancements. He scored a belting goal on his Pompey debut, in a friendly at Woking, but injury deprived him of a chance to claim a first-team place under manager Tony Pulis before he was sacked a few months after signing Tom; successive managers in Steve Claridge, Graham Rix and Harry Redknapp didn't see Tom in their plans and he was allowed to join Mansfield Town on a free in December 2002. Given his Spireite connections it took a while for many Stags fans to warm to him but, by the time he followed manager Keith Curle to Chester City in 2005, Tom had gone a long way towards achieving that. A year at Chester was followed by another at Notts County, but injury and a revolving door on the gaffer's office prevented his making more than just two appearances as a substitute.

In 2007 Tom returned to Loughborough, to coach the college's first team players. He renewed acquaintances with his old mentor John Duncan, who was coaching the university's side in the Midland combination.

2008 saw Tom appointed as Assistant Coach to the British Universities' XI and a return to playing with Alfreton Town for one season. Having been an academy coach at Nottingham Forest from 2009, Tom took up a position with the Antigua & Barbuda Football Association, as Technical Director and Head Coach in March 2011. The job involved managing Antigua's only professional team, Antigua Barracuda, who play in what is effectively the third tier of the USA's professional set-up.

Tom returned to the UK in November 2012 to become Academy Director at Bristol Rovers, two years later he joined the FA as youth coach educator and in August 2021 became England's u17 lead coach.

For Chesterfield: 235 + 5 Football League appearances, 12 goals.

Career: 370 + 30 Football League appearances, 13 goals.