



Every player who has joined Chesterfield FC since the 1970s as a ball-winning midfielder or as a motivational leader of the team has been hopefully compared to Dan Archer. Any player who played well in those roles has been hailed as the new Dan Archer. Even people too young to have seen him play make these comparisons. Such was the impact of John "Dan" Archer, who joined Chesterfield for a £1,000 fee from

Huddersfield Town in May 1969.

The fee itself has a story attached to it: it was said that Jim McGuigan, Chesterfield's astute manager, became aware of Archer's potential availability on a free transfer. Fearful that other clubs might move for him before The Spireites could make an offer, he asked the Huddersfield manager to put a £1,000 fee on him, in the hope that it would discourage any other moves from being made. True or not, every great manager needs an inspirational captain, and McGuigan got his.

Nicknamed after the patriarchal character in the eponymous long-running BBC radio series, Dan was born in Biddulph in 1941 and joined Port Vale as a centre-forward, signing pro forms in July 1958. He played only ten times for the Valiants before moving to Bournemouth & Boscombe Athletic, where he found a more appreciative employer. The third division club enjoyed their best spell in the Football League to that date and achieved top five finishes in Dan's first three seasons, but with no play-offs in operation at the time, they couldn't make the step up.

During the tactical revolution that swept English football around the time of the 1966 World Cup win, Dan made the transformation from forward to midfield with ease, scoring 37 goals from 139 appearances at Dean Court. Crewe Alexandra were persuaded to part with £3,000 to take him to Gresty Road in September 1966, and the Railwaymen were on course for promotion from division four in January 1968 when they found Huddersfield's offer of £8,000 and a player to be too good to decline.

Playing division two football for the first time, Dan stayed at Leeds Road for 18 months but made only seven full appearances in the league as injuries began to slow him down. Any lack of pace was of no concern to Jim McGuigan, however, who was building a side that mixed young lads with a few seasoned pros, and knew that Dan would be the glue that held it all together.

Even today, there is still a note of awe in the voices of Chesterfield fans, who fondly remember his vision, his accurate passing and the quality of his dead-ball delivery. In the course of his 116 league games for Chesterfield, Dan took over penalty-taking

duties from Kevin Randall in 1971 and netted eight of his 22 Football League goals from the spot. Most of the others are remembered as free kicks, and he scored directly from a corner, too. Indeed, his accuracy at corner kicks was the foundation for a near-post flick-on routine that became briefly ubiquitous in English football at this time. With the likes of Ernie Moss and Charlie Bell gathering menacingly at the far post, Dan's corner would be unexpectedly aimed at the near one, where Tom Fenoughty, usually, would steal in to flick the ball on; Kevin Randall was the usual beneficiary of the chaos this caused in opposing defences, being on hand to force the ball home.

Aside from his ability on the ball, Dan's greatest value to the side might well have been as its skipper. He led by inspiration, but if inspiration happened not to work, he was not shy of using clenched fists and curses. Dan wasn't averse to giving the ref the benefit of his opinion too, and was sent off at Wrexham in 1969-70 for dissent.

Dan's transformational effect on Chesterfield's fortunes saw the club promoted as Champions of the fourth division in 1970, ending a long decline that had begun twenty years earlier. He stayed as the club established itself in the third division before retiring from full-time football in the summer of 1972.

Dan gave something back to the game in his locality by serving as player-manager to Sandbach Ramblers and Nantwich Town. From his Staffordshire base he scouted for the Spireites in Wales and the West Country. In later life he was able to indulge another great passion in his life, golf, by becoming the green keeper at the Malkins Bank course, near Sandbach. Away from work, he served as the President of the Wrekin Federation of Pigeon Fanciers. Dan passed away in December 2021, aged 80.

For Chesterfield: 116 Football League appearances, 22 goals.

Career: 331 + 3 Football League appearances, 76 goals.