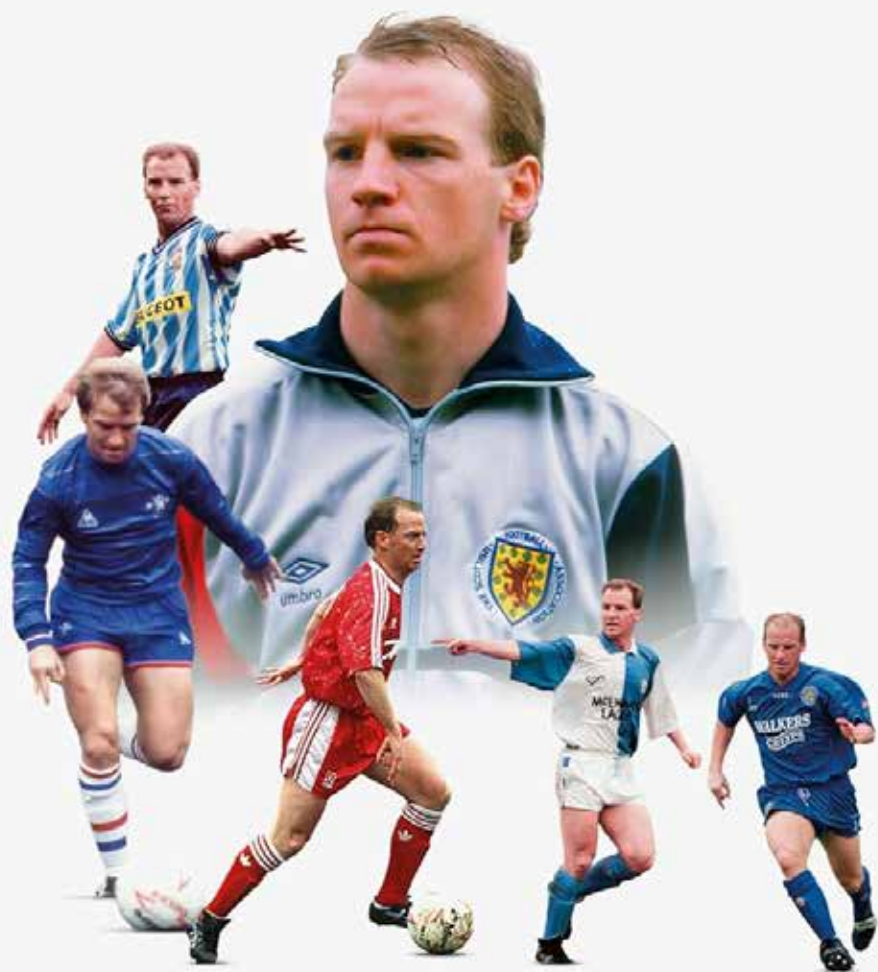


THE
**DAVID
SPEEDIE**
STORY



PAUL HODGSON

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Chapter One

David's Early Years

BORN IN Glenrothes, Scotland, but raised in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, David Robert Speedie worked as a coal miner prior to becoming a professional footballer.

I moved to Doncaster with my parents when I was four and a half years old. My dad was a coal miner and was looking for work because the mine that he was working in, which was situated in Fife, Scotland, flooded. Luckily, he was not working at the time! That was the reason for him moving down south. Once he was settled, he sent for us, and that is where I spent my childhood.

I honestly cannot remember any of my time in Scotland because I was far too young; I wish

I could; however, I have been back many times, both to play football and, more importantly, to visit my father's family, which, I have to admit, I always find enjoyable and indeed look forward to.

Sadly, after he moved to Doncaster, David's younger brother Robert passed away, as he sadly remembers.

Unfortunately, he only lasted a couple of days before he lost his fight for life. I have to say, you never really get over anything like that; my family certainly never did, and he was never forgotten. Personally, I think that Robert might have lived if he had been born and was taken ill today, but back then they did not have the medication or indeed the resources or expertise to make the difference that he needed. Hence, in my opinion, that is why my brother lost his life. All of our family were very sad and obviously found it very hard to take and come to terms with the best way they could (maybe you never quite do that; I know that my parents struggled with it for a long time). I still think about young Robert from time to time. I wonder what he would have been like

if he had made adulthood. Hopefully, we would have been close.

David says that, following the death of Robert, he was the only surviving son in the Speedie family. He smirks as he recalls those days.

I had five sisters plus my mother living in the house that we had at the time. As a teenage boy, can you imagine what it was like when they were all on their periods? It was absolute bedlam! Looking back now, I am not surprised that my dad was always at work down the pit or at the working men's club called 'The Bomb'. The reason it was called The Bomb was that all the coal miners' wives always said that they should put a bomb under it in order to get rid of it. I must admit, even then I found that really funny; thinking about all the wives moaning about their husbands being in the club and wishing that it would get blown up, simply to stop their husbands from going there most of the time, sometimes probably spending the housekeeping money.

I have got three older sisters and two younger ones. Isabelle is the oldest, followed by Jeanette, Christine, Lillian and, finally, Jean. Interestingly, Jean was the only child born in England; the rest of us were born in Scotland. If she had been a man, she could have played football for England and, in theory, I could have played against ‘him’ for Scotland. Now, that would have been a story to tell, wouldn’t it?

I only speak to three of my sisters; the other two are bonkers. It goes without saying that I do not want to divulge too much about this because this book is not the right place to do that. What happens in the family stays in the family, and it should always remain that way, in my humble opinion.

Anyway, my mother, Jean, very sadly passed away in 1998, and my dad, just as sadly, in 2003. They were horrible days, when you lose your parents, but if you think about it, we are all going down the same avenue when it is eventually our time; no one can stop you from making that trip, whether you are rich or poor, no one escapes death in the end. Now, there is an interesting thought for you, reader.

On a much-lighter note, when he was at school, David most liked playing in goal for his team, despite only being just over five feet tall.

I absolutely loved it in goal, but I simply was not big enough, which at the time was a shame. If I had been taller, maybe I would have ended up playing in that position later on in life. Who knows? Interestingly, right at the end of my football career, when I was playing a bit of non-league stuff, I played a whole second half in goal for Hendon against Sutton United in the very first game of the 1996/97 season. I really enjoyed it.

Returning to his early life, as time progressed, when he played junior football in Doncaster, David practised everything to do with the game in order to better himself.

I was not one of the best players at school, but I always tried hard and gave 100 per cent in every single game I played. In addition, I practised every day without fail, left foot, right foot and heading. In fact, eventually, I was as good with

my left foot as I was with my right. As well as this, I was a really good header of the ball by the time I was a teenager. I was super proud of this at the time. All the hard work I had done as a young lad certainly helped me later as I progressed in the game, of that I have no doubt.

When he was still at school, one day David's father bought him a Chelsea shirt.

He handed me this shirt, and I said, 'Why can't I have a Celtic one?' In his broad Scottish accent, he responded by saying, 'I'm a Rangers supporter and not a Celtic supporter, so you are going to play in blue and that is that. Chelsea play in blue, that is why I bought you that particular shirt.' I repeated, 'Why can't I have a Celtic shirt?' My father shook his head and replied, 'A fu***** Celtic shirt?' He paused and then continued, 'The reason is that you can sh** on the grass, which is green, but you cannot sh** in the sky, which is blue. That is why.' So, despite not knowing what the hell he was on about, I wore the Chelsea shirt and became a fan of theirs, along with Leeds United.

Little did I know then, as I was wearing that Chelsea strip, that I would play for them one day in the future. I will talk about my time there later.

When I think of that conversation with my father, it still brings a smile to my face and, even to this day, I do not know what the fu** he was on about when he mentioned the grass and the sky, but, hey-ho, it was amusing.

Moving forward, when David left school he was working as a coal miner when Barnsley's chief scout Martin Wilkinson spotted him playing for a local team in Doncaster and invited him and several of his team-mates for a trial.

We ended up playing against Barnsley's youth team, and we beat them fairly easily, I have to say.

Three or four of us were asked to go back for a second trial. Initially, I was not taken on, but I continued playing for their reserves and youth teams while still working as a coal miner.

David reveals that his dad advised him to remain a coal miner 'because there was no money to be made playing

football'. He later told Martin Wilkinson the same when he tried to sign David for Barnsley, as 'in those days, clubs had to ask prospective players' parents' permission for their boys to join them if they were under 18'.

David reveals, when pressed on his time down the mine:

I did as little as possible and used to hide quite a lot. Luckily for me, it was easy to hide in a coal mine, maybe because I was not very tall; I do not know, either way, whether it was because of my height or the fact that there were plenty of places to hide, but being able to do that certainly came in handy because I hated it down there, it was a god-awful place.

It was absolutely horrendous working down the pit. You went into a cage, and they just dropped you on a little cable. I literally thought that I was going to die every day. I will never forget that feeling; it was really scary. Thinking about it now, being down the mine in those horrible conditions made me even more determined to work harder in order to become a professional footballer, simply because I did not see myself digging for coal the

rest of my life, despite what my father had said. To put it bluntly, that life was not for me. Fair play to the men who did it for 30 or 40 years; I take my hat off to them, I really do. However, I wanted to be out at the quickest possible opportunity. I knew that from my very early days down the pit, and I was determined to achieve my goal.

David worked at Brodsworth Colliery, which was northwest of Doncaster. On researching into the colliery, I learned that two shafts were sunk between October 1905 and 1907 in a joint venture between the Hickleton Main Colliery Company and the Staveley Coal and Iron Company. The colliery exploited the coal seams of the South Yorkshire coalfield, including the Barnsley seam, which was reached at a depth of 595 yards and was up to nine feet thick. After a third shaft was sunk in 1923, Brodsworth, the largest colliery in Yorkshire, had the highest output of a three-shaft colliery in Britain. Something they were no doubt extremely proud of.

The colliery and five others were merged into Doncaster Amalgamated Collieries in 1937 and the National Coal Board in 1947. It closed in 1990 when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister. I can remember

this time, when the miners went on strike and were eventually crushed by the aforementioned government. A lot of men lost their livelihoods and many mining towns became almost like ghost towns, which in many ways was a shame. Whether or not the mines were viable, I do not know; either way, that is a story for another day!

The colliery was consistently among those that employed the most miners in Britain, employing around 2,800 workers throughout the 1980s. The company built Woodlands, a model village for its workers. Since the colliery closed, its spoil tip has been restored and developed as 'a Community Woodland, owned by the Land Restoration Trust and controlled by the Forestry Commission'. Some of the colliery site has been sufficiently remediated to allow houses to be built upon it, which, in one way, is a good thing.

Returning to our story, David recalls:

I did everything down the mine, from putting chocks in to working on the coal face and learning how to take material off the belt. I had nothing on, just a pair of shorts because it was so hot on the barrier gate. The air was smelly and stale because you have got the main gate where the fresh air

came in, but unfortunately, as I mentioned, I worked on the barrier gate, which was not the same for me because the dead air was coming out. Plus, you could smell everyone's sweat. It certainly was not very pleasant, to say the least. Looking back, I do not know how I stuck it for ten months; I absolutely hated it, it was a living hell.

Even though I hated every day of it, mining gave me a really good grounding for my later life. When you go down that big black hole, a mile underground, if you get the chance to come up for fresh air, you take it every time, even if it is just for ten or 15 minutes. I will never forget the relief when that happened and, even today, I remember that feeling because at the very minute you come back into the fresh air, there is no other feeling like it. It is not easy to explain.

I was glad when I eventually got my move into professional football with Barnsley, simply because it meant that I got away from the pit. I never forgot my time down there, though, and it certainly made me appreciate things and, indeed, life later on.