

Football – Derek Riordan signs for Alloa Athletic

✘ Former Hibs and Scotland star Derek Riordan has signed for Alloa Athletic until the end of the season.

The 31-year-old has been without a club since leaving Bristol Rovers in December 2012 although he did train with the Wasps when Paul Hartley was manager there but left after concerns over his fitness levels.

Since then he has offered his services for free and spent time at Morton and Carlisle in recent weeks.

Hartley had since moved to Dundee and new boss Barry Smith has agreed the deal with the player who earned three international caps.

Teenager Riordan was handed his Hibs' debut by manager Franck Sauzee as a substitute against Hearts in a 1-1 draw at Tynecastle on 29 December 2001, then became a fans' favourite at Easter Road, scoring 104 goals in 260 games over two spells with the club.

After helping Hibs to the League Cup final on 2004, Riordan was the club's top goal-scorer for each of the next three seasons, with 18, 23 and 20 goals respectively, earning him recognition in the form of the Scottish PFA Young Player of the Year award and also the Scottish Writers Young Player of the Year award in 2005. During that season, he won the SPL Young Player of the month on an incredible six occasions.

He made his full international debut in August 2005, as a substitute for Scotland in a 2-2 draw with Austria in Graz, in a match where lifelong pal and team-mate Garry O'Connor scored his first goal for his country.

In January 2006, Derek signed a pre-contract with Celtic, however with his contract due to expire in October, Hibs reluctantly accepted an offer of £170,000 allowing him to move west in June. Despite manager Gordon Strachan going on record to say that he was the best finisher at the club, Derek was unable to command a regular first team place and only made 32 appearances in two years, scoring eight goals. He did however win a Scottish Cup winners medal as an unused substitute in Celtic's 1-0 victory over Dunfermline, and his sixteen appearances in the SPL entitled him to an SPL Winners medal as Celtic won the title.

Ironically, during his spell in Glasgow, his former team-mates blossomed under Tony Mowbray, then John Collins and won the CIS League Cup, beating Kilmarnock 5-1 at Hampden.

After a public fall-out with the manager, he trained with the reserves, and a number of clubs including Burnley attempted to buy him, but Celtic rejected their offers. Hibs twice attempted to sign him on loan, but Celtic insisted that any move should be permanent, so on the final day of the 2008 summer transfer window, Hibs manager Mixu Paatelainen paid an undisclosed fee, believed to be in the region of £400,000, to bring him back into the fold.

His return was greeted with enthusiasm from the fans who turned out in their numbers to witness the return of the prodigal son and he was given a tremendous reception when he made his 'second' debut as a substitute in the 61st minute of a game against Dundee United at Easter Road.

In his next appearance, he scored the only goal of the game against Hamilton, and ended the 2008-09 season as Hibs' top goal-scorer with 12 goals.

His form continued into the next season and he was awarded the SPL Player of the Month award and also selected to play for Scotland by George Burley against Japan and Wales, but his

international career ended with the appointment of Craig Levein.

A winning penalty kick at Tynecastle in May 2009 sparked crowd trouble, and a Hearts' supporter ran onto the pitch and attempted to assault Derek as he celebrated with the jubilant Hibs fans.

A trademark free-kick against Kilmarnock gave Derek his 100th goal in senior football, and his scoring form continued despite playing in a new wide midfield role under John Hughes. Despite being the on-form striker, Levein chose less gifted forwards and publically stated that Derek would have to up his work rate to secure a squad place, an accusation that many thought unfair.

A run of poor results saw John Hughes replaced by Colin Calderwood who gave Derek the captaincy however the pressure of that role weighed heavily on his shoulders and he was sent off for a reckless challenge of Hearts Rudi Skacel in the dying minutes of a two-nil defeat at Easter Road.

He returned in style the following week, scoring both goals in a two-one win over Motherwell, and later that season became the first Hibs player in thirty years to notch up a century of goals for the club, following in the footsteps of the Famous Five, Gordon Smith, Bobby Johnstone, Lawrie Reilly, Eddie Turnbull, and Willie Ormond as well as Joe Baker, Jimmy O'Rourke and Arthur Duncan.

A goal against Hamilton in March 2011 meant that Riordan became the third highest goal-scorer in the history of the SPL behind only Kris Boyd and Henrik Larsson.

His Hibs contract ran out in the summer of 2011, and he signed a two-year deal with Chinese Super League club Shaanxi Chan-Ba, making his debut as a 76th minute substitute against Liaoning Whowin. He made his first start in a 1–1 draw against Shenzhen Ruby three days later. His first goal came when he

scored against Chengdu Blades in a 3–1 win, and although Derek became a fans' favourite, team manager, Gao Hongbo, criticised him after a defeat by Dalian Shide, and he decided to leave the club and his contract was terminated by mutual consent in November 2011.

He returned to the UK and trained with Kilmarnock and Blackpool before signing a short term deal with St Johnstone for whom he played four times.

After training with Milton Keynes Dons and turning down a reported bid from Ross County, Riordan signed a three month deal with Bristol Rovers, making his debut on 29 September 2012, in a 2–1 victory against local rivals Exeter City. He was released at the end of his contract, having made 12 appearances without scoring a goal.