

'The sky's the limit - but coming back home keeps me grounded'

Dean Henderson is Cumbrian football's rising star - and next week will be on the big stage with England Under-21s. The goalkeeper speaks exclusively to Jon Colman

Between winning promotion to the Premier League and representing England at this summer's European Under-21 Championship, Dean Henderson quietly returned to his roots. The goalkeeper went back to Whitehaven, where his increasingly rapid football journey started, in order to reconnect.

"It was my mum and dad's 25th wedding anniversary, and I also went training with the goalkeeping coach, Ben Benson, who had me at Carlisle," Henderson says. "He's one of my closest mates now. We went down to [Whitehaven] Miners, got the nets out and did a session. "It brought back loads of

"At Carlisle I got offered two academy contracts - one outfield and one goalkeeper. I was like, 'Mum, I just want to dive in the mud!'

memories. My old man was watching and it was like back in the day, when I was 12 or 13. It was a good reality check, a way of staying grounded."

The workout at the west Cumbrian amateur club whom Henderson represented was a short interlude in a story being played out on much bigger stages. The 22-year-old, on loan from Manchester United, starred for Sheffield United as they finished second in the Championship last season, and is in England's squad for this month's U21 tournament in Italy and San Marino which, for Aidy Boothroyd's team, begins next Tuesday against France.

Before making the U21 grade, Henderson played for younger England age groups, while domestically he impressed in Leagues Two and One. Having now conquered the Championship, Gareth Southgate has publicly earmarked him for the senior international squad. "That's what I've been working for my whole life," Henderson says. "It's no secret I want to play for Man United and England. I've just got to keep working hard, stay grounded, keep setting my goals, and there's no reason it can't happen."

Henderson talks a lot about being grounded and so it was significant that, when he received the Championship's



International stage: Cumbrian goalkeeper Dean Henderson will be in the spotlight this summer when he bids to help England to glory in the European Under-21 Championship in Italy and San Marino. Their first game is against France in Cesena next Tuesday

Golden Glove award for most clean sheets in 2018/19, he wanted to share the moment. "It sort of came off the cuff, but when I saw my mum and dad in the crowd, and my dad was emotional, I pointed them out and made sure the stewards brought them down."

Dougie and Yvonne Henderson descended the stand at Bramall Lane to join their son for a photograph on the pitch. "It was to say thank-you. They've been rocks for me, driving me up and down the country. I couldn't do anything without them. They'll be out in Italy supporting, my whole family's coming over. It will be nice for them."

Henderson is a confident individual but says there are still times when he has to remind himself how far he has come. These thoughts come to mind when he further revisits his youth: growing up in Whitehaven's Hillcrest area, going to school at St Benedict's, playing football anywhere there was grass.

"I remember never wanting to go to school - I just wanted to play footy with my brothers down the park," he

says. "Everyone wanted to beat each other at everything. My group of mates - Jacob Carton, Dominic Weir, Jake Moore, people like that - we were always neck and neck, whether it was football, cricket or rugby. I think that's rubbed off, helped me to stay focused."

"When I go back now, I see other lads who were with me who've either fallen off or didn't quite want it enough. I feel I've got that responsibility, and want to do the town proud."

Henderson was not initially a goalkeeper. "My brother, Calum, is six years older and I'd play against lads his age - and the youngest would get bullied to go in net. I used to be brave, make saves, take it in the face. I didn't like [being a keeper] at first, but that changed when I started doing some actual goalkeeping training."

"At Carlisle United, I got offered two [academy] contracts, one outfield and one goalkeeper. It was a tough decision but I was like, 'Mum, listen, I just want to dive in the mud!' They stuck by me, stuck with the decision, and I think it's safe to say it paid off."

Henderson developed quickly at Carlisle and was snapped up by Manchester United at 14. He progressed through the age levels before first-team football beckoned with loan moves. At first this was in Conference North at Stockport - "still the hardest level I've played" - and then in League Two with Grimsby.

Until his horizons widened, Henderson's ambition had been to play for Carlisle. He got an outing at Brunton Park on January 2, 2017, but for Grimsby, producing a fine display in a 3-1 away win. The chance to return as a Blues player then came the following summer. Henderson, though, is scornful of the circumstances.

"Keith Curle [United's manager] rang me when I was in Mexico. He said, 'Do you want to come? You can be number two'. Number two? Good one. I had offers in League One and said, 'Listen, I ain't coming there to play second fiddle'. I was quite surprised that he picked up the phone to say that, especially when I'd played for Grimsby at Carlisle and it was probably the best goalkeeping performance you'd had all season there. He [Curle] should have been happy to have me there. In my eyes it was their loss."

Would a first-choice offer have tempted Henderson? "Yeah - I would have been back home, played a full season, and I believe I'd have been the difference between promotion and not. To get my boyhood club back up a league would have been a really proud moment. I'm sure he [Curle] regretted it soon after when I got in the team of the year with Shrewsbury in the league above."

How had it felt that day with Grimsby? "The night before, I couldn't sleep," Henderson says. "I couldn't wait to get out on Brunton Park. I'd always dreamed of playing on that pitch. I remember the grass being perfect when

I was growing up and a ball boy. I got a decent reception, although when I was wasting time towards the end I kept turning round and seeing my mates in the crowd giving me abuse. All part of the fun."

The following year Henderson helped Shrewsbury to the third-tier play-offs, and next impressed in the Championship, where he encountered another west Cumbrian goalkeeper. "It was brilliant playing against Scott Carson twice," he says of Derby's ex-England player, who is from Cleator Moor. "We've exchanged a few texts and he's given me good advice. If I follow his pathway I'll have done something right."

Henderson, whose agent is the former Carlisle defender Sean McDaid, earned many plaudits for his goalkeeping for Chris Wilder's team last season, and became a cult hero through his lively interaction with Blades supporters. He also had a couple of bad days, when errors cost Sheffield United against Leeds and Aston Villa. "It all comes down to mentality," he says, when asked how he deals with such mishaps. "I gave me a kick up the backside. We kept something like eight clean sheets on the trot after that. You've just got to get back on the training pitch, clear your mind and back your ability. Just because you make a mistake doesn't make you a bad goalie. If you don't believe in yourself, no-one will."

Henderson hopes this belief will now lead to top-flight experience. A decision on where he will play in 2019/20 will be discussed with Manchester United after the Euros. "I've been staying in Sheffield for the last week or so while I'm getting my house done in Manchester, and every time I drive past Bramall Lane I think to myself, 'What actually happened last season?' As a kid growing up in Whitehaven, dreaming



Glory days: He helped Sheff Utd reach the Premier League



Rising star: Henderson in England training this week

of playing in the Premier League, and to actually get promoted to that level... you have to take a step back and pinch yourself at times. When Gary Madine came to Sheff United last season, I was thinking, 'Jesus Christ, I used to clean your boots'. Hopefully the journey can continue, because the sky's the limit."

Henderson has stayed the course so far at Old Trafford. "I think it comes down to dedication," he says. "It's the little things, like not wanting to go out partying and so on, realising the reward is much better than the sacrifice."

"I find that part easy. I watch videos a lot on YouTube, of big games I've played in, or big games I want to play in, like the Champions League final. It reminds you to make sure you're doing everything right. You'll only be remembered for what you do on the football pitch, not how much you can drink on a Saturday night."

Henderson's immediate aim is to be remembered for a notable summer for England. His rivals for the Under-21 goalkeeping position are Freddie Woodman and Angus Gunn, while Boothroyd's squad (who also face Romania and Croatia) includes outfield stars like Phil Foden, Aaran Wan-Bissaka and James Maddison.

"It's a really proud moment when you pull the shirt on and sing the national anthem," Henderson says. "You get them goosebumps. You can't take it for granted. England have been successful through every age group so it's gonna be outstanding to go out there and try to win another trophy. We've got the capabilities, so we have to go out and play with no fear."

The latter point seems to define Henderson, a Cumbrian enjoying his rise. "In the short time you have - maybe 20 years as a goalkeeper - you've got to make the most of it, because it doesn't last forever. I want to enjoy every bit of it."



Better days: Graeme Dixon blasts a boundary for Keswick 3rds in a recent game against Wigton Ben Challin

Weekend games hit by the foul weather

EDEN VALLEY LEAGUE CRICKET
By Ernie Brabbins

FRIDAY'S and Saturday's deluge put paid to any cricket, resulting in a complete wash-out of both Senior and Junior League Cup fixtures, leaving just three Sunday League games to report on.

In the all-Scottish affair at Nunholm, Dumfries beat Langholm by five wickets.

Batting first, Langholm (171/6) saw Bailey Donaldson (50 ret) and Graham Park (48) leading the way.

Dumfries (172/5) got home with just five balls to spare. The consistent Adam Malik (53 ret) and Jacob Taylor (36no) saw them to their victory.

Carlisle IV (133/10), put into bat at Stainton, struggled with skipper Anthony Wilson (44) and Will Clark (25) best with the bat. Jude Hodson (2/3) and Ed Tallis (3/8) doing most the damage.

Stainton (136/1) raced to victory with Tallis (50 ret) and Cameron Wilson (50 ret) putting on a century opening partnership.

Appleby Eden II travelled to Lanercost and shot the home side out for just 35 after they surprisingly chose to bat first.

George Winder (5/10), Max Winder (3/14) and Tom Fisher (2/7) took the wickets.

Appleby Eden (36/3) took just 6.4 overs to reach their target.

Adam Altham scored (20) with Joshua Bell (3/9) doing his best for the home side.

Somewhat surprisingly, we are already a third of the way through the season.

In the Premiership, champions Carlisle II lead the table, chased by Caldbeck and a resurgent Scotby in third place.

With only one relegated, Wigton, Rockcliffe and Temple Sowerby appear to be in most danger.

In Division One, Staffield are top followed by Edenhall and Langholm, with a game in hand, will enter the fray.

Appleby Eden, having played all bar one fixture away, return home next week and will be looking to close the gap at the top. Patterdale look very vulnerable at the bottom with 5 points.

Division Two sees Nunwick in pole position, 15 points ahead of Gamblesby and Irthing Vale.

In the Sunday League, leaders Stainton host second-place Appleby Eden II this Sunday.

The result could determine the league but don't discount Dumfries and Wigton III.

The depression, which is responsible for the current weather conditions, hopefully will move before the weekend.

We have already lost enough cricket this season.

Results
Sunday League

Dumfries 172/5, Langholm 171/6.
Dumfries won by five wickets.
Lanercost 35/10, Appleby Eden II 36/3.
Appleby Eden II won by seven wickets.
Stainton II 136/1, Carlisle IV 133/10.
Stainton II won by nine wickets.

Premier Division

	P	W	L	T	Pts
Carlisle	5	4	0	0	35
Caldbeck	5	3	0	0	30
Scotby	5	2	0	0	29
Lanercost	6	2	2	0	22
Kirkby S	5	1	1	0	21
Threlkeld	6	1	3	0	14
Wigton	5	1	3	0	11
Rockcliffe	6	0	2	0	8
Temple S	5	0	3	0	6

Division 1

	P	W	L	T	Pts
Staffield	6	3	0	0	37
Edenhall	6	3	1	0	30
Langholm	5	3	1	0	27
Stainton	5	2	1	0	26
Carleton	5	2	1	0	22
Appleby E	5	2	1	0	20
Wetheral	6	1	3	0	14
Keswick	5	1	2	0	12
Carlisle	6	0	4	0	11
Patterdale	5	0	3	0	5

Division 2

	P	W	L	T	Pts
Nunwick	6	4	0	0	42
Gamblesby	5	3	1	0	27
Irthing Vale	6	3	2	0	27
Caldbeck	5	2	1	0	26
Braithwaite	6	2	1	0	23
Lanercost	5	1	3	0	11
Kirkby S	4	0	2	0	6
Temple S	5	0	3	0	6
Penrith	4	0	2	0	4

Sunday League

	P	W	L	T	Pts
Stainton	6	4	0	0	43
Appleby E	5	4	1	0	32
Dumfries	7	2	1	0	30
Wigton	6	2	2	0	24
Caldbeck	5	1	1	0	15
Lanercost	3	1	1	0	15
Carlisle	6	1	3	0	12
Keswick	5	1	3	1	12
Langholm	7	1	3	0	5



Boyhood dreams: Henderson, from Whitehaven, was snapped up by Carlisle's academy in 2005 aged eight - and six years later the talented player was on his way to Manchester United

Frustration and then elation for Carlisle

CUMBRIA LEAGUE CRICKET
By John Walsh

CARLISLE were at first frustrated and then elated from their two scheduled games with Cumbria Cricket League title rivals Furness.

As generally predicted, Saturday's Premier Division clash was washed out without a ball being bowled.

But Sunday's clash in the quarter-finals of the County Cup went ahead and proved to be a real cliff-hanger.

It might have been a low-scoring affair but that only added to the drama as Carlisle successfully defended a modest 40-overs total of 86-9.

Furness started well enough but continued to stutter and were eventually bowled out for 75.

Teenage bowlers Henry Walker and Stanley Mcalindon took three wickets apiece, while Fraser Conn and Phil Frazer shared the other four.

The Carlisle innings was built around a gritty 31 from professional Michael Slack.

Carlisle travel to Workington tomorrow, looking to keep tabs on Furness who entertain Keswick.

In fact, Carlisle all-rounder Ruairidh Barker has joined Keswick, and could be in for a baptism of fire against the league leaders. Barker is switching from Edenside because his parents are moving home to live near Keswick at Applethwaite.

He is already highly-rated at his new club, who have also announced a double registration in Robert Spedding, a former Keswick ju-

nior who has been playing a high standard of cricket while studying medicine at St Andrew's University in Edinburgh.

Keswick have been hit by injuries and work commitments this season so the double recruitment is welcome, especially ahead of a trip to the league leaders. Players across the league will just be hoping they get in some cricket tomorrow after last Saturday's near washout.

Like Carlisle, Keswick were also in County Cup action on Sunday but sent a depleted side to Dalton and were beaten by six wickets.

They did manage 169-8 from their 40 overs but Dalton's pro Lasith Lakshan was dropped twice on his way to 70 not out as the hosts won on 171-4.

Carlisle's hosts tomorrow, Workington, will be

looking for a new captain shortly as Robbie Lambert is leaving to take up a teaching appointment in Qatar. Vice-captain Matthew Lowden is expected to step up at the end of July through to the end of the season.

Wigton were the only winners on a rain-hit Saturday when they won at bottom side Egremont by three wickets.

Egremont made 143 in 35 overs, much of it because of a fourth-wicket partnership between professional Shikhar Mehta (60) and Mark Ponticelli (46), who has been their main run gatherer this season.

Marty Turner spearheaded the Wigton attack and took 4-14 from nine tight overs.

Wigton didn't have it their own way in reply as Alex Hodgson took 4-26 for

Egremont. Lewis Little (48) and Ben Purdham (38) saw the visitors to victory on 146-7 in 28.5 overs.

They will bid to follow-up at home to Cleator while there's a tasty west Cumbrian derby clash at the Play-ground.

Whitehaven, who lost to Egremont in the Higson Cup after being skittled at Gillfoot, have their chance of revenge in the league.

There's also a south Cumbrian derby between Dalton and Millom while champions Cocker-mouth entertain Lindal Moor.

On Sunday, the long-awaited (held over from last season) finals day of the County Under-19 T20 competition will take place with hosts Keswick LakeHawks taking on holders Carlisle at 11am, to be followed by Whitehaven v Furness and, subsequently, the final.



Ruairidh Barker: Has made the switch from Carlisle to Keswick