

I seem to remember the weather was glorious on the 11th May 1997 as my sister and I made our way to Selhurst Park for the game that would determine whether or not we stayed in the Premier League.

This was the season when the Sky series "Premier Passions" had caught the imagination of the satellite TV watching public, making soap stars of Peter Reid, Bobby Saxton and Tommy the groundsman.

And like the best soap operas it had built to a climax with the last match of the season, when anything less than victory could see us relegated. Forest had already gone and Boro looked likely to join them, having had three points deducted for failing to fulfill a fixture at Blackburn when injuries and illness had depleted their squad. A win for the Teesiders and a Sunderland defeat would see them rise above us. The same applied to Coventry City who faced Spurs.

In fact there were still plenty of teams in the relegation mix and West Ham, Everton and Blackburn could all be caught if we could take all three points.

Although the game was at Selhurst Park, our opponents that day were the original Wimbledon F.C. the club that would be translocated to become MK Dons. As usual Sunderland took a huge contingent of supporters, the 13,000 red and whites there to roar their team on, greatly outnumbering the home fans and it came as no surprise to those who had been around in 1977 to hear that Coventry had managed to delay their kick off in north London.



Chris Waddle and Paul Stewart both missed decent opportunities to put the game to bed but Coventry had taken the lead at White Hart Lane and while pushing for a winner we had left ourselves exposed at the back.

Jason Euell scored for the Dons in the closing stages, so unless we could find two goals, we faced an immediate return to the second tier. Even at that late stage Michael Bridges could have

scored an equaliser in the end but a single point wouldn't have been enough.

Despite knowing that we had been relegated the Sunderland fans left the ground in good spirits. As we were walking away to get our train, a bloke in a Sunderland shirt rode past on a police motorcycle, prompting a rapid response from the Met's finest who went into total riot control mode, pouring from vans, truncheons drawn. I saw a mounted policeman threaten a middle aged man with a young lad who was simply trying to cross the road in front of us and a highly aggressive attitude to anyone who looked like a Sunderland fan. A vastly inappropriate, over the top response to the actions of one over exuberant supporter. A letter to my MP, passed on to the Met simply drew the response that hundreds of drunken Sunderland supporters had necessitated a firm response. Hardly surprising not that many years after the miners' strike and at a time when kettling at demos was the norm.

Use Ctrl and click on this link to view highlights of the game
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jued-MldxCo>