

Sunderland 3 Everton 0 – Roker Park 3rd May 1997

Twenty two years ago on 24th December 1996, Sunderland's position in the Premier League had looked safe enough. This was the season of "Premier Passions", the Sky documentary that followed the team throughout that campaign. It was also the final season where the team would play their home games at Roker Park and Everton were to be the last ever visitors for a competitive fixture.

By May however, the club found itself in a position where relegation was a distinct possibility, but which would be avoided by taking the maximum six points from the final two games. Even defeat in one would not be disastrous if other results went our way, but the manager, the team and the fans knew that safety was in our own hands.

Home attendances had been healthy all season but unsurprisingly this fixture was a 22,018 sell out. I was one, having made the journey up from rural Leicestershire and I was joined by my brother, who still living in the family home was a bit more local and my sister who had travelled up from London.



For old times sake, we had a ham and cheese pudding stotty at dinner time (that's midday to any members of the bourgeoisie reading this), took the bus in from Hetton to Park Lane then wended our way across the Wearmouth bridge and along Roker Avenue. There was an excited atmosphere amongst our fellow fans, recognising that this was a special day in the history of the club but also still full of

hope and anticipation that we would collect three points from the Toffees to take us one step closer to moving to our pristine new ground, still in the top flight of English football.

And part one went to plan as we ran out 3-0 winners. The place went through the roof, or into the higher reaches of the atmosphere in the uncovered Roker End where we were, when Duncan Ferguson inexplicably handled a Mickey Gray cross inside his own penalty area and Paul Stewart buried the spot kick.



Then Welsh keeper Neville Southall decided that he would carry the ball out of the box before kicking it upfield – the last time I have seen a keeper penalised for that offence. Chrissy Waddle, former England international, ex Tow Law Town midfielder and one half of a successful footballing pop duo sent a peach of a free kick direct into the top corner to put us 2-0 up in front of the Fulwell end.

Substitute Allan Johnston completed the scoring eleven minutes later and we walked back to Park Lane, confident that we would collect another three points in our final game against Wimbledon the following week – but that's another story, which you can find behind door 10.

You can You Tube the important moments of the game at these links...

Unfortunately they are each only about ten seconds long but show the goals.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqbUjGVnH7A> – the pen
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhOBBeZoya4> – Waddle's free kick
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BC5pvZgJocg> – AJ's header