

## Inspired by Sport – By Max Ray

It was a cold, dark night in Sheffield, Hillsborough was roaring. Lee Gregory put Wednesday 1 nil up. 1-1 on aggregate. Sunderland, attacking, attacking, attacking but nothing. 90 minutes passed, 11 added on. The away end was buzzing like a beehive cracking open, bodies everywhere. 91st minute, 92nd minute. Nerves engulfed the whole stadium. The 93rd minute on the other hand, was a different story. Sunderland had the ball. Coming in at the last minute like someone going to school, Patrick Roberts slots it in!!! Perfectly assisted by Jack Clarke. Sunderland were going to Wembley!

As soon as our first chance came, we rushed to buy tickets. Nervous in case the tickets sold out before we got one, as soon as the website opened, we were there. The tickets were bought and I was buzzing. Counting down the days until it was time to go, I was nervous. The nerves were building up. The butterflies were getting bigger and bigger like an eagle, (a fully grown one). At school, Wembley, Wembley, Wembley. It was on everyone's mind and everyone was talking about it.



What if we lose? What if we don't play well? What if we never make it back to the final? These thoughts entangled my brain. We had been stuck in League one for far too long. Instead of thinking of the negatives, I tried to highlight all the positives. We could get promoted. We could hammer them. We could play in the championship. The morning of the game, I was nervous but I was ready. Putting on my Sunderland hat and ( most importantly) my SAFC shirt, my stomach was rising and rising further into my throat. Before I knew it we were on Wembley Way.

Entering the stadium, the fans, the high reward of being promoted and the Wembley air all added up to an adrenaline pumping atmosphere. Walking to our seats, the towering Wembley arch mesmerised everyone, as an iconic piece of not just Football but sport around the world. The crisp, vivid green turf was in immaculate condition for the next Championship club. The blue of Wycombe and the unmistakable red and white of Sunderland, both trembled with a feeling of intense pressure onto the pitch. The fans had an unfeedable hunger for promotion.



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Almost too quickly the game of the season had begun. After 12 minutes of backwards and forwards football Elliot Embleton decided to change it. From outside the penalty area he thumped the ball straight at the keeper David Stockdale who couldn't stop it. The shot was a rocket! The Sunderland end was limps! While everyone was already partying I wasn't convinced, I've never been more nervous in my life. At half time I felt some relief but I still had a weird feeling. In the next 34 minutes the stadium never got any quieter, but it was about to get even louder. Because in the 79th minute Ross Stewart perfectly placed it into the bottom left corner!!! That sealed it Sunderland just became a Championship team - even I believed it this time!

On the way back home I had an unliftable weight lifted off my shoulders. In that stadium my dad, my grandpa and I witnessed an amazing achievement for SAFC, three generations of fans saw their club on the first step of its way back to where it belonged. The Premier League. Watching the game, feeling the nerves, excitement and atmosphere showed me how much of a big effect Football can have on someone's life. For me it also had a big impact, being stuck in league one like being stuck in quicksand and finally getting out helped me realise that there is always a way if you try hard enough. Now in the second season of the championship, though there have been moments of victory and triumph but also disappointment and sadness, I along with many other people will never forget that sunny day in London.



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