

Sneekes — Survival's as Good as Wembley

FOOTBALL

By MICHAEL BEARDMORE

Sports Editor

PROUD Royals boss Richard Sneekes says keeping Sutton up feels as good as appearing at Wembley and clinching promotion to the Premier League as a player.

Sneekes' Sutton completed an amazing 'Great Escape' last weekend, securing Evo-Stik Northern Premier Division survival on the final day of the season with a gutsy 0-0 draw at season-outfit Workington.

It was a remarkable achievement given the Royals had looked cast adrift at parts of the campaign and Sneekes says the feeling was right up there with his most memorable moments as a player.

Sneekes said: "It would definitely be in my top five achievements, up there with

playing at Wembley in the Coca Cola Cup final and achieving promotion to the Premier League, both with Bolton.

"And it was a similar feeling when we secured safety at West Brom on the last day in front of 25,000 people against Charlton.

"It's definitely in the same bracket because what we have achieved has been phenomenal. The elation at the end of the game was unbelievable and it is something I have witnessed only two or three times in my life.

"Hopefully people will start to take (assistant) Steve Hinks and I seriously as a management team because we have finished ninth and tenth with Rushall and won two cups. And now we've helped save Sutton from relegation."

But the Baggies legend was quick to acknowledge the part played by his players, adding: "All of the credit has to go to the playing staff.

"Steve and I have worked tremendously hard but ultimately, we couldn't have done this without the players and they really seem to have grown

together these last few weeks.

"I don't think it's sunk in what an achievement it is yet.

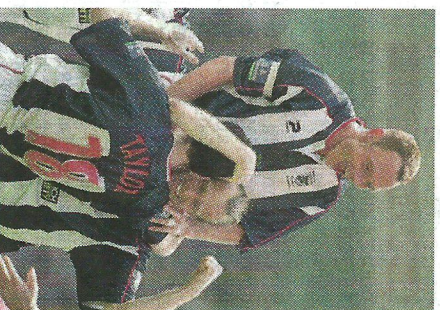
"We were ten points behind the majority of our rivals at one point, having played more games, and I have had messages from people saying we have accomplished mission impossible."

And with mission accomplished, Sneekes is already starting work on the next task — to build on staying up and ensure a less nervy third consecutive season at Northern Premier level.

He added: "It is difficult to compete with the big boys in the league and their financial resources — people were talking about going for promotion after Saturday! I think that's going a little bit too far.

"It would just be nice to have an easier season next year and we are already talking to players about staying with us. You can't afford to rest on your laurels and let it go for a couple of weeks because you basically have to start from scratch.

"After what we have done, there will be some players who



Richard Sneekes says keeping Sutton up felt similar to helping Albion survive in his playing days.

have shone and will have interest from other clubs, where they might be able to earn more. Hopefully the players have enjoyed working with us, training and playing here, and won't be swayed by money.

"Getting things right off the pitch is as important as on it sometimes and it's about portraying the image of the club correctly.

"Sutton Town should have a bigger presence in the city than it does and that's something we can work on as there is still lots of work to do."