

You'll always be associated with 1996-1997. When you think about that season, is it with pride in your own performances and the fact that the club came so close, or is the disappointment of losing Cup Finals and relegation the overriding memory?

"It was a very strange season because sometimes we were so confident at home. But when we went away there were a lot of mistakes, and early in some matches we were often one or two nil down. So it was hard to get results when we played away. We knew we were a good team, that's why we got to two Cup Finals. We didn't deserve to go down. We obviously also had the problem with the FA and the three point deduction. So there were problems in that season but people still say that was the most exciting season we've had because of the quality of the football."

Was it a problem that you played so well that season, that everything went through you, so if the opposition stopped you they stopped the team; maybe you took on too much responsibility?

"Maybe, because we went well in the cups which were one off games. You win and you're through, lose and you go out. I think we had more concentration in those games than in the league. If we lost in the league we'd think we have however many games left to get away from the bottom. The concentration wasn't the same in the league as the cup games. Maybe that's why we went down."

People still talk about the Chelsea game as the best individual performance they've seen. Is it one that stands out in your memory? [Boro 1 Chelsea 0, 22nd March 1997. Juninho dominated the entire match and scored the only goal with a diving header, in a must win game.]

"I remember it because it was a real important game for us to win if we wanted to stay up. We needed a result, and Chelsea were a great team. I had the opportunity to score, and we got the three points. That was the most important thing. That's why people talk about that game, if we'd lost, maybe we would have lost the opportunity to stay up."

After relegation you went to Atletico Madrid and played well until your broken ankle. After that you seemed to have problems at the club.

"I'd never had a bad injury before. When you come back from a bad knock you need support from people around you; the manager, and the club because you need time to come back to your best. When I was injured the club changed managers. [Raddy Antic was replaced by former Italian national coach Arrigo Sacchi.] That was the start of my problems. First of all he wanted to play me in a different position, and I wasn't doing well because I had lost confidence. Nobody supported me to help me get it

