

TALES FROM
THE PITCH

KANTÉ



HARRY CONINX

This is a fictionalised biography describing some of the key moments (so far!) in the career of
N’Golo Kanté.

Some of the events described in this book are based upon the author’s imagination and are probably not entirely accurate representations of what actually happened.

Tales from the Pitch
N’Golo Kanté
by Harry Coninx

Published by Raven Books
An imprint of Ransom Publishing Ltd.
Unit 7, Brocklands Farm, West Meon, Hampshire GU32 1JN, UK
www.ransom.co.uk

ISBN 978 178591 955 8
First published in 2020

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Cover illustration by Ben Farr © 2020 Ben Farr

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**N'GOLO
KANTÉ**

HARRY CONINX

RAVEN



For Debbie, who is as little as N'Golo and just as kind

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I

“THE REST IS COVERED”

*May 2018, Wembley Stadium, London, England
FA Cup Final, Chelsea v Manchester United*

Taking a deep breath, N’Golo looked down at the badge on his Chelsea shirt. The blue lion seemed to be fearless, and just the sight of it was enough to fire N’Golo up. He didn’t have to look up to know that few of his team-mates were feeling the same way.

The dressing room was unusually quiet as the players sat nervously contemplating what was at stake in this game.

Last year Chelsea had lost to Arsenal in the final of this very competition, but back then they'd had the league title to fall back on.

That wasn't the case this season. This FA Cup final was their last opportunity to get a trophy – and the players knew it. It was this or nothing.

The Chelsea team were also fully aware that Man United, their opponents today, hadn't won a trophy this season either. Both teams were going to be particularly hungry for victory.

Keen to get in one or two last words of inspiration, Chelsea manager Antonio Conte broke the nervous silence.

“As most of you know, this will probably be my last game at Chelsea,” he began. “I know we've had our differences, but we've also had a lot of success – and I really want us all to go out on a high.”

Conte had lost a lot of the dressing room over the last year. He'd clashed with several of the players and there were big doubts about whether he'd still be at the club come the next season.

“Whatever you think of me,” the manager continued, “go out and do it – for yourselves and for the fans!”

It was exactly what the players needed to hear, and N’Golo was moved by the resounding cheer that came from every corner of the room. This was a team that wasn’t going to go down without a fight – a team that he was proud to be a part of.

“You’re going to deal with Pogba, Sánchez, Lukaku and Rashford, right, N’Golo?” Eden Hazard muttered, as they began filtering into the tunnel.

N’Golo smiled, a little unsure as to whether Eden was joking or not. The Belgian probably didn’t expect him to mark *all four* Manchester United players at the same time, but from the moment the game started N’Golo gave it his best shot.

Spurred on by the incredible noise from the 90,000 fans packed into the stadium, he hassled relentlessly any red shirt he saw with possession, taking the ball from them and laying it off to Chelsea team-mates Tiémoué Bakayoko and Cesc Fàbregas.

It wasn’t long before N’Golo saw his hard work paying off. Eden had stunned a ball from Cesc with one touch and was beginning to drive in on goal, when he was clumsily dragged to the floor by Phil Jones.

“Penalty,” N’Golo murmured to himself, as the rest of his team-mates surrounded the referee.

They needn’t have bothered. There was no doubt in the ref’s mind and he firmly pointed to the spot. Chelsea had the opportunity to take the lead.

Eden stepped up and coolly tucked the ball into the bottom-right corner of the net.

GOAL!

The blue half of the stadium erupted and, together with the rest of his elated team-mates, N’Golo instinctively started racing after Eden.

While the rest of the Chelsea players stood facing their fans, hyping them up even more, N’Golo simply gave the winger a little pat on the back, before slipping back into position.

This was the start they needed, but there was still a lot of the game left to play. United were as keen to win this one as Chelsea.

So N’Golo continued to work tirelessly in midfield. Every time a United attack looked likely he was there to snuff it out.

“Seventy-five per cent of the Earth is covered with

water ... ” Gary Cahill laughed at one stage, starting the now famous Chelsea joke.

“ ... and the rest is covered by N’Golo Kanté!” César Azpilicueta finished it for him.

But N’Golo wasn’t just sweeping up United attacks – he was also setting Chelsea attacks in motion, driving forward at every opportunity.

Feeding the ball to Marcos Alonso, he gave Chelsea a real opportunity to put the game to bed. Frustratingly the Spanish defender fired his shot straight down de Gea’s throat, but N’Golo didn’t even blink. He just dropped back into midfield, knowing that other chances would come.

The game played out without any further goals, and eventually N’Golo heard the shrill blast of the final whistle.

Chelsea had done it. They’d held on for a win by the tightest of margins. But the scoreline didn’t matter – they were FA Cup winners!

N’Golo watched the delirious celebrations breaking out around him, both on the pitch and in the stands, as he tried to gather his thoughts.

This was his third season in a row ending with a trophy, although today's win was his first-ever FA Cup.

A broad smile spread across his face as the celebrations continued ...

... being enveloped in hugs by his team-mates ...

... having a small trophy pushed into his hands, after being voted Man of the Match ...

... climbing the famous Wembley steps ...

Standing at the top of the steps, looking out over the sea of fans as Gary Cahill raised the trophy high into the air, N'Golo Kanté felt as if he was at the very heart of a world he'd worked so hard to be a part of.

And he didn't plan on giving this world up anytime soon.

On the contrary, N'Golo planned on going as far as he possibly could.