

**HAVING WON THE PREMIER LEAGUE WITH MANCHESTER CITY LAST SEASON, VINCENT KOMPANY ADDED A NEW PERSONAL MILESTONE LAST WEEK BY EXTENDING HIS CONTRACT AT THE CLUB UNTIL 2019. WITH GREAT PERSEVERANCE HE HAS SUCCEEDED, AND THE INSIGHTS HE GAINED ALONG THE WAY HAVE ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO HIS INVOLVEMENT IN SEVERAL OFF-FIELD ACTIVITIES, RANGING FROM THE AMBASSADORSHIP OF SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES TO THE FOUNDATION OF HIS OWN FOOTBALL CLUB.**

# WINNING KOMPANY

by Arthur Renard

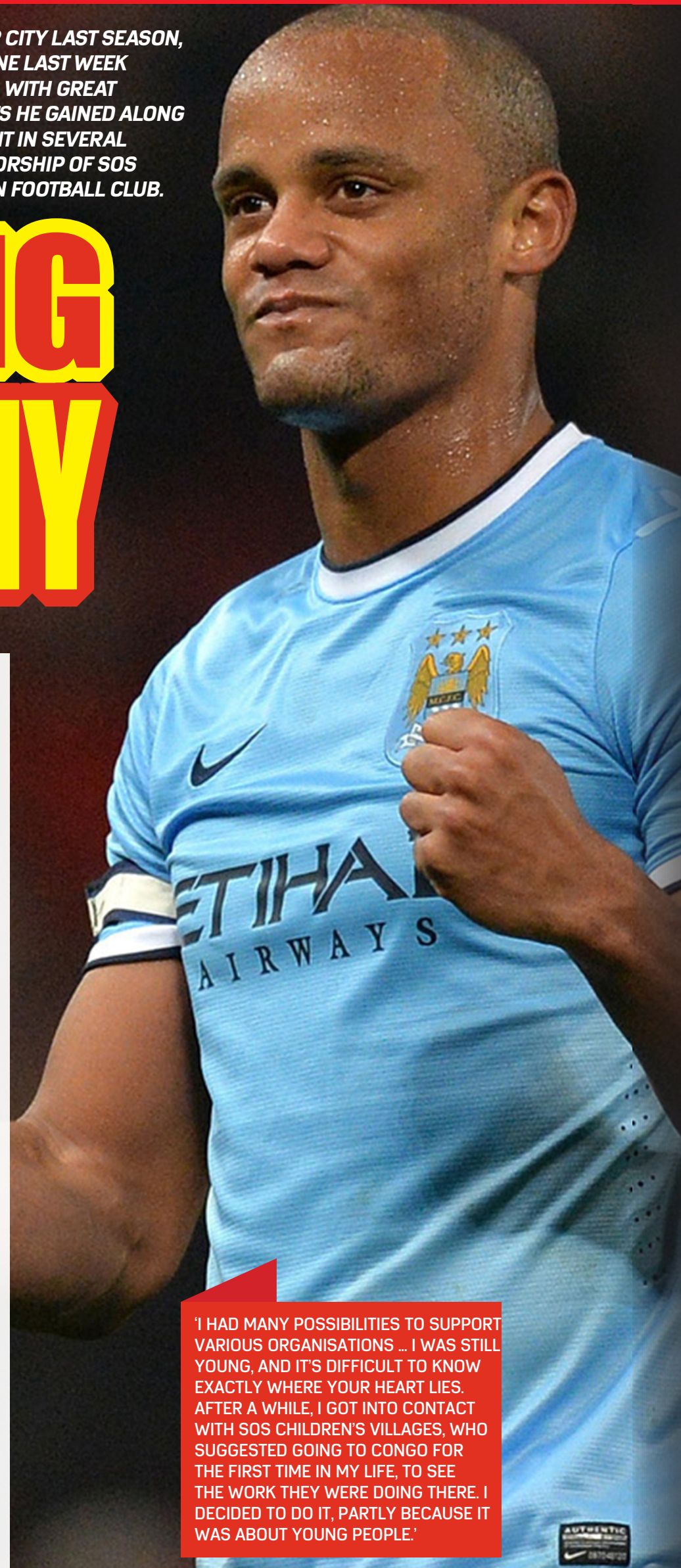
**F**rom a young age Vincent Kompany (28) showed great dedication to become a professional footballer. When he was only seventeen, he joined the first team of Anderlecht, and from that moment everything went into top gear. Straight away, the central defender established himself as a first team regular, impressed in the Champions League and even got a call-up for the national team. A few months after his debut, Alex Ferguson was rumoured to be keen to bring Kompany to Old Trafford. That didn't happen; Kompany preferred a gradual path and remained in Brussels. In his first year, he combined his football with his studies, something which his parents wanted him to finish. As the son of a Congolese father and Belgian mother, Kompany was raised with a realistic worldview. His parents emphasised social engagement and passed on a strong sense of justice to Vincent, his elder sister Christel and younger brother François. On the streets in his neighbourhood - the tough Noordwijk district - he learned several other lessons. It was there that he started playing football, and from a young age his talent was obvious. He was welcomed at the Anderlecht academy aged eight, and at that moment he already distinguished himself with his strong willpower. 'It's funny, because I hear I haven't changed since I was young. People say my mentality is the same as when I was six. I've always been very stubborn and persistent; I think I've always had a strong personality.' That attitude served him well during the start of his career. 'At Anderlecht, I was getting pampered, because I experienced a quick and successful breakthrough. But I kept on studying. I remember days at school when I had been playing Champions League matches the night before. During holidays there was not really time off for me, as I had to do exams. I've always kept challenging myself. Always.'

## GOLDEN SHOE

With his inner drive, he quickly established himself as an important player at Anderlecht. In his first year, he won the Belgian championship and a Golden Shoe award. After winning another league title in 2006, he made a transfer to German side HSV. There he started in impressive fashion too, but after only two months he suffered an overstretched Achilles, which required surgery. The subsequent nine months of rehabilitation proved tough. 'Suddenly I went from 'top talent in Europe' to 'biggest flop in Europe.' It had nothing to do with my football qualities, or the games I played, but I was just non-stop injured. Then it's difficult to say: 'Look, I'm good, but I'm not playing.' Football is a very periodic thing; you'll always be watched and judged in the present moment. Back then; I had become faded glory in Belgium at a very young age. It shows how quickly things can change.' Kompany felt he was slowly disappearing from the attention of the football world, something that only increased his drive to come back. 'I've worked incredibly hard. The more people who lost faith in me, the more hunger I got, it's unbelievable. I remember being alone in the club's gym over Christmas. Everyone was on holiday while I was on a fitness bike, with my leg in a kind of rehabilitation shoe, working myself to pieces. Whenever I finished, I would be in so much pain I could cry. But I didn't, because I can't do that.'

## PERSONAL GRIEF

However, things became even worse for Kompany, when he had to deal with personal grief as well. Both his mother and sister were diagnosed



**'I HAD MANY POSSIBILITIES TO SUPPORT VARIOUS ORGANISATIONS ... I WAS STILL YOUNG, AND IT'S DIFFICULT TO KNOW EXACTLY WHERE YOUR HEART LIES. AFTER A WHILE, I GOT INTO CONTACT WITH SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES, WHO SUGGESTED GOING TO CONGO FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE, TO SEE THE WORK THEY WERE DOING THERE. I DECIDED TO DO IT, PARTLY BECAUSE IT WAS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE.'**

Despite the heartbreak, Kompany managed to see through and continued his hard work. 'Many tough things were going on in my life at that time. It was a hard situation, but never did I have the choice to say: 'Okay, now I stop.' In that period, I learned to never make excuses to myself. Never. Life can be hard, but at the same time it's important to keep looking to things you do have in life. For example, I'm happy that I knew my mother for twenty years, also that my sister was able to recover from cancer and I was able to get fit again. Perhaps twenty years ago my injury would have signalled the end of my career. It's all part of your life. And it could have been worse. I said to myself: 'I have to continue.' The point is you have to keep a goal to aim for. Then, it doesn't matter if you have to go through shrubs, swamp or forests, you'll get there in the end. But you have to keep moving, and I've always done that.'

## REHABILITATION

That attitude came in very useful on the football pitch too, where he endured a long wait to rediscover his old form after making his comeback. 'When I returned, I noticed that I had lost some of my speed and manoeuvrability. That was a real shock. Suddenly I was a totally different player; I went from 'the superstar' to 'the useful player.' I was prepared for the worst scenario, that I would remain this kind of player for the rest of my life. But in the end it was OK, I was at peace with it.' Kompany just realised his situation could have been worse. 'I was glad I could walk, that I could play football. I was like: 'It's unbelievable what I can do!' During my rehabilitation there was another guy with the same problem as me, and he has never been able to play football again. So I knew it could go wrong. When I was recovered, perhaps I learned to be a better player with lesser qualities. I also realised I was able to play good games without being 100%, without having to be the showman. That was the most important change in my game at the time. With Huub Stevens, we also had a coach who didn't attach importance to who was the most talented; he put the team players to the fore. And I actually started to appreciate it as well, as it was the only thing I could offer at that moment. But then suddenly, in the summer, I was back to normal again. From one day to the other I regained my old feeling, all at once I was the player I thought I'd never be again. I felt it straight away; I was instantly ten times better than the month before. It's the best feeling I've ever had in my career.'



## OLYMPIC & WORLD CUP DREAMS

Still, Kompany wouldn't show his recovered form at HSV again. During that summer, he felt he was on a divergent path from his club. 'Hamburg had already lost hope with me, right? They were looking at options to sell me. It was difficult then to tell them I had rediscovered my form, but I knew it. Next, I went to the Olympics in China with Belgium, but I was unable to show anything there either. In the first match against Brazil - in which I played really well for an hour - I was sent off in the end. Thereafter, I got into trouble; because HSV insisted that I come back to Hamburg. Yet, in the subsequent league match against Bayern Munich I was only on the bench, while my Belgian teammates played the quarterfinal at the Olympics. That was the moment when I said: 'That's it!' Soon after, I left for Manchester City and during my first match there I got a man of the match award. Since then, my career has taken an upward direction.' At both his club and his national team he became captain and subsequently inspired them to greater heights. In 2012 and 2014 he helped Manchester City win the Premier League and this summer he captained a Belgium team that reached the quarterfinals at the World Cup in Brazil.

**BOTH HIS MOTHER AND SISTER WERE DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER, A DISEASE FROM WHICH HIS MOTHER EVENTUALLY DIED. DESPITE THE HEARTBREAK, KOMPANY MANAGED TO SEE THROUGH AND CONTINUED HIS HARD WORK.**

# GOOD KOMPANY OFF THE PITCH



SOS Children's Villages

## SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES

Parallel to his sporting achievements, Kompany has always made efforts to develop himself off the pitch too. While at Anderlecht, he began engaging in social programmes, something he expanded as his career unfolded. After a while, I got into contact with SOS Children's Villages, who suggested going to Congo for the first time in my life, to see the work they were doing there. The trip served as a reality check, in which he learned to see things in even better perspective. 'When I was there, I noticed how hopeless the situation was for many people. I really liked

the fact that the destiny of the children could be changed. It's still no life of luxury, but to some extent you can offer those youngsters the same chances and opportunities as we have. You can tell them: 'Look, if you want to be an engineer, then you should do this, or if you want to become a footballer, then these are the possibilities.' You see children entering the village that are brought in from the streets, who might otherwise have died the next day. In one year's time, those kids are playing, having fun and talking about their dreams for the future. If I think about such things, then I want to do anything for it.'



## VINCENT KOMPANY - AMBASSADOR

After his visit in 2006 Kompany became an ambassador of the organisation and decided to back the construction of a new children's village in Kinshasa. The entire complex consists of housing for 150 children, a primary school for 250 children, a nursery school for 80 children, a playground, a medical centre and a sports field. For its opening in 2012, Kompany was flown in from Manchester, where he had just won the Premier League with Manchester City a few days before. He knows how to combine his life as a footballer with his activities off the pitch. Apart from Congo, he has also visited countries like Vietnam, China and Malaysia on behalf of SOS. In addition to financial support to the organisation, he contributes ideas to policy and logistic issues, and raises awareness for projects. For example, he was responsible for collaboration between SOS and his club Manchester City, who started to support a training centre in China.

## INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

To reward his efforts, Kompany was recently appointed international ambassador, and has therefore become one of the global faces of the association. Kompany strongly believes in the principle of development through knowledge expansion. His ideal scenario is that the children he supports will inspire others in the future, and so ultimately bring about changes for the better in their own country. That's the goal.'



## BX BRUSSELS

That same philosophy is also reflected in another project he started closer to home. Over a year ago, Kompany began to invest in the ailing FC Bleid-Gaume, a club that he moved from South Belgium to Brussels, and then rebuilt from scratch. Supporters were responsible for the new club's colours, emblem and the name of BX Brussels. The club encompasses many underlying ideals of Kompany himself, the most important being the education of youth, both on and off the pitch. 'I love Brussels, my city. I see there are problems, but at the same time I think they could offer opportunities as well. There is poverty, youth unemployment and a lack of opportunities. In comparison to other clubs

the subscription costs are low, and there are even ways to recoup the fees - by performing well in school for instance. Sportsmanship and discipline are paramount, which explains why a careful eye is kept on school and training attendance. When growing up, Kompany spoke French at home, but pursued a Dutch education. Thanks to his subsequent experiences abroad, he now speaks fluent German and English too. He is convinced the social part can integrate with the sporting/technical side. With that special mix he hopes to become an example to other football institutions in Belgium. His aim for the club is that everyone involved and the local people in the area will continue it. It's never a quick return that interests me. It's always the story behind it.'

## VICA

Some of Kompany's activities melt into one other. Prior to the football project he was already making plans for VICA (named after Vincent and his wife Carla), another fund that will focus on giving youths the chance to develop themselves on both sporting and artistic levels. That could be either by organising workshops, supplying equipment (like instruments, drawing paper, balls, etc.) or helping children with logistic issues, such as with transport to training sessions.

## CORE VALUES

For Kompany, change in the world starts with an optimal living environment for the youth. 'Many projects have started from a bigger concept. Although launched independently, the projects are linked philosophically.' In all his endeavours, certain core values of Kompany remain. 'The common denominator in every project is that it must remain ethical. We always have a goal in mind, whether the road is going left or right, that doesn't matter, we'll get there.'

## THE FUTURE

It's in fact exactly the same attitude he had to adopt himself, when he went through some very difficult moments in Hamburg. Whether he is on the football pitch or supervising his projects, values such as confidence, resilience and perseverance always come around. And this remains true as well as Kompany enters new challenges with Manchester City this season. He will once again give his all, in an attempt to write new history for his club.