

Luxury Player: My Story

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With Sam Wallace

SEVEN DIALS

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*In memory of George Cole, 1954–2016
(he wouldn't have read it,
but he would have enjoyed the audiobook)*

Right A North London boy from the Camden estates. Here I am near our flat in Donnington Court on the Clarence Way estate. I played football every day of my childhood.

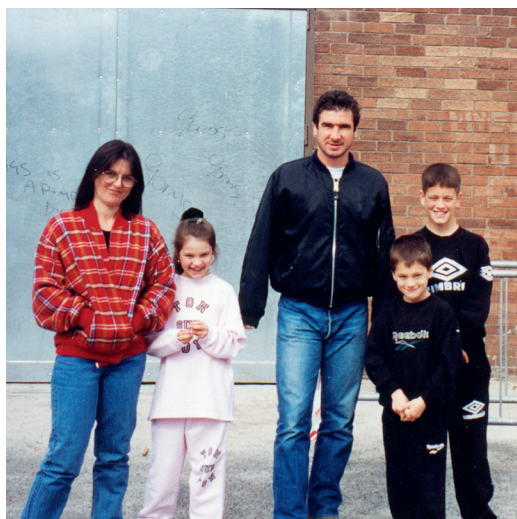


Right My mum, Susan, and dad, George. They gave me and my siblings everything. Life was not always simple, but we laughed a lot together. They gave me love and security.



Below With my dad, George. I presume the beer on the bar was for him. He and my mum watched me play all over the world once my professional career began.





Left While training with Manchester United, me, my mum and my brother and sister, Charly and Nicky, got to meet Eric Cantona. He was serving his ban at the time for kicking the Crystal Palace fan. On this day he told me he was off to do his community service.



Left As a West Ham junior, running out the famous old tunnel at Anfield. You could have fit me twice over into that Pony shirt.



Below On tour with the England schoolboys team with some of my friends from the FA centre at Lilleshall. Football meant that I saw a whole new world outside of Camden.



Above Size XL Pony shirt tucked in. Game face on. I made my West Ham debut at seventeen and my football apprenticeship there was ideal. It was one of the last of its kind.

Above right With Michael Carrick and Frank Lampard. We all made it through the West Ham youth system and played for England, but sadly never repeated the World Cup win of West Ham's boys of '66.

Right Paolo Di Canio was a fabulous footballer. One of many West Ham teammates who taught me so much, and he always let me know if I didn't pass to him.





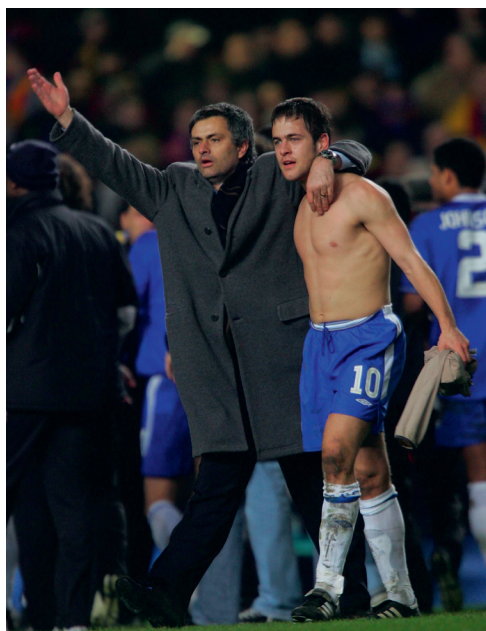
Left Signing for my boyhood club Chelsea with then manager Claudio Ranieri. I just wish I had dressed as smartly as Seba Verón.

Middle From the moment he arrived, José brought the future to Chelsea. I could see it from his very first training session. He got the best out of me – even if at the time I could not understand why he gave me such a hard time.



Below left After we beat Barcelona on that great night in 2005, José sought me out for praise. I craved it from him.

Below This was taken by one of the fans watching me and Didier Drogba celebrate the 2005 Premier League title outside Bolton's stadium. I almost slipped on the champagne that had been sprayed on the roof of the coach.



Right Luiz Felipe Scolari used to say I was more Brazilian than English. We just could not turn results around and he paid with his job.



Right With Carlo Ancelotti, a brilliant manager who always knew how to keep his players calm. He always took time to speak to me when I was injured.

Below left Just one season under José and at last I had some more trophies to add to the legendary 1999 Intertoto Cup triumph with West Ham.

Below right Slipping past Paul Scholes in the 2008 Champions League final. I was so sure we would win the shootout I took my contact lenses out ready to celebrate.





Above It took me a long time to win Sven-Göran Eriksson's confidence. I did like him – he never took life too seriously.



Above Drifting away from a tackle against Sweden at the 2006 World Cup. I was at the top of my game and I scored one of the goals of my life that day.



Left Jamie Carragher, a great Liverpool defender and one of the few then left in the game with the personality to organise his teammates in a game.

Right Celebrating with my Lille teammates – a wonderful season in my career. It meant I got to play alongside Eden Hazard, the most talented teammate I ever lined up with.



Right At Aston Villa my body felt like it was falling apart. I had to lift my leg out of my car on one matchday.



Below My swansong in English football at Coventry City. I just wanted to play football and Tony Mowbray gave me the chance.





Left With my Tampa Bay Rowdies teammates – a great time in my life in Florida. We flew economy and finished training by 10.30 a.m. I loved it.



Left My brother-in-law, Mitchell Cole, with his daughter, Rhys, and son, Georgie. Leni was born weeks after his death in 2012.

Below My precious family, from left: Harry, Carly, Max and Ruby.

