

'I find football much more powerful than what grown-ups want it to be. It's a community'

Kompany says the MBA and his family — he is married with three young children — kept him going throughout the injury lay-offs. "It allowed me to take away a lot of the pressure... from my day-to-day job, which is football."

His next mission is to learn Spanish, the language of coach Pep Guardiola. Challenging himself is "something that's vital to me. I need it in my life."

He had talked to business schools in Belgium and Germany and France but they could not offer the flexibility to fit the course around that all-consuming day job.

Manchester's Global Part-time MBA is based on self-study with lectures and seminars grouped into blocks to allow busy executives and footballers to carve out time to do it. Kompany says lecturers ensured he did not fail because he had to miss a deadline or seminar for a match. He was also given longer than the normal two years to complete the course. "There was a general approach that made you feel like they wanted you to succeed. It was tough... but there was enough to say okay, you're making progress, we're seeing that you're coming to terms with the material and just helping at the right moment," he says.

"Everyone in Manchester in general has a positive mindset," he says and that was true of the university, too.

Xavier Duran, interim head of MBA programmes at Alliance Manchester, says that while students without an undergraduate degree have taken the course, it was a big step up. "We tend to take people from all sorts of different backgrounds and every single walk of life."

The fact that Kompany had already demonstrated leadership skills on and off the pitch was in his favour. The course uses the "Manchester method", which aims to apply learning to practical situations. This involves a lot of "do-it-yourself", Kompany explains.

An MBA will help him develop his business career once he finishes playing football. Kompany says he has experienced success and has learnt from his failures, in particular through a chain of sports bars in Belgium. Inexperience and enthusiasm led him to sink money into the bars. Revenues did not meet targets and he had failed to take into account overheads such as leases, stock and staff costs. He lost about £2m. The two bars he opened shut after a year. He learnt a lot about responsibility, "having to unwind it all whilst remaining a good human being. You don't want to lay off anyone [or] have an impact on other businesses that would bankrupt them or cause problems for families".

The MBA will help him present a proper business plan and account for the unexpected next time, he says. His Bonka Circus, a communication and advertising agency in Belgium, has gone better. Kompany invested in Bonka

Circus in 2011 when it became a profit-making company rather than a social enterprise. Turnover is more than €5m. "I'm proud of it because it started with absolutely nothing which is, I think, the right way to start a story," he says.

His advice is to find the right people and reward them with stakes in the business rather than big wages early on.

"The success of Bonka Circus is 100 per cent down to the people. You find the right people, you motivate them and you kind of nudge them in the right direction after that or at some stage if they do really well you almost ride on the wave of success."

Business people are often eager to learn from sport and Kompany says there are parallels. Captaincy is like middle management, he says. "You're a captain but you don't really have any power over anyone. It's a very challenging way of being a leader because you have no tools to exploit." He learnt how to deal with different players. Some responded to a telling-off, others to an arm around the shoulder.

Kompany's final dissertation could also help businesses, he says. He examined the link between home form and the atmosphere in a stadium. He asked top players around Europe at which grounds they performed well as home players and which intimidated them as away players. The same venues came up time and again for a good atmosphere, including Dortmund, home to Europe's tallest football terrace, and Celtic Park in Glasgow. He says these clubs had cheaper tickets and a close relationship with their city and the fans. Few were in the Premier League, he notes. Business could learn how to create a "fortress" in their institution that rallies people to a "common purpose".

Kompany will stay in the game after retirement. He has worked in it for 25 years and says leaving would be like qualifying as a doctor and giving up medicine in your 30s.

He already owns, with his sister, a community club in Brussels used to help children in deprived neighbourhoods stay out of trouble and break down racial barriers. "I find football much more powerful than what grown-ups want it to be. It's a community to me, it's something very meaningful in the life of many, many people and especially the youth. And, therefore, I think it can bring social cohesion," he says.

The African refugee's child, who came to live his dream in Europe through football, seems to be trying to preserve something of that idealistic spirit.

Meanwhile, Kompany is able to joke that he is one of few people to do an MBA who are likely to earn less afterwards. He reportedly receives a basic salary of more than £6m a year. But a long retirement would be his "worst nightmare". "I'd rather give up most of my wealth to have the guarantee that I can carry on working for the rest of my life." **GB**



PHOTO: AFP/GETTY IMAGES



CV

1986 Born in Brussels

1992 Anderlecht academy

2003 Anderlecht debut, wins Belgian title in the 2003/04 season

2004 Belgium debut at 17

2006 Joins Hamburg SV

2008 Leaves Hamburg for Manchester City

2011 Marries Manchester City fan Carla Higgs. They have three children.

2012 City wins first league title in 44 years. Starts Global Part-time MBA at Alliance Manchester Business School

2013 Buys third division Belgian club and renames it BX Brussels, to provide opportunities in a deprived part of the city

2014 Sets up Good Kompany sports bars in Belgium. They close a year later. Ambassador for SOS Children's Villages, a charity helping children who cannot live with their families

2017 Completes MBA

Above, top Lifting the Premier League trophy as Manchester City's captain in 2012

Above A computer-generated image of the new building at Alliance Manchester Business School