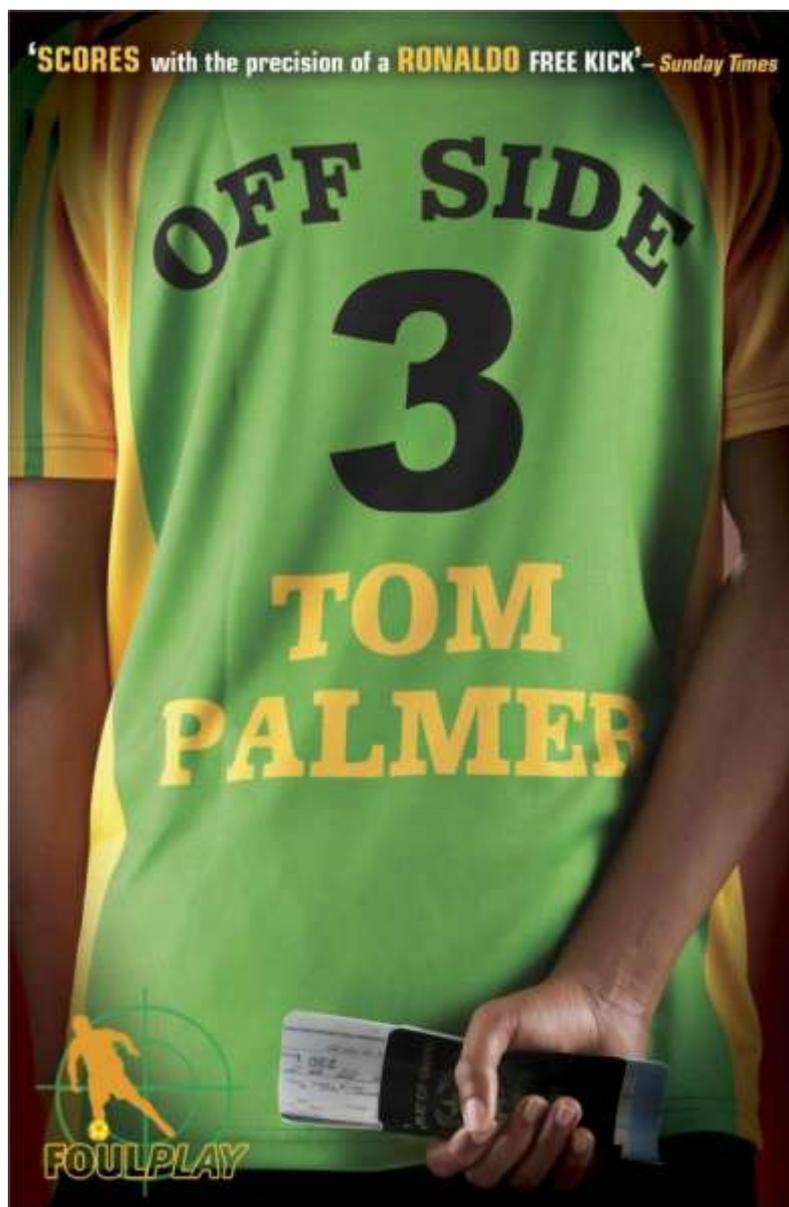


TOM PALMER

FOUL PLAY 3 : OFFSIDE



Danny Harte is obsessed with two things - watching football and tackling crime.



Chapter 2 : Three Thousand Miles South

The weather was cool in Kumasi, Ghana's second city. Heavy clouds seemed to be pulling the vast sky down to the ground. A breeze was making the trees and the corn fields dance.

In a clearing, a patch of sparsely-grassed ground, on the outskirts of Kumasi, a football pitch had been marked out and there were even nets in both goals. It was one of the top places to play football in the city and the best unsigned players came here to show off their skills.

Dozens of them came every day. Game after game. It was an unofficial football academy, a place where boys with big dreams showed what they could do. And every player playing knew that eyes were watching: eyes that could change their lives forever.

Kofi Danquah, a sixteen year old boy, was on the ball now. Kofi travelled to Kumasi every day by foot or in the back of a pick up truck. He lived several kilometres away, with his parents who were cocoa bean farmers.

In the last year, two boys that Kofi knew had been spotted here, then taken on to Europe to play football. One - Nelson Otoo - who was two years older than Kofi, had signed for a club in Belgium. They had seen his picture in a newspaper that the player had sent home to his family. Otoo's family were now rich. They had moved away from their old home to a wealthy part of Kumasi.

Otoo's money meant that his family's life had changed forever. And not just his mother and father, but his uncles and aunts and dozens of cousins.

Other boys had gone to Italy, France and Germany. All hoping to be the next Michael Essien. Or Anthony Owusu. To be a famous footballer.

Some had never been seen back in Kumasi again. Or heard of by their families.

Kofi always swore that if he made it to Europe he would honour his family. Like Nelson Otoo. Like Anthony Owusu.

Kofi looked up to see a pair of defenders approaching him. The one on the left was not so good. Kofi knew he could beat him easily. The one on the right, however, was Enoch Ngugi, the best footballer on the pitch. Ngugi was so good he had European clubs after him. It was rumoured that an AC Milan scout was on the touchline watching Ngugi now. All the players had noticed the two white men, sitting in plastic chairs, occasionally talking to each other.

That was why this next move was so important to Kofi. If he was ever going to be good enough to have an agent from Europe take an interest in him, he would have to be able to get past players like Enoch Ngugi.

Kofi stood on the ball and waited as the defenders came closer. Then he feinted to go right and saw the lesser defender lunge at him. Kofi took the ball past him with ease.

Now he had to beat Ngugi.

But Ngugi was strong, his bigger frame next to Kofi.

Kofi was small for his age, it was true. But he was also fast. Really fast.

So he forced himself on, trying to edge ahead of Ngugi's. For a moment they were shoulder to shoulder, Kofi trying to cope with Ngugi's strength, Ngugi with Kofi's speed. Kofi knew what he had to do: he had to believe he could win this battle. *I can beat him*, he said to himself

Then, suddenly. Ngugi was somewhere behind. Kofi *had* beaten him.

Now he was one-on-one with the keeper. This was his chance. He could feel the adrenalin coursing through him.

And Kofi thought, *What would Anthony Owusu do now? Ghana's greatest-ever footballer. Kofi's hero. A millionaire living in England. The man whose shirt Kofi was wearing.*

He'd shoot. Kofi drew back his right leg and fired.

The ball flew like a rocket. Through the flailing arms of the keeper. *Goal!*

Kofi Danquah is a brilliant young footballer, based in Ghana. The book begins with him being offered a place to play for a Premier League team in England. But when he reaches the UK, all is not as he expected.

In a chance meeting he comes across Danny Harte, the football detective. Danny tries to help Kofi. But things get worse. Much worse.

Read on ... FOUL PLAY 3: Offside by Tom Palmer available from your library and bookshops. ISBN 9780141323671
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