

Alternatives to N’Golo Kante...where are they?

The transfer market is in full swing, qualifying for European competitions is well underway and just last week pre-season friendlies began. During this time, managers and coaches have the time to upgrade their squads with players for either quality or quantity purposes. Ideally, you would like the two in one package but with the market demands these days, that is not always possible. What if it was though and some players were just constantly overlooked by clubs? For that reason, I built a player database (6 Premier League seasons) and wanted to see what information I could find out of it.

In this edition of the scout, I look at the peculiar case of N’Golo Kante and is the Premier League hiding others like him? Yes, Kante is special but I think there are players like him in the league. The following table shows an example of players (also Premier League) who play in the same position as Kante. Based on his position and what he became known for were his Interceptions and Tackles. All one should do is look.

Interceptions & Tackles Per Game	2015/2016	2016/2017
N’Golo Kante	9.86	5.99
Player A	8.34	7.24
Player B	6.50	6.04

Interestingly what springs to mind is the decrease in all three players’ combined metrics and could be explained by a variety of different reasons. While age plays a role in reducing player’s ability to move around the pitch, it would not explain the decline as all are still reasonably young (26, 27 & 25). One major reason for me would be the teams they are playing in. Last season, Kante and Player A moved from lesser quality teams as Leicester and Aston Villa to Chelsea and Everton. At these clubs, it is quite reasonable to assume that they had “less” clean-up to do than at their previous clubs.

Not sure if you have been able to figure out who Player A was but it was Senegalese international Idrissa Gueye. Last season, Everton bought him from Aston Villa for £8.5 million. Quite a bargain I must say. For a player of his calibre and quality, his performances have turned some heads in the league itself and Arsenal were rumoured to be interested in his services in [late April](#).

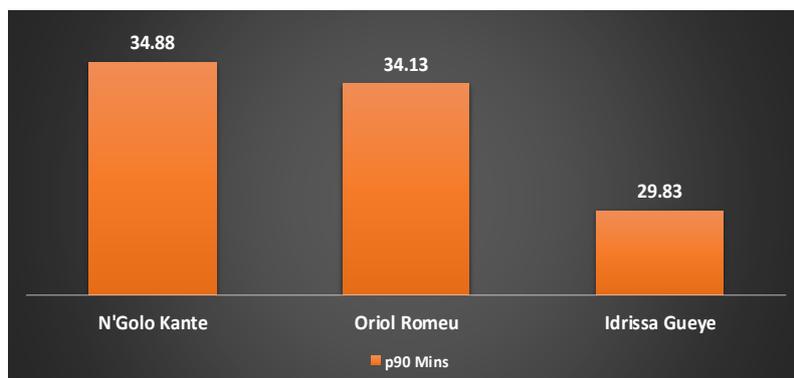


Kante receives the most plaudits and it is not hard to see how and why that is. He, after all, was the Hoover that cleaned up and helped Leicester City and Chelsea win a Premier League Title What about Player B? He’s been included in the mix so surely, he must be interesting for one reason or another? Let’s go back three years ago, and Jose Mourinho was involved in getting rid of the player. He was considered not good enough at 22 years of age but now after more playing time and maturing it should be put to bed. The player in question is Southampton’s, Oriol Romeu.

Examining some basic publicly available data, we could build a profile of Kante and compare him to Gueye and Romeu. This would allow us to visually examine the/if any differences between the three players. Let’s use last season’s data as an example.

For the last part of this report, I will use [p90](#) to compare the three players. This method allows us to examine how each player performed/would have performed if they played 90 minutes every time. In a way, the method is quite similar to a simple per game statistic.

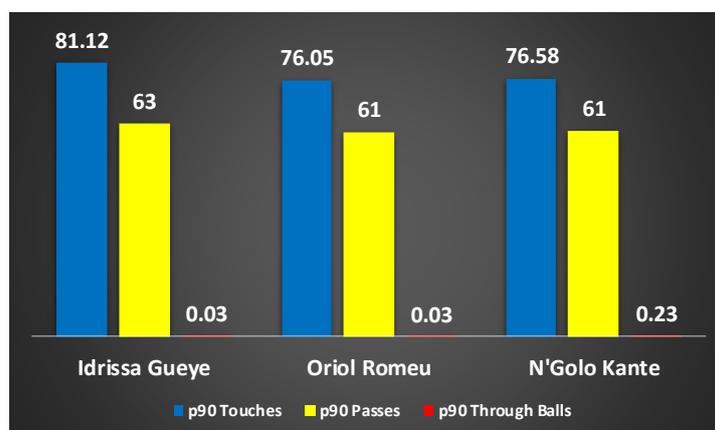
Games Played



Kante and Romeu played nearly every available minute of Premier League football this season, while Gueye missed out on nearly 5 games. These were not due to injury but rather a) international duty with Senegal at the Africa Cup of Nations b) a yellow card suspension and c) being benched.

As defensive midfielders, these players do not often venture into the opposition third and create opportunities for their teammates. They often stand back and assess the possible dangers that might happen if their team gets caught in possession and a counter-attack occurs. In that sense, there are better statistics to use and evaluate the players than shots and goals taken. I have decided to go with touches and passes per game as these are the statistics that are more specific to their positions.

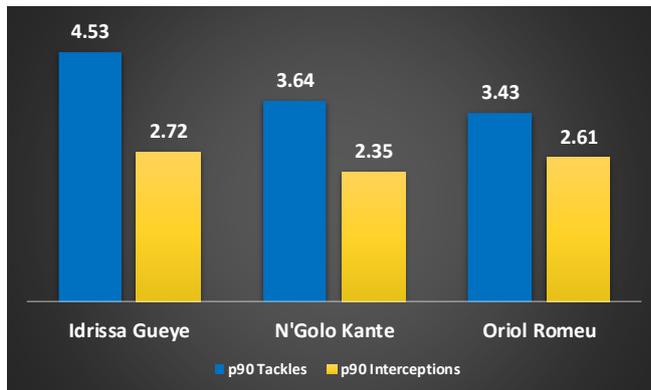
Touches and Passes



On second thought, these metrics do not tell us much about the players themselves other than that they are very similar. As defensive midfielders, it is expected that they have a high number of touches and passes per game as they act as protection and breaking up opposition play. What I have not included is passing % as that will not help explain any part of their game. [Here](#) is why. Instead, something that could help us measure how they distribute the ball forwards is [Key Passes](#). In this metric, Gueye produces nearly 1 KP a game to Kante and Romeu's one every two games.

The most important part of their game and something that earned Kante phenomenal accolades last season was his tackles and interception rates at Leicester City. It was also something that helped him earn [two individual awards](#) this season ahead of team-mate Eden Hazard.

Tackles and Interceptions



As previously discussed, all three players contributions have decreased since last year. What is, however, incredible to examine is Gueye's defensive contributions in comparison to Kante and Romeu's. He played fewer games last year yet made more tackles and interceptions than Kante and Romeu.

Market Value

The website www.transfermarkt.com lists a whole bunch of professional soccer players market value at different times throughout their career. At the time of writing, Kante was valued the most expensive of the three at £50million, then Gueye at £18million and last but not least Romeu at £10million. From this, I would say that based on the performance of the three, the market value might not accurately reflect the performances of the players correctly. For instance, Romeu's performances in accordance with quite a number of metrics tie him quite close to Kante. Therefore, the alternative options to Kante do exist and clubs should know how and where to look to find these players.

Conclusion

This piece hopefully showed why Kante was not a once in a lifetime player in the PL but rather that he set the pace for players like him to be noticed and used more favourably by clubs. While we all enjoyed Leicester City's surprise Premier League winning season and Kante playing a major role in helping them achieve that, players like him exist in the league or even abroad. With all the technology available it is incredible how many clubs still get it wrong. All you have to do it look.