

# Never Lose!

A Film Treatment

The True Story  
of  
Dr. John Kline

Screenplay - Tom G. Robertson

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## A Film Treatment

Africa 2007 – An elderly man looks out from a mountaintop in Ghana to a breathtaking view across the wide expanse of West Africa. For Dr. John Kline it has been a remarkable journey that began in the hard tough streets of Detroit. It is the story of a young man who rose from the streets to All-American glory and international fame as a basketball player. He then fell into the hellish pit of heroin addiction before fighting his way back to discover what it really means to be an African American man.

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“Never Lose” begins in 1949 and is set against and in the turbulent era of the civil rights struggle. Young Johnny Kline is a basketball legend in Detroit with his speed and incredible leaping ability. With his father gone and mother remarried, he lives with feisty Auntie Rea who has raised him, cheered him, and took on anyone who messed with “her boy.” With his infectious smile and generous fun loving spirit Johnny soon attracts a beautiful and talented young jazz singer named Dorothy. They fall in love as both dream of being “stars.” Johnny is “discovered” playing Sunday afternoon basketball in the Detroit Recreational League and soon offered a scholarship at Wayne University.

At Wayne, he becomes a basketball All-American and record setting high jumper. When Dorothy becomes pregnant they face a daunting dilemma. Deciding against abortion they choose to keep the child and marry. With the birth of his son Johnny struggles to juggle two jobs, family, athletics, travel, and classes. His academics suffer and Johnny loses his scholarship at Wayne. His old coach gets him a tryout with the Harlem Globetrotters where he excels. Suddenly having to leave his wife and son behind, Johnny is caught up in a whirlwind Globetrotters tour for eight months traveling from town to town achieving fame if not fortune. For the first time he begins truly experiencing bigotry in a still very segregated society. At the end of the long season they try to come together as a family but soon he is back on the road. When his second child is born, Johnny is enjoying a glamorous international tour filled with adulation, parties, drugs, drinking, and exotic women. It would be months before he saw his new daughter. Dorothy is alone trying to raise two children, having given up her singing, When Johnny comes back to Detroit, she is caught having an affair. The marriage crumbles.

**Johnny escapes into the frenetic international tour, traveling to country after country, meeting celebrities, kings, princes, and even the Pope. On the domestic tour they encounter a harsh dose of racism. Johnny and the other black players are denied hotel rooms and restaurants. Though the black players are the big attraction, the Globetrotters give white players a higher travel allowance because they claim “White restaurants and hotels are more expensive.”**

**Johnny becomes known as a “troublemaker” protesting the discrimination. After a thousand games and racial incident after incident, Johnny defiantly quits. Looking for a fresh start Johnny takes his “hot” new girlfriend Lenore and heads for New York to play in the Eastern Professional Basketball League.**

**Johnny revels in the Harlem high life of drugs and drinking. Ironically at the same time he is hearing Malcolm X and Elijah Mohammed preach about African American manhood. The emotionally eclectic Harlem experience is suddenly shattered with the death of Auntie Rea leaving Johnny completely devastated. She was like a mother and father to him, the anchor in his life. After the funeral Johnny decides to stay in Detroit “to be closer” to his children who were growing up fast. He had vowed not to abandon them as his father had, but in fact he was barely in their lives. He began a downward spiral into heroin addiction and a world blurred by drugs.**

**Heroin became not just a “monkey on his back” but King Kong in a “netherworld of pimps, players, muggers, dealers, junkies and stoolies.” To pay for his own habit, Johnny began dealing heroin and cocaine in a very dangerous and sleazy world. He was arrested and charged with serious drug violations, but the Judge gave him probation when he learned of Kline’s basketball career. Johnny was so “strung out” he was high on heroin even during his court hearing and stopped at a dope house minutes after the judge threatened him with ten years if he violated probation.**

**Johnny’s was a slave to drugs. His relationship with Dorothy remained cold despite the fact she had broken up with her “boyfriend” who left her with five more children. Johnny visits with his children, but even then cannot stay away from the heroin and cocaine. He hocks his only pair of shoes in the middle of winter to get a fix and has to wear galoshes. He is almost killed in a shootout with thieves who try to steal his drugs. Following a wild car chase Johnny is arrested again and imprisoned for violating parole. When Dorothy learns he is in prison, she pleads with the parole officer to let him come back and live with her and the children where the environment would help him. Johnny leaves prison on Christmas Eve and shows up at Dorothy’s house stoned. She takes him in but his promises are empty. He pawns his son’s only suit to buy cocaine. He always promises and always misses his son’s basketball games ending up in some tawdry dope house. .**

**Desperate for a “fix” he steals his son’s bicycle at dawn and peddles frantically across Detroit to find a Pawn Shop. He gets \$12 for the bike and shoots up with heroin. When he finally comes home, Johnny is confronted by his son, “What kind**

of man are you?” The pain and sadness in the face of his son haunts Johnny even more than the gaunt and broken face he sees in the mirror.

Johnny Kline had hit bottom and finally realized what kind of man he had become. He began the upward struggle to be the kind of man he wanted to be as an African American. He was nearly 40 years when he broke the chains of addiction and went back to school to earn Bachelors, Masters and Ph.D.

As Dr. John Kline enters the mountain top retreat to address a gathering of African leaders, he is introduced as “a champion for young people, a passionate crusader who has led efforts to end drug abuse in the city of Detroit and state of Michigan...an All American and Hall of Fame Athlete- Founder of the Black Legends of Professional Basketball - a father who helped raise eight children - and an African-American.

Dr, Kline begins his speech... “I looked in the mirror and decided what kind of a man I wanted to be...”