Name: _____ Date: _____

Counted in Days: Jude Bellingham's Records

Reading level 13 · 1442 words

A midfielder is the hardest player to summarize in one number. A striker has goals, a goalkeeper has saves, but a midfielder's work is spread across the whole field, so it is described in several different ways at once. This book reads two kinds of numbers about one midfielder, Jude Bellingham of England and Real Madrid, who was born on June 29, 2003 and, through November 2026, still plays for both. The first kind is a clock: records for being the youngest to do something. The second is a count: what trackers and analysts say a midfielder does. Each rests on a definition, and the definition decides what the number can claim.

The clock begins at Birmingham City. On August 6, 2019, he started a cup game at Portsmouth at 16 years and 38 days old, which made him the youngest first-team player in the club's history. BBC Sport reported that he broke a record held by Trevor Francis, who later played for England. His age is arithmetic: June 29 to August 6 is one day left in June, 31 in July and six in August. Reports differ on how long the old mark had stood. One magazine said 39 years, while a biography page dates Francis's debut to 1970, which would be nearly 50. Stated to the day, the record can be beaten by a player who is a single day younger.

A record has to name its event, because a debut, a goal and a start are separate records. On August 31, 2019, he came off the bench against Stoke City and scored a 2 to 1 winner, which was reported as the club's youngest goalscorer; by this book's count he was then 63 days past his 16th birthday. At Dortmund on September 14, 2020, he scored in the German cup at 17 years and 77 days. Dortmund's own site lists two older marks: 17 years and 82 days in the league and 17 years and 83 days in the cup, so the margins were five days and six. A younger Dortmund player passed his mark that December. Each of these is a separate claim, even when one match produces several.

Europe's Champions League gave him three rungs in six months. On October 20, 2020, he started at Lazio at 17 years and 113 days, the youngest Englishman to start a game in the competition. The old mark was 17 years and 192 days, set on December 6, 2017, so the margin was 79 days. On February 17, 2021, at Sevilla, he became the youngest English starter in a knockout game, at 17 years and 233 days; the old mark was 17 years and 283 days, a margin of 50 days. The gaps between his own rungs, by this book's count, were 120 days and then 56 days. UEFA lists his first goal in the competition as April 14, 2021, at 17 years and 289 days, the youngest English scorer.

For England the clock ran faster still. On November 12, 2020, he made his debut at 17 years and 136 days, the third-youngest England player ever. At the Euro, played in 2021, he came

on against Croatia on June 13 at 17 years and 349 days. Opta gave his age that day as 17 years and 349 days; the old mark for a Euro finals match was 18 years and 71 days, from 2012. Counting a year as 365 days, that is 436 days minus 349, or 87 days. Six days later a Polish player of 17 years and 246 days broke it, 103 days younger. Age records like these can be broken only by someone who plays younger, so one match can end them. A record is a claim that holds only until someone younger does the same thing.

Now the second kind of number, which depends on a label. The England FA's squad page lists him as a midfielder. One encyclopedia lists him as an attacking midfielder. A June 2023 article from Opta's analysis site says he can play as a holding, box-to-box or attacking midfielder. The record shows why: at Birmingham he started on the left wing, moved to central midfield to build confidence, then played a more advanced role. After he joined Real Madrid in 2023, he was often a number 10, and sometimes a false 9. A position label describes a task, not a person, and the task changes.

What would a box-to-box test look like? One tactics writer defines it as running effectively between your own penalty area and the other team's, and says the harder part is doing so as a repeated action in fast games. The same writer proposes that such a player contributes almost equally in the first and final thirds of the pitch. That is a testable definition, and tracking systems can test it. Under the field rules for international matches, a touchline is 100 to 110 meters and a penalty area is 16.5 meters deep, so the gap between the boxes is roughly 67 to 77 meters, by this book's count.

Two older studies give the running some scale. In 2007, a team tracked 300 top outfield players in 20 Spanish league games and 10 Champions League games, and found that midfield players covered a significantly greater total distance than defenders or forwards. A 2009 study of 28 English Premier League games, played in 2005-06, found that central midfielders covered about 2,825 meters at high intensity in a typical match. In the last 15 minutes their high-intensity running fell by about 20 percent, from 534 to 429 meters. These are group averages from 2005-06 and earlier, in two other leagues, so they describe the job, not Bellingham himself. The study does not say how fast a run must be to count as high intensity, so the figure is best read as a comparison between positions.

Event data counts what happens with the ball, and each count has a definition. Opta defines a carry as moving the ball five meters or more and a progressive carry as moving it more than five meters upfield. It defines expected goals as the likelihood that a chance will be scored, and a tackle as a legal, ground-level challenge in which the player connects with the ball. For the 2022-23 Bundesliga season, its analysts listed him with 76 tackles, the most at Dortmund, and 88 dribbles, the most in the league. It also gave him 9.99 progressive carries per 90 minutes, the highest rate it listed among midfielders. Another provider using a different threshold would publish different counts.

Role changes show up in goals, but only with caution. In 2019-20 at Birmingham he scored four times in around 40 games, about one goal every ten games. England Football wrote on October 30, 2023, that he had scored 13 goals in 13 games for Real Madrid, a rate of one per game. The teams, leagues and opponents differ, and 13 games is a small sample, so the comparison cannot show that he improved or that the role alone explains the rise. What it does show, in the plainest sense, is a change of location: he moved to where goals are scored, as the shift from midfielder to number 10 would predict. He scored 19 league goals in 2023-24.

By 2026 the clock changed type. On June 17, 2026, by one analyst's count he became the youngest European to play in four major men's tournaments, at 22 years and 353 days, and the old mark was 23 years and 108 days. On June 23, against Ghana, he played his 50th England game at 22 years and 359 days, with the old mark at 23 years and 159 days. From his debut to that game is 2,049 days, by this book's count. A total of this kind depends on starting early and on being picked, so it combines a clock with a count. At that World Cup he also scored seven goals, one more than any England player had scored at a single major tournament.

Every figure here is dated through November 2026, and each kind of record has its own rule for ending. A youngest-ever record cannot change for him, because those days are fixed, and it ends only when someone younger does the same thing. A total, such as caps or tournament goals, can be passed by anyone who plays enough. A tracker's average, such as 2,825 meters, is only as reliable as the sample and the speed threshold behind it. A midfielder's career is therefore measured twice: once by a clock that counts days, and once by a tracker that counts nearly everything else.

Questions

1. By this book's count, how much younger was Bellingham's Euro mark than the old one?

A. 87 days
B. 103 days
C. 6 days

2. Why does the book say 13 goals in 13 games does not show he improved?

A. The goals were not counted by the league
B. He had stopped playing for the team then
C. The teams differ and 13 games is a small sample

3. In the sentence "Event data counts what happens with the ball," what does event data mean?

A. Records of actions in a game

B. The schedule of all the matches
C. Tickets sold for each match

4. What is the margin between the old and new Champions League start records in October 2020?

A. 50 days
B. 79 days
C. 113 days

5. Why can a youngest-ever record not change for Bellingham himself?

A. The record books are closed
B. Those days are already fixed
C. He is no longer a midfielder

6. What does the book say a position label describes?

A. A person's size
B. A shirt number
C. A task that changes

Words to know

margin: size of gap
definition: exact meaning
tracking: following movement
sample: small studied group
threshold: cutoff line

Answer key: Counted in Days: Jude Bellingham's Records

1. A. 87 days
2. C. The teams differ and 13 games is a small sample
3. A. Records of actions in a game
4. B. 79 days
5. B. Those days are already fixed
6. C. A task that changes