Name: _____ Date: _____

How Fast Is Kylian Mbappé?

Reading level 11 (7th grade) · 1343 words

Who is Kylian Mbappé? The short answer fits on a roster card. He is a French forward, born on December 20, 1998, and he is 5 feet 10 inches tall. He grew up in Bondy, a suburb of Paris. Through November 2026 he plays for Real Madrid in Spain, and he captains the French national team. The longer answer is mostly about one thing, his speed. This book follows it from a boys' club in Bondy to the cameras that time him at World Cups. It also says which numbers do not hold still.

Bondy gave him his first lessons. In one account, at 11 he was playing with 13-year-olds, and at 13 with 15-year-olds. A coach there, Tonio Riccardi, said, "Kylian doesn't have legs; he's got rockets." In 2011 Mbappé gained a place at the French national institute at Clairefontaine, and he stayed two years. A coach there, Jean-Claude Lafargue, said he could "move past people and scorch the ground in the last 40 metres." Both are coaches' impressions, not measurements. In 2013 he chose to join Monaco.

At Monaco the records came quickly. On December 2, 2015, he came on as a substitute against Caen, at 16 years and 11 months. The game ended 1 to 1. No one that young had played for Monaco. Two months later he scored his first goal for the club, and by 2016-17 Monaco was the French champion. In spring 2016 he also won a youth cup, the Coupe Gambardella, with the club's under-19 team. On August 31, 2017, Paris Saint-Germain signed him, first on a loan for one season. By June 2024, ESPN reported, he was Paris's all-time top scorer.

On June 3, 2024, Real Madrid announced that he would be a Real Madrid player for the next five seasons. He made his debut on August 14, 2024, and scored in a 2 to 0 win over Atalanta in the UEFA Super Cup. In 2025-26 he finished as top scorer in the Spanish league and in the Champions League. For France, coach Didier Deschamps named him captain after Hugo Lloris retired from the team. He wears number 10 for the club. In 2026 Mbappé played his 100th game for his country.

His first World Cup was in Russia in 2018, when he was 19. He was the youngest French player ever to play at a World Cup, and FIFA gave him its Young Player Award. On June 30 he scored twice in four minutes in a 4 to 3 win over Argentina. In the final, France beat Croatia 4 to 2, and Mbappé scored. Only one teenager had scored in a World Cup final before him, Pelé in 1958. France were the champions. His second World Cup came in 2022, and his third in 2026.

At the 2022 World Cup in Qatar he scored three goals in the final, only the second man to do that in a World Cup final, and won the Golden Boot as top scorer. In 2026 the tournament

moved to the United States, Canada and Mexico. He scored 10 goals there and won the Golden Boot again. That made 22 World Cup goals in all, one more than Lionel Messi. France lost its semifinal to Spain, and then lost the third-place game to England, 6 to 4. Records move, so these counts are through July 2026.

How does anyone know how fast a player runs? At big tournaments, cameras around the stadium follow every player. Software works out speed from how far a player moves between two readings, after smoothing the raw positions. Researchers who studied Euro 2024 used data from an optical system made by Hawk-Eye, which they say was checked against gold-standard methods. UEFA calls sprinting the most physically demanding action a player performs. But what counts as a sprint? Studies draw the line at slightly different speeds, around 25 kilometers an hour, so even the word has no single meaning in the research.

Here are his numbers, with dates. At Euro 2024, UEFA's report named his 36.7 kilometers an hour the top speed of the tournament. At the 2026 World Cup, news reports gave him 37.61, ahead of Anthony Elanga of Sweden. One of those reports cited FIFA's list, and we could not open that list, so we call the number reported. A kilometer is about six tenths of a mile. By our arithmetic, 37.61 is about 23 miles an hour, or ten meters every second. The two numbers differ by about one kilometer an hour.

The 2018 run against Argentina has the most numbers. An article on FIFA's website said he was clocked at 37 kilometers an hour with the ball at his feet. Italian television, citing an official FIFA measurement, gave an average of 32.4 and a peak of 38. A peak is one instant of the run, and an average covers more of it. Other outlets attach 38 to a different game, a league match in 2019, so the same number belongs to two different runs. The Italian report also compared him with Usain Bolt and decided that Mbappé was not faster.

Why does a fast forward worry defenders? The data company Opta defines a through ball as "a pass splitting the defence for a teammate to run on to." The runner must get there first. In a study of the 2018-19 Premier League, England's top league, a lone center forward made about nine runs in behind the defense a game, on average. In another study, of 360 goals in Germany's top league, a straight sprint was the scorer's most common action just before the goal. It came before 45 percent of the goals, mostly with no opponent and no ball.

The offside rule gives the runner a narrow path. Under Law 11, being in an offside position is not an offense. A player level with the second-last opponent is not offside. The position is judged when a teammate plays the ball, so a fast runner can start level and use his speed after the pass. That puts pressure on the assistant referee, who must judge it live. A study of the 2002 World Cup, long before today's video checks, found that assistant referees' offside calls were wrong 26.2 percent of the time. Its authors link many errors to the flash-lag effect, in which a moving object seems to be ahead of where it is.

Sprinting is also where many injuries happen. The UEFA injury study followed 54 teams that

played in the Champions League group stage. It lasted 21 seasons and counted 2,636 hamstring injuries, to the muscle at the back of the thigh. Running or sprinting was the most common way they happened. The authors suspect, but have not proved, that more high-risk activity is the cause. A review of 15 studies found that programs with one exercise, the Nordic hamstring, had about half the injury rate. None of this is about Mbappé.

Is speed what makes a forward? Not alone. In sprint tests of 939 players at an Olympic training center in Norway, timed electronically, forwards were only 1.4 percent faster than defenders over the first 20 meters. On average, sprint speed peaked between ages 20 and 28 and fell after that. Those are averages for groups, not forecasts for any one player. A coach's word such as "rockets" is an impression. The measurements add that the gaps between levels were small, which is worth remembering beside a number like 37.61.

So how fast is Kylian Mbappé? The top numbers run from about 37 to 38 kilometers an hour, close to 23 miles an hour, depending on who measured, when and how. Euro 2024 gave 36.7, and the 2026 World Cup was reported at 37.61. A peak, an average and a coach's picture are three different kinds of answer, and each measures something a little different. He is still playing, so the numbers may move. Through November 2026 he is 27, and the next World Cup is in 2030. Its cameras will give someone a new number to argue about.

Questions

1. Why does the book call the coaches' sayings about the young Mbappé impressions rather than measurements?

A. They were never said out loud
B. They describe how he looked but no instrument timed him
C. They were said by his teammates

2. What is the difference between the 32.4 and the 38 reported for the 2018 run?

A. 32.4 is the peak and 38 is the average
B. Both are averages from two cameras
C. 32.4 is an average over the run and 38 is the peak

3. In this book, what does the word impression mean?

A. A personal opinion
B. A drawing
C. A foul

4. According to Law 11 as the book describes it, when is a forward's position judged for offside?

A. When the referee blows the whistle
B. When he reaches the goal
C. When a teammate plays the ball

5. What does the book suggest about the hamstring study?

A. It proves sprinting causes all hamstring injuries

B. Its authors suspect more high-risk activity but have not proved it

C. It says Mbappé was injured

6. What was the top speed UEFA's report gave for the whole of Euro 2024?

A. Mbappé at 36.7 kilometers an hour

B. Mbappé at 32.4 kilometers an hour

C. Mbappé at 38.0 kilometers an hour

Words to know

forward: scoring player
sprint: all-out run
clocked: timed
debut: first game
impression: personal opinion

Answer key: How Fast Is Kylian Mbappé?

1. B. They describe how he looked but no instrument timed him
2. C. 32.4 is an average over the run and 38 is the peak
3. A. A personal opinion
4. C. When a teammate plays the ball
5. B. Its authors suspect more high-risk activity but have not proved it
6. A. Mbappé at 36.7 kilometers an hour