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Mbappé on the Run

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 935 words

How fast can a soccer player run? At big tournaments, the fastest runs are about 22 to 23 miles an hour. One of the fastest players is Kylian Mbappé, a French forward. He was born on December 20, 1998. He grew up in Bondy, a suburb of Paris. Through November 2026 he plays for Real Madrid. He also captains France. This book follows his speed. It asks who timed it.

Why does speed matter in soccer? One study watched video of 360 goals in Germany's top league. It looked at the move just before each goal. For the scorer, the most common move was a straight sprint. That came before almost half of the goals. A sprint is a run at full effort.

Mbappé's speed showed early. Bondy is about seven miles from the center of Paris. One account says that at 11 he played with 13-year-olds. At 13 he played with 15-year-olds. A coach at his hometown club once said, "Kylian doesn't have legs; he's got rockets."

In 2011 he won a place at the French national soccer school. It is at Clairefontaine. He stayed there for two years. A coach there said he could "move past people and scorch the ground in the last 40 metres." In 2013 Mbappé chose to join the club Monaco.

On December 2, 2015, Monaco sent him onto the field. It was the 88th minute of a game against Caen. The game ended 1 to 1. He was 16 years and 11 months old. No pro player had ever been younger at Monaco. Two months later he scored his first goal for the club.

In 2017 he moved to Paris Saint-Germain. He signed on August 31, 2017. He was 18, and he had just helped Monaco win the French league. At Paris he became the club's top scorer of all time. He won six league titles there in seven seasons.

Now picture June 30, 2018, in Russia. France is playing Argentina at the World Cup. Mbappé is 19 years old. In the first fifteen minutes, he gets the ball and runs. FIFA's website says he was clocked at 37 kilometers an hour. The ball was at his feet. That is about 23 miles an hour, or ten meters a second.

The run forced a defender, Marcos Rojo, to bring him down inside the penalty area. FIFA wrote that the pace of Mbappé "tore the opposing defence in half." Antoine Griezmann scored from the penalty. A defender who cannot catch a runner has few choices. A foul is one.

Reports do not agree on how fast that run was. FIFA's article said 37. Sky Italia, a TV channel, said an official FIFA measurement gave them. It gave an average of 32.4 kilometers an hour, about 20 miles an hour. It also gave a peak of 38, about 24. An average covers a stretch of running. A peak is the fastest single moment.

Mbappé scored twice in four minutes in that game. France won 4 to 3. Fifteen days later he scored in the final. France beat Croatia 4 to 2. He was 19 years and 207 days old. Only one teenager had scored in a World Cup final before him. That was Pelé, in 1958.

What does a fast forward do to a defense? One study calls it a run in behind. The attacker heads for open space behind the defenders. That can throw them off balance. The study counted these runs in England's top league in 2018-19. A lone center forward made about nine a game, on average. Each run was about 21 meters.

The offside rule limits those runs, but it leaves room. A player is judged at the moment a teammate plays the ball. A player level with the next-to-last defender is not offside. So a fast forward can start even with the defenders. He waits for the pass, and then he uses his speed.

At the 2022 World Cup he scored three goals in the final. He won the Golden Boot as top scorer. On June 3, 2024, Real Madrid said he would play for the club for the next five seasons. He played his first game for the club on August 14, 2024. It was a win in the UEFA Super Cup.

At the 2026 World Cup he scored 10 goals, the most of anyone. That made 22 World Cup goals in all. Lionel Messi of Argentina had one fewer. Through July 2026, no one had scored more. France lost its semifinal to Spain. Then France lost the third-place game to England and finished fourth.

How do we know how fast Mbappé runs? Cameras around the stadium follow each player. A computer notes where each one stands, many times a second. It works out speed from how far a player moved between two moments. Then someone must choose a moment to report. It can be the fastest, or the average.

At Euro 2024, UEFA named the fastest player of the whole event. It was Mbappé, at 36.7 kilometers an hour. At the 2026 World Cup, news reports gave him 37.61. Both are about 23 miles an hour. One report said it came from FIFA's list. So we call it reported.

So how fast is Kylian Mbappé? Every top speed in this book comes to about 23 or 24 miles an hour. The number you get depends on who measured, and when, and how. Through November 2026 he is 27. The next World Cup is in 2030, in Morocco, Spain and Portugal. New cameras will time new runs, and someone will get a new number.

Questions

1. In the study of 360 goals in Germany's top league, what had the scorer most often just done before the goal?

A. Made a straight sprint
B. Taken a corner kick
C. Changed teams

2. How old was Mbappé when he came on for Monaco against Caen?

A. 13 years and 2 months
B. 19 years and 3 months
C. 16 years and 11 months

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

A. Stopped by a defender
B. Timed by a measuring system
C. Sent off the field

4. Why can an average and a peak give different numbers for the same run?

A. An average covers the whole run, and a peak is the fastest single moment
B. A peak is always measured by a different camera
C. An average is only used for slow players

5. Why can a fast forward start even with the defenders and still not be offside?

A. The referee cannot see him
B. Offside is judged when a teammate plays the ball, and level is not offside
C. He is allowed to use his hands

6. Which team did France lose to in the 2026 semifinal?

A. England
B. Argentina
C. Spain

Words to know

forward: scoring player
sprint: all-out run
clocked: timed
defenders: back-line players
peak: highest point

Answer key: Mbappé on the Run

1. A. Made a straight sprint
2. C. 16 years and 11 months
3. B. Timed by a measuring system
4. A. An average covers the whole run, and a peak is the fastest single moment
5. B. Offside is judged when a teammate plays the ball, and level is not offside
6. C. Spain