# Declan Rice: Defensive Strength but Limited Progression

This report analyzes Declan Rice's performance during Euro 2024, focusing on his contributions as a defensive midfielder and examining his limitations in progressive passing. While Rice provided much-needed defensive stability for England, his passing profile, when compared to other midfielders in the tournament, shows a conservative approach that hindered England's attacking transitions.

## Key Findings

**Rice's reluctance to advance the ball up the field hindered England's ability to break down defenses.** This issue was so prominent that Trent Alexander-Arnold, typically a rightback, was often paired with Rice in midfield to compensate for his lack of forward passing, allowing England to progress the ball more effectively.

Progressive passing: Rice averaged 4.46 progressive passes per 90 minutes, significantly lower than other midfielders, including Toni Kroos (19.67 progressive passes per 90). • Positional play: Rice's progressive passes largely came from deeper midfield areas, limiting England's ability to quickly transition from defense to attack.

## Progressive Passing Analysis

In a scatter plot comparing midfielders in Euro 2024, Declan Rice averaged 4.46 progressive passes per 90 minutes. This was significantly lower than several of the standout midfielders in the tournament.

Toni Kroos led with 19.67 progressive passes per 90 minutes, exemplifying his crucial role in pushing the play forward for Germany.

Bruno Fernandes and Trent Alexander-Arnold also far exceeded Rice, each contributing more than 10 progressive passes per 90 minutes. These players were pivotal in moving the ball upfield and creating attacking opportunities for their teams.

Other players such as Hakan Çalhanoğlu and Pierre-Emile Højbjerg displayed a more balanced passing profile, actively participating in both defensive duties and advancing the ball through midfield.

Even players like Granit Xhaka and Pascal Groß, who hovered around Rice in terms of total passes, managed to contribute more significantly to moving the ball forward.

These comparisons illustrate Rice's conservative role in the midfield, where he prioritized retaining possession in deeper areas rather than pushing into attacking spaces.

Figure 1: Progressive Passes per 90 Minutes (Scatter Plot)
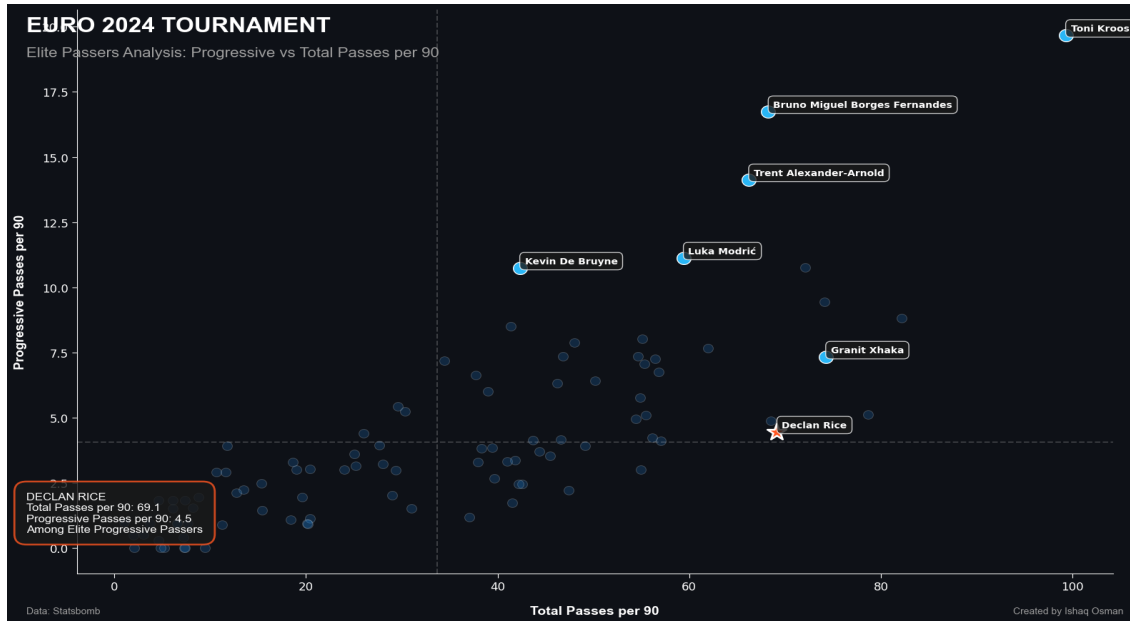
A heatmap of Rice's passing distribution further supports this observation. Most of Rice's progressive passes originated from deeper positions in midfield, contributing to England's slower transitions from defense to attack. Unlike midfielders like Kroos or Fernandes, Rice rarely ventured into more advanced areas of the pitch, which made England's build-up play predictable and less dynamic.

Figure 2: Progressive Passes by Declan Rice per Game (Heatmap)
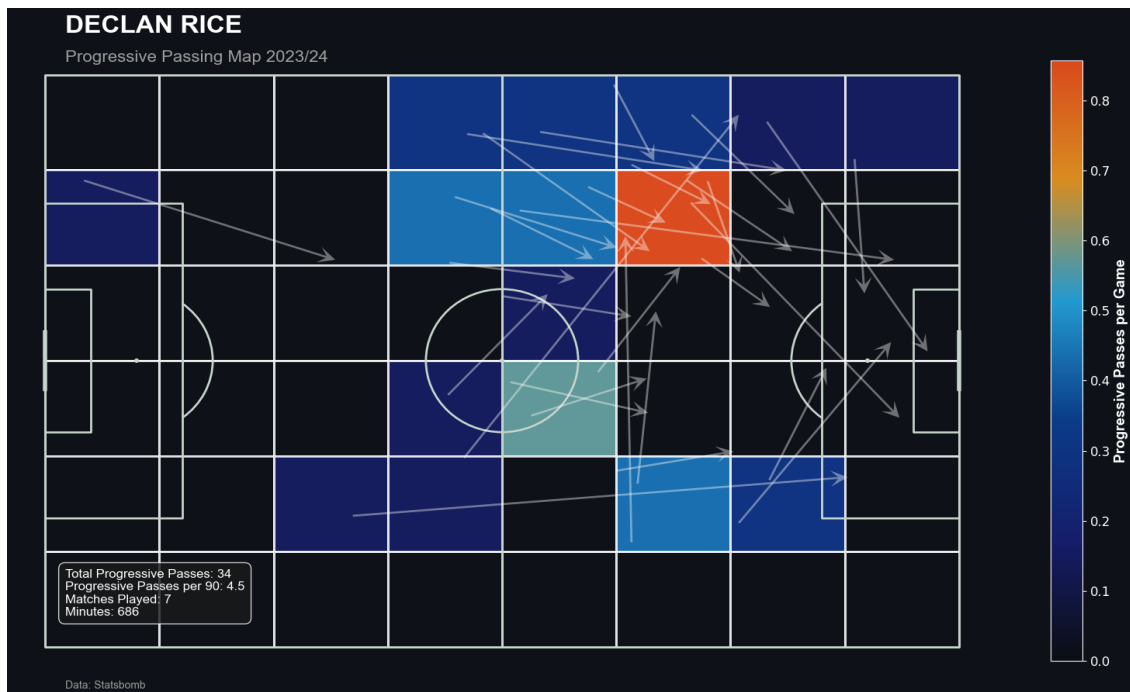
Impact on England's Chances

The conservative nature of Rice's passing not only slowed England's attacking transitions but also limited their ability to break down organized defenses. With a lack of a progressive midfielder capable of driving the ball forward, England found it more difficult to create clear goal-scoring opportunities against teams employing a low-block defensive strategy.

Trent Alexander-Arnold's deployment in midfield alongside Rice was likely a tactical move to counterbalance Rice's limitations. However, this strategy highlighted the need for a player who could combine Rice's defensive stability with a more dynamic passing range.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Declan Rice's performance at Euro 2024 demonstrated his value as a defensive midfielder, but it also revealed his limitations in progressive passing. Compared to other midfielders in the tournament, Rice's conservative approach restricted England's ability to transition quickly and break down defensive structures. To maximize their chances in future tournaments, England would benefit from a midfielder who can maintain Rice's defensive solidity while offering greater involvement in advancing the play.