

Declan Rice 2023-2024 Premier League Analysis

Have Arsenal improved after spending 116,60 million € on the English midfielder?

Index:

- Introduction;
- Player general information/statistics;
- Club's context;
- Player in-depth analysis:
 - Shooting;
 - Shot Creation;
 - Passing/Possession;
 - Defending;
- Final remarks;
- Sources.



Introduction

In a league recently dominated by Manchester City, Mikel Arteta's long-term plan for Arsenal had started to come to fruition as visible signs of improvement since the 2021-2022 season showed a promising future for *The Gunners*. In the next season, Arsenal began to surprise after they reached, and held comfortably for a long period of time, the top spot of the Premier League. However, mostly given to a lack of depth and rotation within the squad, the red club from North London fell short of silverware when Pep Guardiola's team managed to recover the ground lost and end the season in an extraordinarily consistent manner.

Having stayed 5 points below Manchester City, Arsenal looked forward to the summer of 2023 to strengthen their squad, especially its depth. Jurriën Timber, former Ajax defender, David Raya, on loan from Brentford, and Kai Havertz, acquired for 75 M € from city rivals Chelsea, were brought in for this exact reason while Declan Rice, a defensive midfielder previously from West Ham, represented a huge investment by the club in an intent to compete with the very best.

Despite losing Granit Xhaka, a key player last season, *The Gunners* have definitely reinforced their squad in the market, but has it paid off?

Player General Information/Statistics

Declan Rice, born in 14/01/1999 (25 years old), in London, England, is a right-footed defensive midfielder who had 7 and 4 years in Chelsea's and West Ham's academies, respectively, before breaking through the scenes in the 2017-2018 season in West Ham's colours. The English player has 296 appearances in his senior career, accumulating 22 goals and 23 assists. Declan Rice played 3 games for Ireland, having later switched to England where he so far scored 3 times in the 50 matches that he played.

This season, Arsenal's most expensive signing played all the 38 games in England's top flight and a further 10 in the UEFA Champions League, in which he contributed directly to 1 goal. In the Premier League, though, the numbers he achieved were nothing short of surprising as he netted 7 times and assisted 9. Declan Rice also played in the Community Shield, FA Cup (1 game) and EFL Cup (1 game).

Club's Context

Arsenal are a positional-based side with emphasis on controlling the tempo of the game, dictating its rhythm by surrounding the opposition (very high-press) and circulating the ball patiently in order to dismantle the low block, an approach most of the teams playing against *The Gunners* adopt.

In the 2022-2023 season, they accumulated 84 points, with 88 goals scored (2.31 per game) and 43 conceded (1.13). In the 2023/2024 edition of the Premier League, however, Arsenal achieved 89 points with more goals scored, this time 91 (2.39 per game), and with only 29 conceded (0.76). The xGDp90 has also improved massively, going from +0.78 to +1.27.

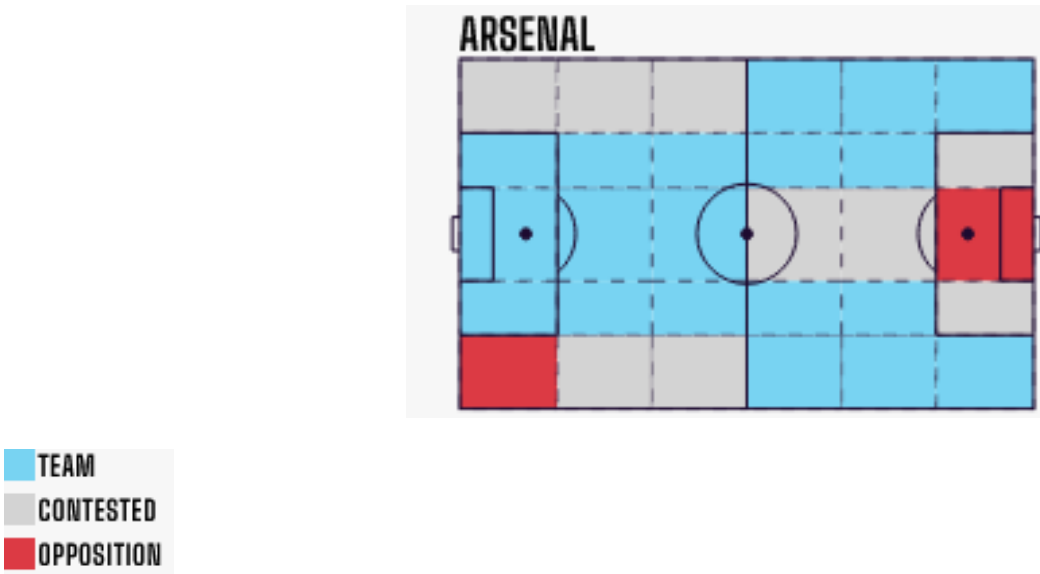
Mikel Arteta has, undoubtedly, shifted the attitude of this club, which translates to the tactics that make this team so ruthless in attack yet extremely solid in defence, visible in this seasons' underlying numbers: 2.00 xGFp90 and 0.73 xGAp90.

In the "Player In-depth Analysis" section, we will analyse the contribution Declan Rice has had in the metrics in regard to each aspect of the football game and how he helped Arsenal reach new heights in an extraordinary fashion.

Player In-depth Analysis

❑ Shooting

Having just had an xGp90 of 0.07 in his last season at West Ham as the team’s penalty taker (with a slight overperformance of +0.04 Goals - xG per 90), Arsenal’s new defensive midfielder began to play in more advanced positions. Even though the red club from North London tends to dominate possession for the majority of the game, Declan Rice often played as an 8 in a similar role that Granit Xhaka had last season, offering more attacking threat to *The Gunners*. In fact, Declan Rice’s shooting numbers have gone up considerably, as he racked up 0.09 xGp90, with, again, but this time better, an overperformance of +0.10 Goals - xG per 90.

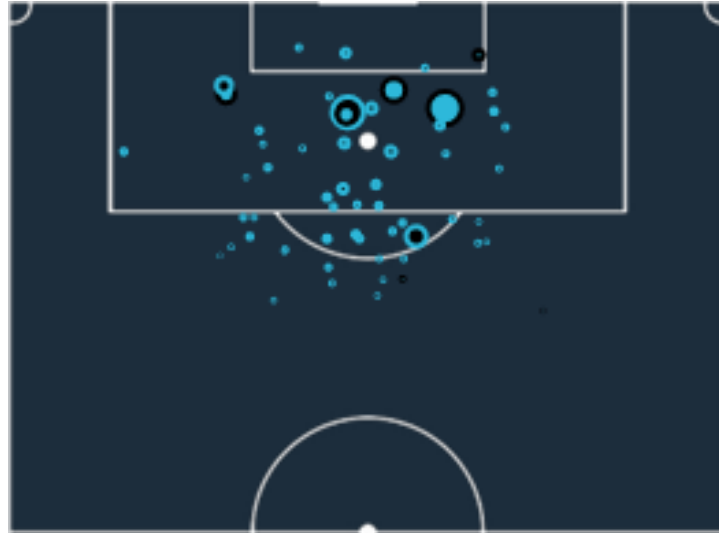


Note:

Where on the pitch are teams touching the ball more than their opponents in open play? Zones labelled TEAM gain more than 55% of total touches. Zones labelled OPPOSITION show where the opposing team gain more than 55% of total touches, while the others are considered CONTESTED.

Arsenal’s zones of control map in the 2023-2024 Premier League
Source: Opta

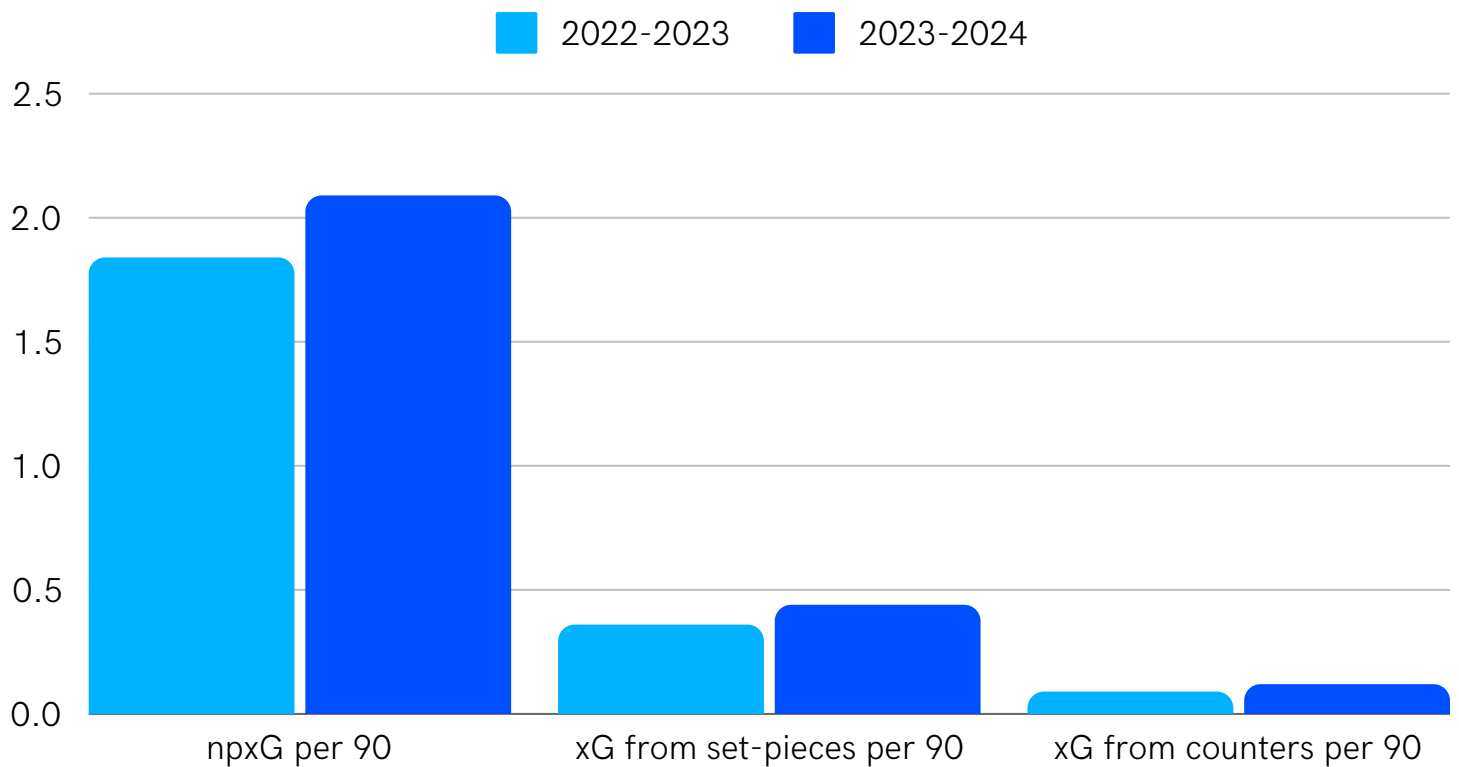
While playing for a team with a large offensive focus has undeniably helped Declan Rice improve his shooting volume and quality, the jump from 0.96 to 1.62 total shots per 90 highlights the versatility that the 25-year-old is acquiring, which is and will further bolster Arsenal's midfield regarding consistency.



Declan Rice's shots map

Source: xvalue

Despite not being a forward, most of Rice's shots come from the penalty area, reflecting Arteta's preference for his team to generate high-quality goal opportunities rather than attempting long-distance shots. The English midfielder also plays a pivotal role in set-pieces, a well-recognized strength of this team, due to his height (188 cm) and physicality, which is heavily valued by the manager.

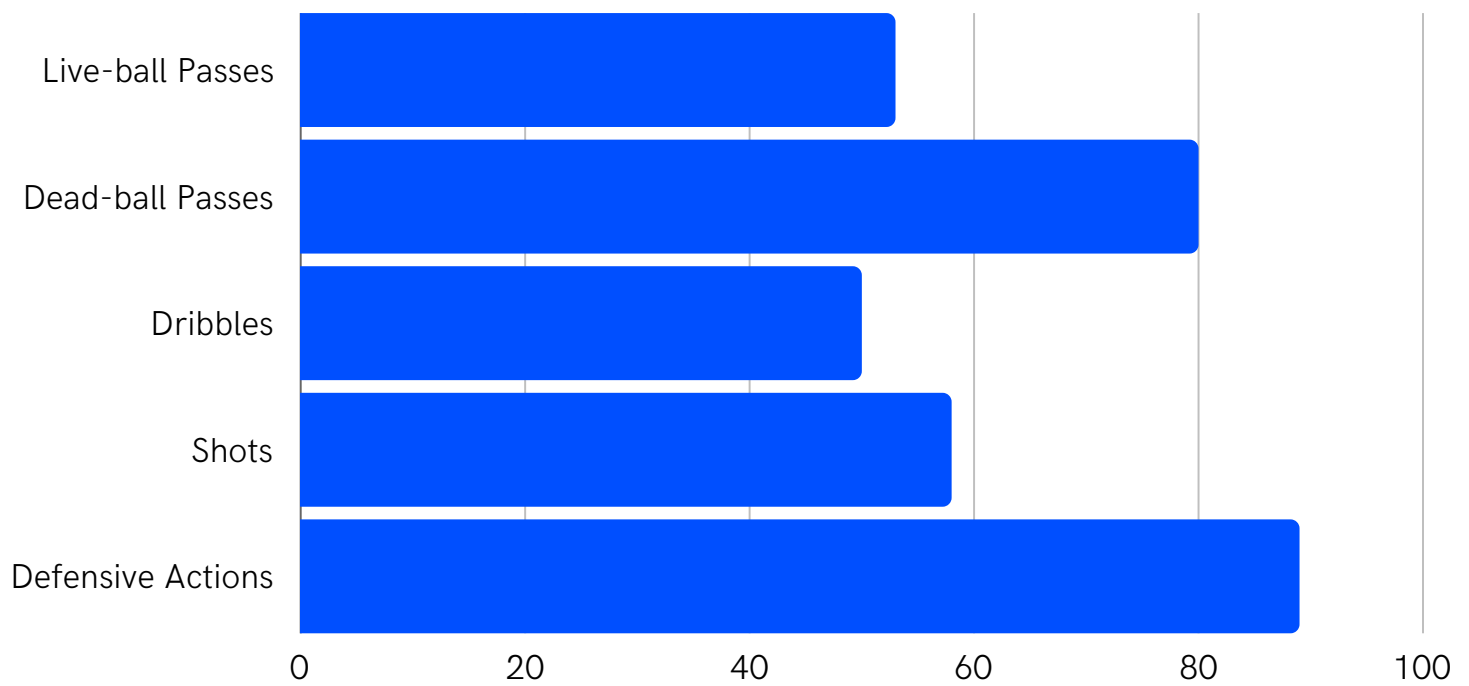


Arsenal xG statistics from the 2022-2023 and the 2023-2024 seasons comparison

Source: xvalue

The underlying in the graph above numbers point out that, since the arrival of Declan Rice, Arsenal are looking better in attack, with the set-pieces being prominently key for their success. This improvement can be, partially, due to the impact that he had, especially when taking into consideration the departure of Xhaka, a midfielder with an enormous influence in the positional attack. Not solely because many other factors like tactical changes are not being taken into account. What can be stated is that Arteta benefited somewhat in terms of offensive power after securing Rice.

☐ Shot Creation



Note:

The numbers in each category relate to the percentile where Declan Rice is in, with comparison to positional peers in the 2023-2024 Premier League season.

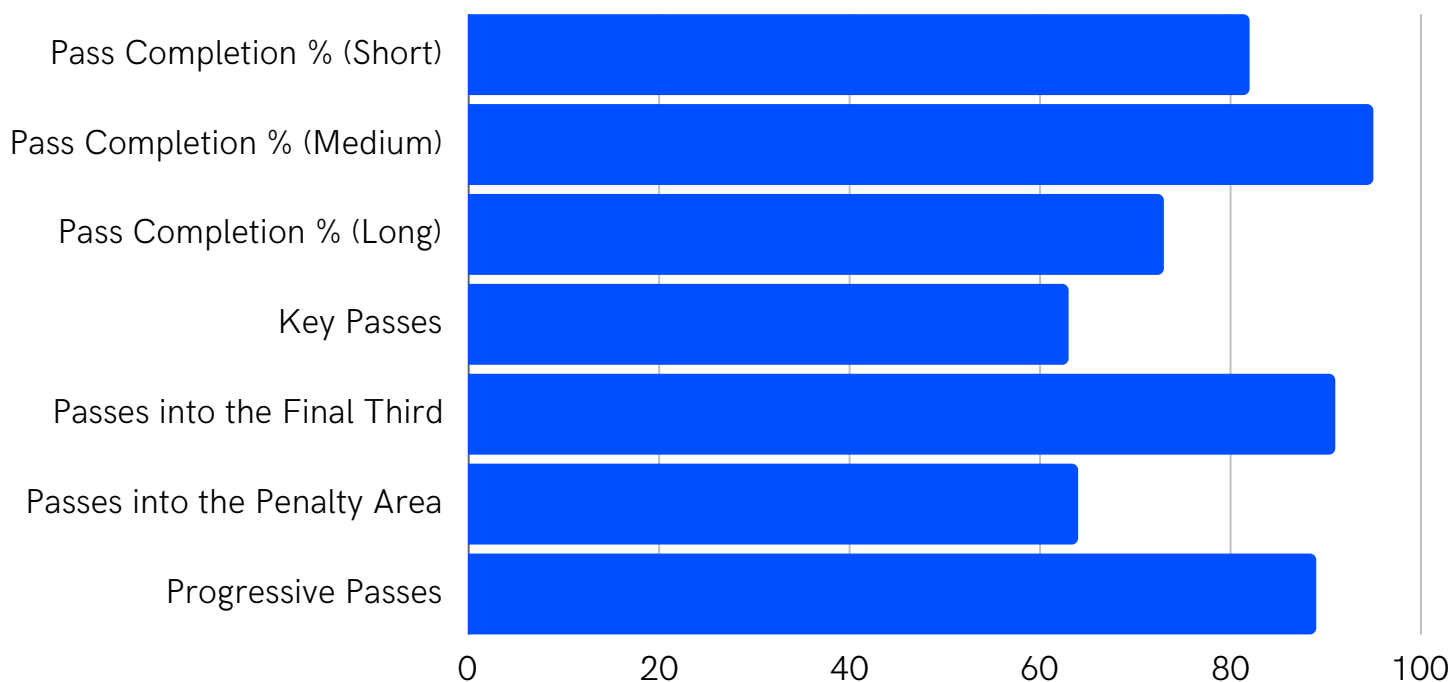
Declan Rice's shot-creating actions statistics

Source: FBref

As seen on the graph above, most of Rice's shot-creating actions, when compared to other similar players in English's top flight division, come from set-pieces and defensive actions, which demonstrates how Arsenal's new midfielder creates goalscoring chances, although in a significantly small volume: 2.79 SCAp90 (58th percentile).

❑ Passing/Possession

Declan Rice has consistently been an excellent circulator of the ball, meaning he can easily pass the ball, even with some pressure, for his team to try to exploit certain spaces that were perhaps left out open or to simply restart attacks. As for progressing the play, the 25-year-old isn't world-class, but totally not inept of finding those line-breaking passes.



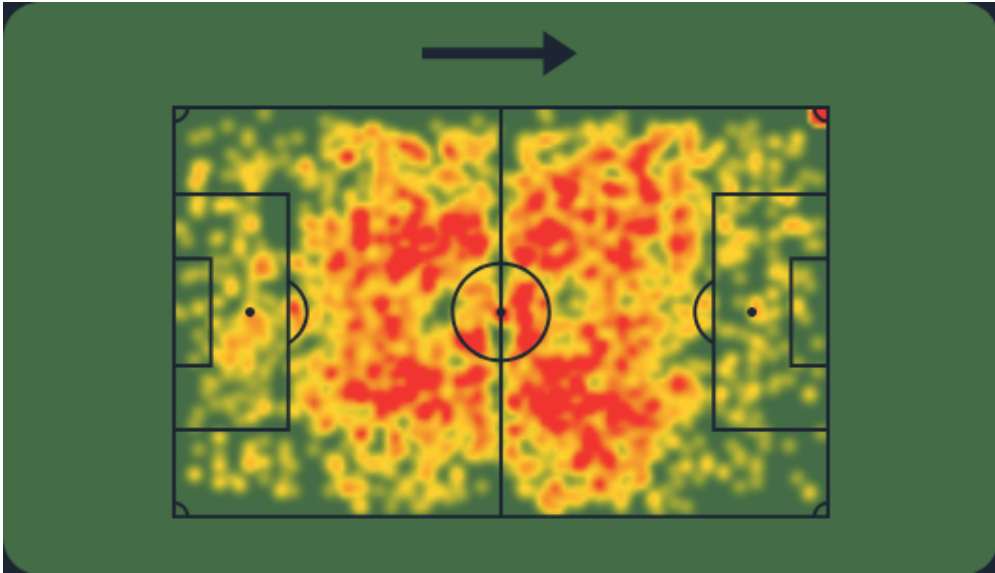
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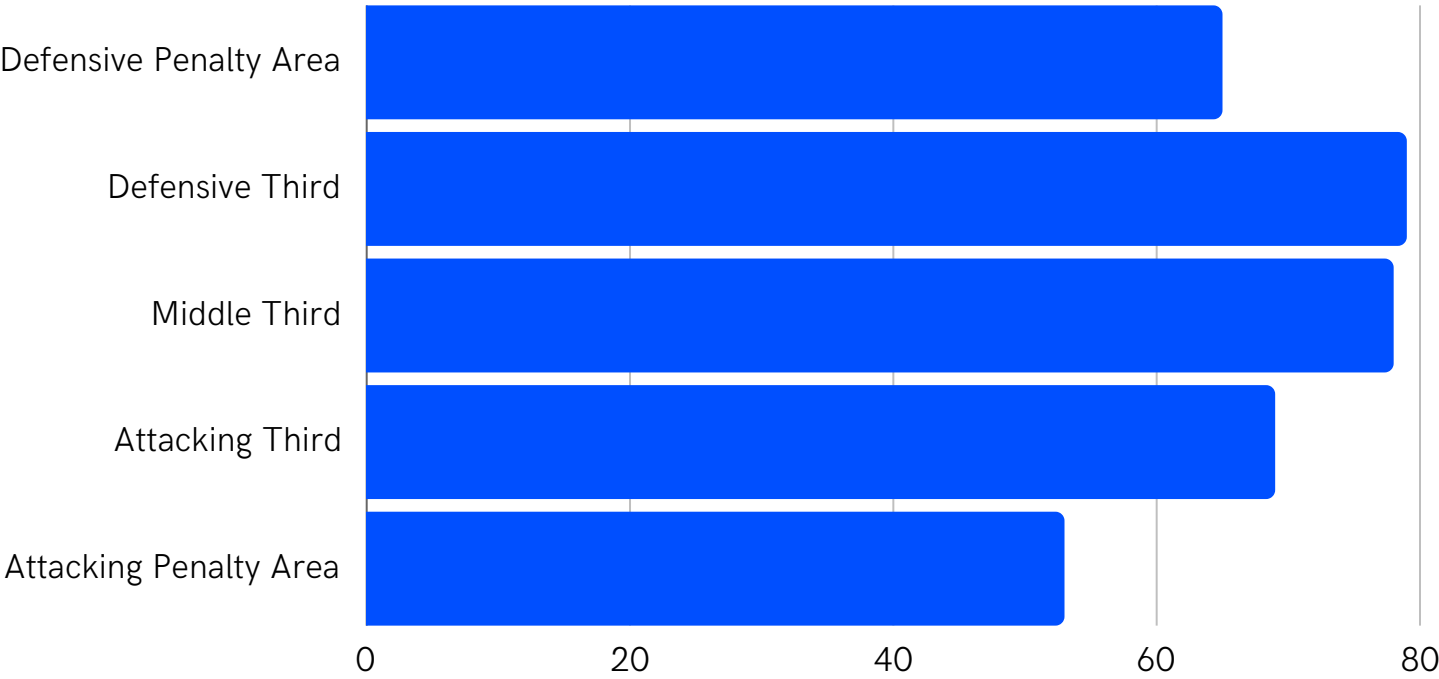
Declan Rice's passing statistics

Source: FBref

Rice, despite playing for a dominant side that want to possess the ball, isn't in the higher percentiles in some categories. That's because of his role within the team, as he tends to play deeper sometimes, occasionally forming a back-three with Gabriel and Saliba, before joining the attack when all the outfielders are camped in the opposition's half. This is also the reason he makes loads of forward passes (launching attacks from deep) and racks up a considerable amount of passes into the final third, due to his normal position in settled attacking phases (middle third).



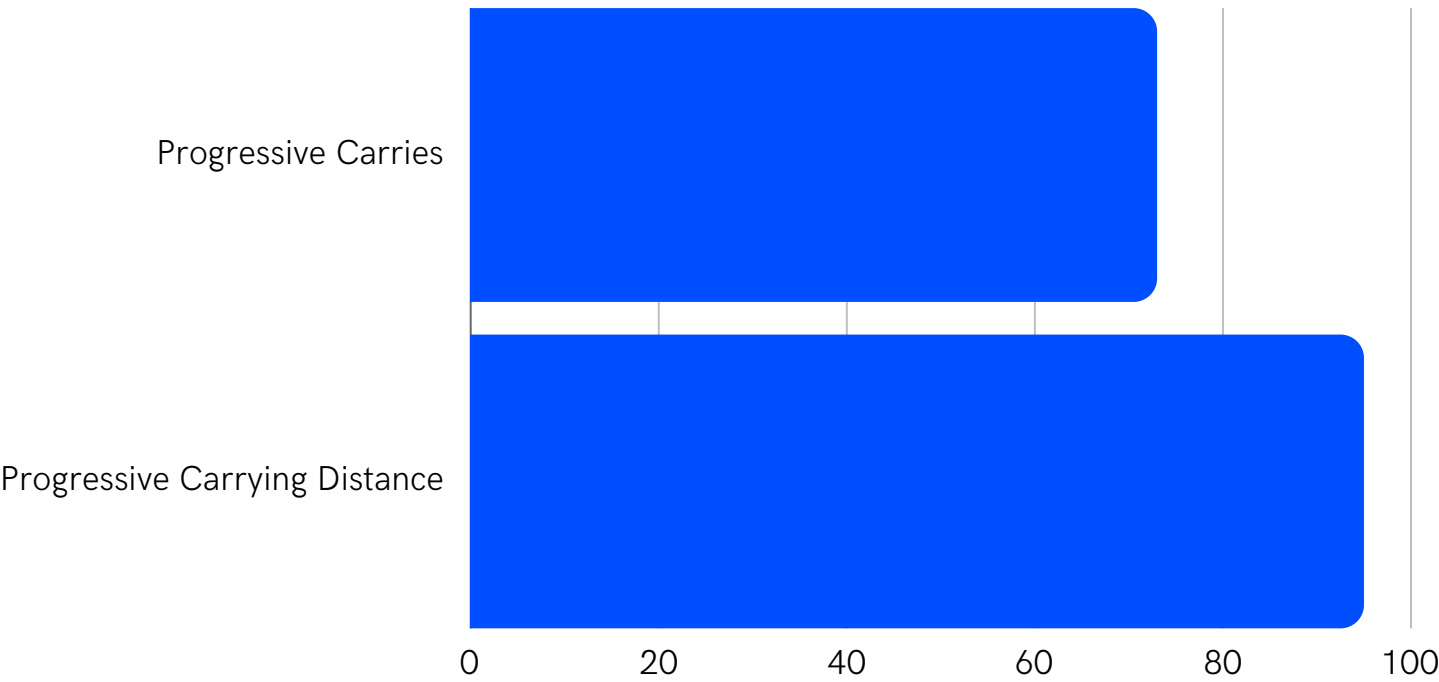
Declan Rice's touch heatmap
 Source: Sofascore



Note:
 The numbers in each category relate to the percentile where Declan Rice is in, with comparison to positional peers in the 2023-2024 Premier League season.

Declan Rice's touches' zones statistics
 Source: FBref

One aspect of the game where Declan Rice excels in is carrying the ball, especially after recovering it and launching a quick counter-attack, which generally results in longer carries.



Note:

The numbers in each category relate to the percentile where Declan Rice is in, with comparison to positional peers in the 2023-2024 Premier League season.

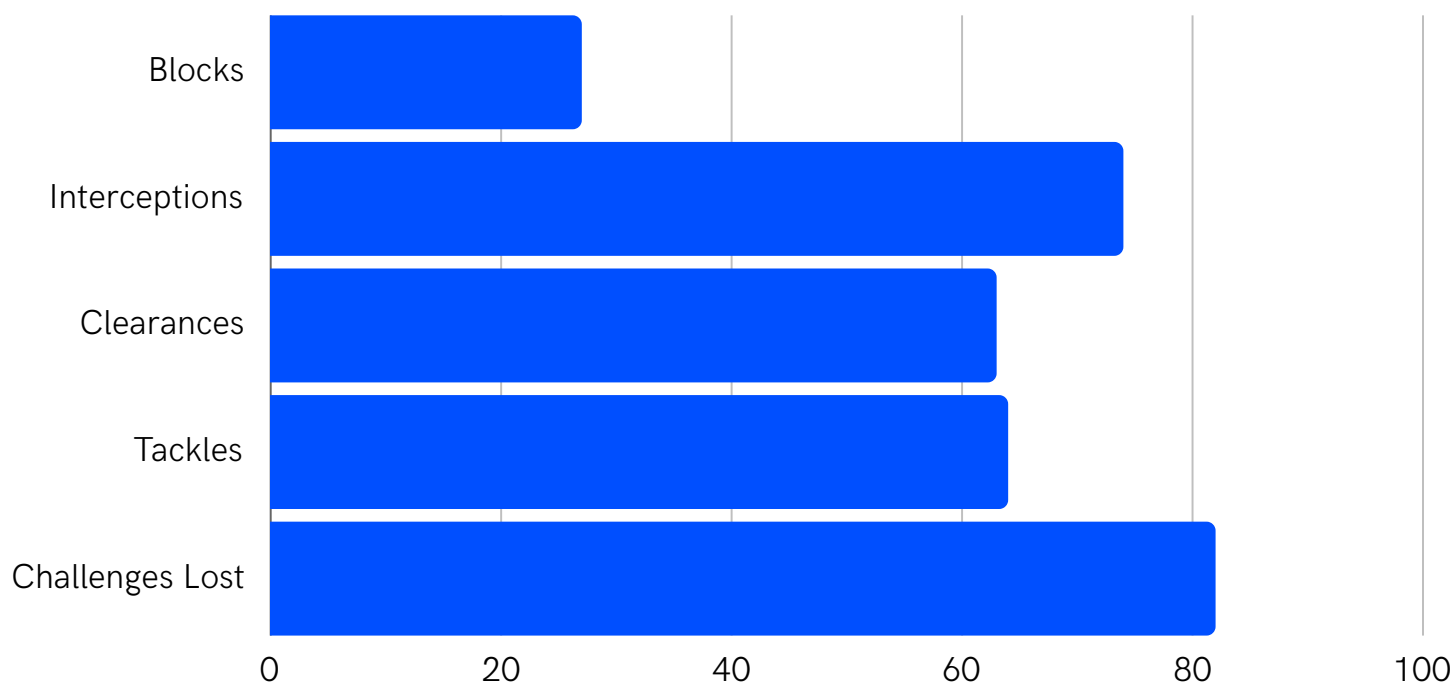
Declan Rice’s progressive carrying statistics
Source: FBref

In spite of this, Rice doesn’t have the best successful take-on record: just 45.7%. Such low percentage, nonetheless, does not mean that it’s a problem, since a defensive midfielder isn’t tasked with dribbling opponents too regularly. Despite this, the 25-year-old sits in the 80th percentile, according to FBref, for the number of times the player was dispossessed, a decent number which could reinforce even more *The Gunners’* odds of winning if improved.

Defending

The reason as to why Arteta wanted Declan Rice, and the reason behind the hefty price tag surrounding this deal, is clearly the defensive capabilities Rice offers, as his positioning whilst his team are out of possession is the best in world, and his anticipation and ability to read danger are extremely valuable in the modern game, since there are few "number 6's" that possess all these qualities, something that was reflected on the price, besides the "Premier League tax".

In terms of Rice's underlying numbers, the picture, at a first glance, isn't too pleasant. However, when taken into consideration that the more time in which Arsenal have the ball, the less time in which Arsenal don't have the ball, which translates to fewer opportunities for him to tackle someone or intercept the ball.



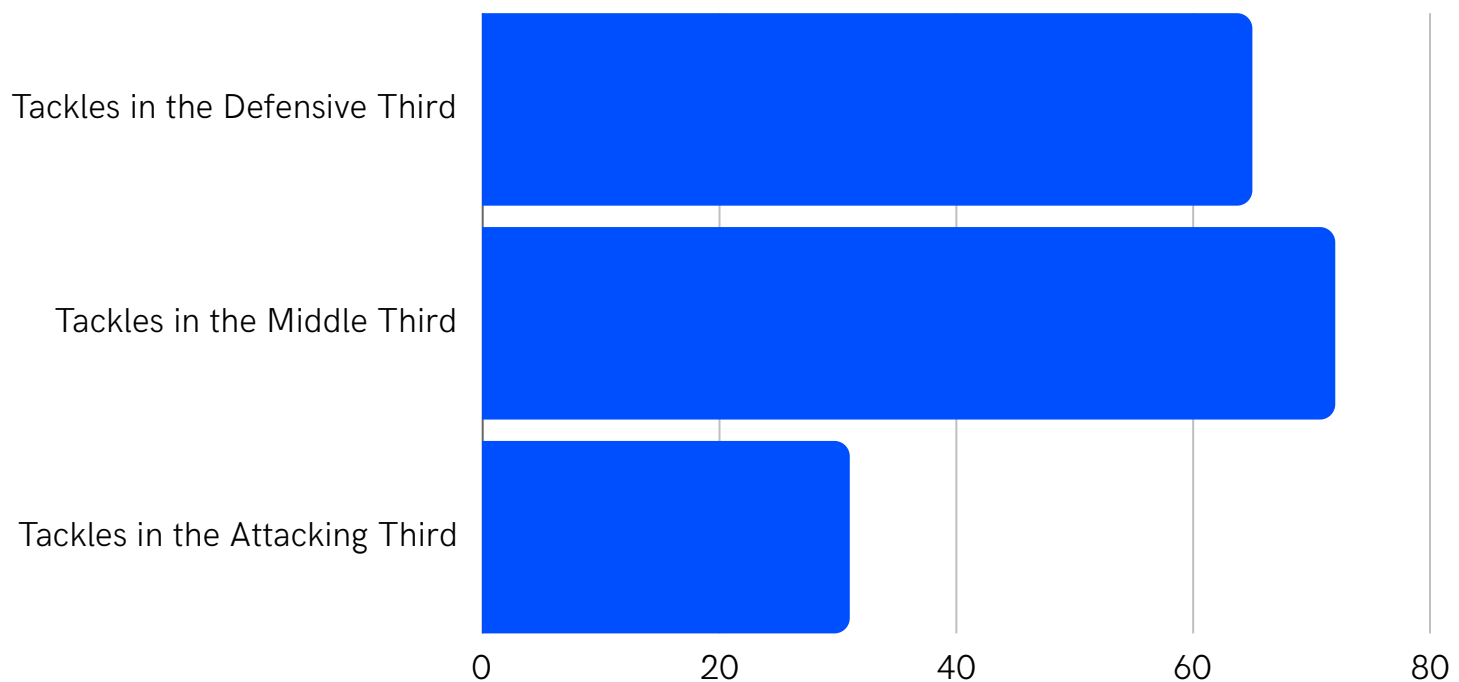
Note:

The numbers in each category relate to the percentile where Declan Rice is in, with comparison to positional peers in the 2023-2024 Premier League season.

Declan Rice's defensive actions statistics

Source: FBref

This ultimately means that the numbers of defensive actions the English international isn't reflective on his qualities without the ball. Instead, percentages are often good as they don't rely too much on volume, providing clearer signs. For instance, Declan Rice racked up a whopping 56.1% in terms of dribblers tackled (83rd percentile) and 47.6% of aerial duels won (64th percentile), according to FBref.



Note:

The numbers in each category relate to the percentile where Declan Rice is in, with comparison to positional peers in the 2023-2024 Premier League season.

Declan Rice's tackles' zones statistics
Source: FBref

About the zones in which the former West Ham player makes tackles, there's adequate evidence to suggest that Rice doesn't tend to jump up the pitch and participate in the front line of Arsenal's press. Alternatively, he rather stays in the middle, covering the areas that potentially were left out exploitable by his attacking teammates. Or, while the team is defending in the first third, the 25-year-old is very well capable of protecting the box by stopping any possible danger.

Nevertheless, the English midfielder had an astoundingly exceptional impact upon arriving at the Emirates, drastically improving Arsenal's defensive underlying numbers from 1.11 xGCp90

at the 2022-2023 season to 0.73 xGCp90 in the following one, according to FBref. The -0.38 difference highlights not only how Arteta was able to tactically improve Arsenal and maintain everyone fit throughout the whole season, but also how crucial Rice has been in this department.

Final Remarks

To sum up, Declan Rice has definitely helped Arsenal achieve a new dimension regarding consistency, defensive solidity and physical presence in both boxes, which all contributed to a remarkable improvement in comparison to last season, where Arsenal struggled to hold on to the lead they previously had before Manchester City recovered and eventually surpassed them in the league standings.

Even though this year the red club from North London fell short of silverware, the prospects for the following seasons look particularly promising, as the signing of Rice was part of a well-structured long-term plan to great success designed by Arteta which has, so far, modified the way Arsenal are viewed by the football world, since their standards are gradually approaching the ones set by Guardiola at Manchester.

It is also important to note that there's still room for individual improvement for Declan Rice, with the expectations for him to continue levelling his game up as he is doing with Arsenal.

Sources

- [FBref](#)
- [xvalue](#)
- [Opta](#)
- [Transfermarkt](#)
- [Sofascore](#)