NI WEEKLY



THE MIDFIELD ENGINE

Power, composure and control at the heart of the game

FROM KINGSTON TO THE TOP OF ENGLISH FOOTBALL

The roots, setbacks and rise of a modern leader

WEST HAM CAPTAIN TO ARSENAL STAR

The journey from academy graduate to Premier League mainstay

ENGLAND'S MIDFIELD LEADER

A key figure for club and country

DECLAN RICE

THE PLAYER • THE LEADER • THE FAMILY MAN



PHOTO: IMAGE SUPPLIED FOR THIS FEATURE

KINGSTON-UPON-THAMES • LONDON

A London beginning, with Irish roots

Declan Rice was born on 14 January 1999 in Kingston upon Thames, south-west London. Raised by parents Sean and Stephanie, he grew up with two older brothers, Connor and Jordan. His family story also reaches across the Irish Sea: his paternal grandparents came from Douglas in County Cork, a heritage that later shaped a major decision in his international career.

Football entered his life early. As a child, Rice played at Dickerage Lane Adventure Playground in Kingston before joining Chelsea’s academy in 2006, aged seven. There he formed a friendship with Mason Mount, a connection that would continue into their senior careers with England.

At 14, Rice was released by Chelsea. For a young player, that moment could have ended the dream. Instead, after a trial, he joined West Ham United’s academy in 2013. Coaches later pointed to his determination and persistence as qualities that helped him climb through the ranks.

His development was built on patience rather than overnight fame. Rice progressed through West Ham’s youth teams, won the Premier League Cup with the under-21s in 2016 and helped the under-23s claim their division title in 2020. The foundations of a composed, hard-working midfielder were already visible.

> A setback at 14 became the beginning of a bigger football journey.



PHOTO: IMAGE SUPPLIED FOR THIS FEATURE

ACADEMY GRADUATE • CLUB CAPTAIN

The making of a Premier League leader

Rice signed his first professional contract with West Ham in December 2015. After impressing at under-23 level, he earned a senior call-up in April 2017 and made his Premier League debut against Burnley in May. His first full first-team appearance followed in August that year.

By 2018, he was becoming one of the club’s most reliable young players. He scored his first senior goal against Arsenal in January 2019 and collected West Ham’s Young Hammer recognition for a third consecutive season. His defensive reading, passing range and calmness under pressure made him central to the team.

Rice captained West Ham for the first time in December 2019, aged 20. He later succeeded Mark Noble as club captain in 2022. In the 2022–23 campaign, he led the side through its European run and lifted the UEFA Europa Conference League trophy after the final against Fiorentina in Prague.

UEFA named him Player of the Season in that competition. Rice left West Ham in July 2023 having made 245 appearances and scored 15 goals for the club. His departure marked the end of a formative chapter: he had arrived as a teenager and left as a trophy-winning captain.

> 245 West Ham appearances. A European trophy. A captain’s legacy.



PHOTO: IMAGE SUPPLIED FOR THIS FEATURE

A RECORD MOVE • A NEW CHALLENGE

Why Arsenal invested in Rice

Arsenal announced Rice's signing in July 2023 after agreeing a reported initial fee of £100 million, with add-ons potentially taking the deal to £105 million. At the time, it was a club-record transfer and underlined how highly the midfielder was valued across English football.

He made his competitive Arsenal debut in the 2023 Community Shield, which the club won on penalties against Manchester City. His first league goal arrived in September 2023, a stoppage-time strike against Manchester United that helped secure a dramatic 3–1 victory.

Rice's influence has not been limited to defensive work. He carries the ball through pressure, covers ground, wins tackles and interceptions, and can contribute in advanced areas. In April 2025, he scored two spectacular direct free-kicks against Real Madrid in the Champions League quarter-final first leg, a landmark performance in his Arsenal career.

His 2024–25 season brought Arsenal's Player of the Season award and a place in the Champions League Team of the Season. By the 2025–26 campaign, he was part of the Arsenal side that won the Premier League title, adding a major domestic honour to the European success he had achieved with West Ham.

> A defensive anchor with the range and confidence to change a match.



PHOTO: IMAGE SUPPLIED FOR THIS FEATURE

TWO INTERNATIONAL PATHS

The decision that shaped his international career

Because of his Cork family roots, Rice was eligible to represent the Republic of Ireland. He played for Ireland at under-17, under-19 and under-21 levels before making his senior debut in March 2018. He made three senior appearances for the country.

In February 2019, Rice declared for England, and FIFA confirmed the change of international allegiance the following month. He made his England debut against the Czech Republic in March 2019. The decision attracted strong reactions, but Rice went on to establish himself as a key part of the national side.

He featured at Euro 2020, the 2022 World Cup and Euro 2024. England reached the final at both European Championships, finishing runners-up to Italy in 2021 and Spain in 2024. At Euro 2024, Rice played every minute of England’s campaign.

At the 2026 World Cup, Rice remained a central figure for England. The tournament added another major chapter to a career that has involved representing two countries at senior level and becoming one of England’s most trusted midfielders.

> From Ireland youth international to an established England regular.



PHOTO: IMAGE SUPPLIED FOR THIS FEATURE

LAUREN FRYER • FAMILY • PRIVACY

The people behind the footballer

Rice has kept much of his private life away from the spotlight. He and Lauren Fryer have been together since they were teenagers, having met at 17 in their hometown of Kingston-upon-Thames. Their relationship has remained relatively low-key despite his rise to international fame.

The couple welcomed their son, Jude, on 7 August 2022. Rice has spoken publicly about how important his family is to him, and his son’s name is tattooed on his arm. Lauren and Jude have been pictured supporting him at major football moments, including Arsenal’s title celebrations in 2026 and England’s World Cup campaign.

Fryer has generally avoided celebrity attention. In 2024, she was subjected to online abuse and removed posts from her Instagram account. Rice publicly defended her, making clear that she was the person he loved and that he had no interest in replacing her. The episode highlighted the personal cost that can accompany intense scrutiny of footballers’ families.

Off the pitch, Rice is also known for his long friendship with Mason Mount, dating back to their days together at Chelsea’s academy. Their bond is a reminder that the relationships formed in youth football can last long after players move between clubs and national teams.

> A long-term partnership and young family remain central to his life.

AT A GLANCE

DECLAN RICE

PLAYER PROFILE • CAREER MILESTONES • PERSONAL LIFE

FULL NAME	Declan Rice
DATE OF BIRTH	14 January 1999
BIRTHPLACE	Kingston upon Thames, London, England
HEIGHT / POSITION	1.88 m • Midfielder
CLUB	Arsenal • No. 41
INTERNATIONAL TEAM	England
FAMILY	Partner Lauren Fryer; son Jude

CAREER MILESTONES

- 2006 — Joined Chelsea academy, aged seven.
- 2013 — Moved to West Ham United’s academy.
- 2017 — Made his Premier League debut.
- 2022 — Became West Ham captain.
- 2023 — Lifted the UEFA Europa Conference League and joined Arsenal.
- 2025 — Scored two free-kicks against Real Madrid in the Champions League.
- 2026 — Won the Premier League with Arsenal and represented England at the World Cup.

SOURCE

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