World-class yet down-to-earth, he's Kane of a kind

London: Harry Kane completed his long quest for football's highest individual honour on Monday, with the Bayern Munich and England striker winning the Ballon d'Or after a record-breaking season that cemented his status as one of the game's greatest goalscorers.

Kane is the first Englishman to win the prestigious award in 25 years, after Michael Owen won it in 2001.

"Wow, wow, wow!" Kane said after taking the stage. "I am almost speechless. Being here in London has made it extra special. Made it a good omen for me. Thank you to everyone who voted for me. I can imagine it was tough this year."

Spain midfielder Alexia Putellas won the Ballon d'Or Féminin for the third time. Putellas won the treble with Barcelona in the 2025-26 campaign, in addition to the Spanish Super Cup. She moved to Women's Super League side London City Lionesses in July after 14 years at Barca.

Kane's move to Bayern in 2023 brought the team trophies that had long eluded him. In 2025-26, he coupled that success with goalscoring numbers that made him the leading Ballon d'Or candidate.

The England captain produced the most prolific campaign of his life, scoring 61 goals in 51 games for Bayern across all competitions as the German giants completed a domestic league and cup double.

His influence stretched far beyond club football. At the World Cup, he was England's driving force, scoring six goals while leading the team to the semi-finals.

The Ballon d'Or has often rewarded players whose success was built on flair and spectacle, but Kane's triumph is a tribute to consistency, intelligence and productivity on an exceptional scale.

Back to base

Kane headed back to Germany for a "special welcome" at Bayern Munich and a slightly less glamorous game — a German Cup second-round game against second-division 1. FC Magdeburg on Wednesday.

Bayern is celebrating their first Ballon D'Or winner in 45 years and it's also the first for any player at a German club since 1996.

"We're all delighted with Harry Kane's performance. It's not just his goals that make him an exceptional footballer, and it's not just on the pitch that he's a special character," sporting director Christoph Freund said.

"Harry is a great guy, you very rarely come across someone like him, world-class yet so down-to-earth. Harry has taken the centre-forward role to a whole new level — he's an inspiration, especially for young players. He's undoubtedly one of the greatest in football history."

With inputs from Reuters, AP



Harry Kane receives a hearty welcome at Bayern Munich on Tuesday. (Bayern Munich/X)

KANE'S SEASON

OVERALL
Games 65 Goals 73

FOR BAYERN
All competitions
Games 51 Goals 61
Bundesliga
Games 31 Goals 36
Champions League
Games 13 Goals 14

RECORD PLAYER

- Kane became just the fourth player to score three goals in a German cup final when he got all the goals in Bayern's 3-0 win over VfB Stuttgart in the DFB Cup final. But among them, Kane's the only one to have scored a "lupenrein hat-trick" — three goals scored consecutively in one half.
- Kane equalled the record set by Cristiano Ronaldo in 2012 and 2013 when he scored in six consecutive matches in the knockout stages of the 2025-26 Champions League.

ENGLISH WINNERS OF BALLON D'OR

1956 Stanley Matthews (Blackpool)
1966 Bobby Charlton (Manchester United)
1978, 1979 Kevin Keegan (Hamburg)
2001 Michael Owen (Liverpool)
2026 Harry Kane (Bayern Munich)



Ballon d'Or winner Harry Kane in London on Monday. (AP/PTI)

Reward for resilience & belief

London: Fans packed the streets and climbed light poles near the London Palladium, where the Ballon d'Or event was held, for a glimpse of the arriving athletes. Harry Kane stopped to sign autographs on his way in.

The award, in many ways, represents the culmination of a remarkable journey for Kane. Once struggling to establish himself at Tottenham Hotspur as a youngster, being sent out on numerous loans, he developed into one of the most complete centre forwards of his generation.

"Anything is possible with hard work, when no one else is watching, to go through the ups and downs, to learn through resilience, determination and self-belief," an emotional Kane said in a message to young players, after reflecting on his early struggles.

"My journey wasn't straightforward. I wasn't the kid who went straight to the top. I had to experience the downs," he added. "I had to fight my way to be the very best right now. I hope that can give you inspiration as well."

Kane was followed in the voting by Kylian Mbappé, Lamine Yamal, 2024 winner Rodri and record eight-time winner Lionel Messi.

Kane thanked his teammates, coaches, parents, children — "It's past your bedtime" — and wife Kate.

The fans on the streets stayed through the ceremony and chanted Kane's name as he left the theatre near Oxford Circus after midnight. That's no less an award.

Kohli doffs his hat

Among those who congratulated Kane was Indian cricket superstar Virat Kohli.

Kohli and Kane endorse the same sports apparel brand.

"Harry my friend, you deserve every bit of this award for your resilience, hard work and honesty with which you've carried yourself through all these years playing football at the top. Really happy for you," Kohli posted on X.

With inputs from AP