

**WORLD CUP
2018**

England smash Panama to reach knockout stages

Is this team the real “golden generation”? England are through to the next round with a game to spare after dismantling Panama 6-1. Why is this team succeeding where others failed?



Captain Fantastic: Harry Kane has now scored 50% of England's World Cup goals. © Getty

“I didn't like the start, and I didn't like the goal at the end, but I guess the bits in the middle were pretty good.”

It was with his trademark realism and understatement that manager Gareth Southgate summed up England's 6-1 thrashing of Panama in their second World Cup game.

Yes, it was **only Panama**. But for England fans who have seen so many **painful matches against low-ranked sides**, this was paradise. They were up 5-0 at half-time. It was their **biggest ever World Cup victory**. England scored as many yesterday as they did at the 2014 World Cup and Euro 2016 combined.

Harry Kane bagged a hat-trick. John Stones converted two expertly practised set-pieces and Jesse Lingard scored a magical curling strike. As Daniel Taylor wrote in *The Guardian*: “England are becoming the team their supporters want them to be. And it is great fun.”

So far the World Cup has been a triumph for an England team that entered the tournament with expectations at an all-time low.

England have one of the least experienced squads in Russia. Seven teams were rated more likely to win the World Cup.

This is in stark contrast to the so-called “golden generation” of the 2000s. That team, filled with iconic players like David Beckham, Frank Lampard, Wayne Rooney, Rio Ferdinand and many others, constantly underachieved with England.

In an interview in May, Ferdinand explained how club rivalries “killed” that team. Cliques emerged based on club loyalties. And they were all stars — all desperate to be the team's main figure. Managers simply picked the 11 best players, rather than the team and formation that would produce the best performance.

Now it seems different. Kane aside, not many England players could be described as true “stars”. They are an impressive group of young players coached by **a man who knows them well**. Many of the players began their careers at **obscure clubs**.

Yet they seem on course to be the best

England side for over 20 years.

Is Southgate's team the true “golden generation”?

It's coming home

England fans are starting to believe that this side is the real deal. They are shorn of the ego of previous generations but are blessed with quality, tactical intelligence and humility. They are not crushed by expectation, and as a consequence are playing with more freedom than their predecessors. There is something different about this team.

Calm down, reply legions of cynics. Panama are one of the weakest teams at this World Cup, and we seem to be forgetting that England only scraped past Tunisia a week ago. Do not be so harsh on the “golden generation”; at times they were very unlucky. This team still has a long way to go to emulate their success.

Q & A

Q: What do we know?

A: England have qualified for the knockout stages of the World Cup. Having each played and beaten Tunisia and Panama, England are dead level with Belgium at the top of the group. Both teams have scored and conceded the

same number of goals. If the match between England and Belgium on Thursday ends in a draw, the team with the lowest number of yellow cards will win the group. England will play either Colombia, Japan or Senegal in the next round.

Q: What do we not know?

A: Whether England will go all the way. It could

be that finishing second in the group will give them a less forbidding run to the final, as they would likely play the winner of a match between Brazil and Germany should they finish at the top. They are currently 9/1 with most bookmakers to win it.

YOU DECIDE

1. How good is this England team?
2. Does pressure help or hinder sportspeople?

ACTIVITIES

1. Predict who will win the World Cup. Put all of your predictions in an envelope, and open it on Monday, July 16, to see who was right.
2. Research a sports team that significantly exceeded its expectations in the last 20 years. Give a five minute presentation about them to your class.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

"They've seen it all before, The just know... that England's gonna throw it away."
Three Lions, by David Baddiel and Frank Skinner

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WORD WATCH

6-1 – This was the joint biggest win at the World Cup so far along with Russia's opening day 5-0 win against Saudi Arabia.

Only Panama – This is Panama's first World Cup. The majority of their players play in Central America and they are ranked 55th in the world, between Jamaica and Slovenia.

Painful matches against low-ranked sides –

In recent tournaments, England have lost 2-1 to Iceland and drawn 0-0 with Slovakia, Costa Rica and Algeria.

Biggest ever World Cup victory – This is the first time England have won a World Cup match by more than two goals since their 3-0 win over Denmark at the 2002 World Cup. England's biggest ever win is a 13-0 win over Ireland – but that was in 1882.

A man who knows them well – Southgate previously managed England's under-21 side,

so he has coached many members of this squad before.

Obscure clubs – Jamie Vardy, who came off the bench, was a non-league player until the age of 25. Kieran Trippier started his career at Burnley; Jordan Pickford and Jordan Henderson at Sunderland; Ashley Young at Watford; John Stones at Barnsley; and Harry Maguire at Sheffield United.

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 Notes

