

Kane and Unable: England must improve finishing to avoid further World Cup woe

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Buzzing around where you least expect them, swarming to create more problems and causing havoc to those who oppose them. No, not the plague of flies that have taken over Volgograd in recent days but, somewhat remarkably, the England football team.

Gareth Southgate has long promised a brave new dawn of exciting, aggressive, possession-based football from the Three Lions, and throughout his tenure the signs have certainly been there that he might just come good on his word.

But this is a major tournament. England never come good in a major tournament. Certainly not since the turn of the millennium.

Here they were, though, at times during the first 35 minutes of their World Cup opener, tearing through the Tunisia defence with ease. That was, until, they realised they were, in fact, England.

Though the penalty conceded by Kyle Walker was soft if not incorrectly awarded and Harry Kane twice should have earned his side a spot-kick having been unceremoniously wrestled to the floor while challenging from set-pieces, their performance was, in large parts, England in a nutshell.

Wasteful in front of goal, nervy at the back and lacking any cutting edge once they had conceded – as opening games at a tournament go this iteration of the Three Lions had it almost down to a tee.

Again, though, they managed to come up with something very un-England - a stoppage-time winner. But as 'Three Lions' kicked in over the tannoy at full-time it was difficult to shake the feeling that they had got away with it somewhat.

No England team since those likely lads in 1966 had managed more than the six shots on target England mustered up in the first half here. Unfortunately, it was the numerous efforts from close range that they failed to hit the target with that nearly cost them dearly.

Jesse Lingard, John Stones and Dele Alli were all guilty of missing the target when presented with opportunities from inside 10 yards. Raheem Sterling had an offside flag to thank for perhaps the worst miss of the lot; not that certain corners of the English media will likely let him forget it.

This was an England team that very much felt like one with only 25 international goals between them prior to the tournament. Ashley Young's contribution of seven only highlights the issue this young but improving team has in front of goal.