

25 Caster Semenya vs the IAAF: A ground-breaking gender case



26 Morgan hopes World Cup win will spark a new English cricket revival



27 Djokovic vows to win fans' love with Federer's record in sight



CAIRO: Algeria's forward Riyad Mahrez (R) scores from a free-kick during the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) Semi-final football match between Algeria and Nigeria at the Cairo International stadium. —AFP

Mahrez stunner sends Algeria into final

'It's my most important goal for the national dream'

CAIRO: Riyad Mahrez rifled in a stoppage-time free-kick to earn Algeria a dramatic 2-1 victory over three-time champions Nigeria on Sunday and set up a rematch with Senegal in the Africa Cup of Nations final. Algeria led through a first-half own goal by William Troost-Ekong before Nigeria equalized with an Odion Ighalo penalty on 72 minutes awarded after a VAR review.

However, as extra time looked necessary, Mahrez blasted in from 20 yards with the last kick of the match to send the Desert Foxes through to their first final since lifting the trophy for the only time in 1990. Algeria will take on Sadio Mane's Senegal for the title on July 19, in a repeat of a group stage clash they won 1-0. "We are very happy to be in the final of the Africa Cup of Nations because it is something very special," said Mahrez. "It was our goal to do it for the people and for our families. We know they are behind us all the way. It's

my most important goal for the national dream. Yes, it's my dream to win it and hopefully we will be able to."

Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr conceded Algeria were worthy winners after denying the Super Eagles the chance to compete in an eighth final. "I have to congratulate the players for a big fight against this very good team. They won it in the last minute and they deserved it," said Rohr. "A wonderful free-kick made the difference."

An injury to Youcef Atal, who fractured his collarbone during the quarter-final win over Ivory Coast on penalties, forced Djamel Belmadi to start Mehdi Zeffane at right-back, while Nigeria fielded the same team that overcame South Africa here. Algeria supporters filled most of the lower tier at one end of the ground, dwarfing a small section of Nigeria fans, but there were large swathes of empty seats at the 75,000-capacity Cairo International Stadium.

Mahrez leads by example

Leading scorers in the tournament and considered the most impressive side, Algeria quickly asserted themselves as Ramy Bensebaini headed narrowly over before a wicked Youcef Belaïli cross nearly lead to a goal for Baghdad Bounedjah. Hesitant defending from Kenneth Omeruo just outside his own area then allowed Bounedjah to nip in, but the Al-Sadd striker could only shoot tamely at Daniel Akpeyi.

Seemingly having moved on from the penalty miss that reduced him to tears in the last round, Bounedjah was consistently proving a nuisance to a nervy Nigeria backline with Jamilu Collins relieved to see a toed clearance land on the roof of the net. Nigeria countered intermittently as Ighalo dragged wide after Mahrez was caught in possession, but the Manchester City winger promptly atoned as Algeria made the breakthrough on 40 minutes.

After gathering the ball on the right Mahrez danced past Collins before sending over a cross that flicked off the left-back and struck a helpless Troost-Ekong in the midriff before tricking over the line. Rohr has regularly praised his side's resilience, particularly the way they bounced back from a shock loss to Madagascar to eliminate defending champions Cameroon, and Nigeria again hit back with the aid of VAR.

Gambian referee Bakary Gassama initially dismissed Nigerian penalty appeals when a Peter Elebo shot struck the arm of Aissa Mandi but reversed that decision, with Ighalo sending Rais Mbohli the wrong way from the spot for his competition-best fourth goal. Sofiane Feghouli blazed over late on and extra time beckoned after Ismael Bennacer rattled the bar in stoppage time, but Mahrez incredibly won it in the 95th minute with a thunderous strike into the top corner. —AFP

Senegal reach Cup of Nations final as own goal sinks Tunisia

CAIRO: Senegal reached the Africa Cup of Nations final for the second time with a Dylan Bronn own goal giving them a 1-0 win over Tunisia on Sunday in a tense last-four clash in Cairo. With 11 minutes gone in extra time, goalkeeper Mouez Hassen pushed a free-kick against the head of Bronn and the ball went backwards into the net. Tunisia thought they would have a chance to equalize when Idrissa Gueye handled in the box, but the Ethiopian referee reversed his original decision to award a penalty after watching replays at the VAR monitor.

Both teams missed penalties in regular time with Ferjani Sassi the Tunisian culprit before Henri Saivet failed for the Senegalese. Liverpool star Sadio Mane began the tournament as the first-choice Senegal penalty taker but, after missing two, opted out before the quarter-finals. Senegal will miss star defender Kalidou Koulibaly for the final against

Algeria or Nigeria, who meet in Cairo later Sunday, after he was yellow-carded.

It was the second caution of the knockout phase for the Napoli centre-back and triggered an automatic one-match suspension. Senegal last reached the title decider 17 years ago, when current coach Aliou Cisse captained a team beaten on penalties by Cameroon in Mali. "I congratulate (Tunisia and former Senegal coach) Alain Giresse because he left me a good group. He did a good job in Senegal," said Cisse. "The match was incredible because of the uncertainty — it will remain in the annals of African football." French football legend Giresse said: "We were equal to Senegal and had opportunities, but did not know how to transform them. "I am the number one supporter of Aliou Cisse. He will become a coach who will surpass what he achieved as a player. He will win the Cup of Nations."

Clearcut chance

Cisse made one change to the team that defeated Benin in the quarter-finals with 20-year-old forward Krepin Diatta replacing Keita Balde. Giresse changed two of the side that eliminated Madagascar, promoting Mohamed Drager and Ayman Ben Mohamed and benching Wajdi Kechrida and Ghaylen Chaaleli. The countries were meeting for the sixth time in the Cup of Nations with each winning one match and the other three drawn.

Tunisia had the first clearcut chance at the 30 June Stadium in the Egyptian capital, but unmarked captain Youssef Msakni headed a corner well over. Senegal then took control and had three opportunities before half-time to end the deadlock and edge closer to the July 19 final. Youssouf Sabaly unleashed a curling shot from the edge of the box that beat Mouez only to cannon back into play off the woodwork.

Then, in a 60-second purple patch, Mbaye Niang and Mane were unable to convert chances before a small crowd. Niang swivelled inside the box before firing well wide and Mane rounded the goalkeeper but his shot from an acute angle finished off target. Giresse took off Msakni at half-time and introduced Naim Sliiti, scorer of the stoppage-time goal that sealed a convincing last-eight win over giantkillers Madagascar.

Senegal goalkeeper Alfred Gomis, a virtual spectator in the opening half, reacted quickly early in the second half to push away a Sassi snap shot. Attackers Niang and Diatta were having little success and came off with Mbaye Diagne and Ismaila Sarr replacing them as an intriguing semi-final entered the final quarter. The Sassi penalty was weak, allowing Gomis to save comfortably, while Hassen made a brilliant one-hand block to foil a powerfully struck spot-kick by Saivet. —AFP



CAIRO: Senegal's goalkeeper Alfred Gomis and Senegal's forward Keita Balde celebrate after winning the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) Semi-final football match between Senegal and Tunisia. —AFP