

Mali beat title hopefuls Tunisia

Tale of two penalties as Mali stun Tunisia at Cup of Nations



LIMBE: Tunisia's midfielder Hannibal Mejri (left) fights for the ball with Mali's midfielder Diadie Samassekou during the Group F Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 football match between Tunisia and Mali at Limbe Omnispport Stadium yesterday. — AFP

LIMBE: Mali beat title hopefuls Tunisia 1-0 in a match that was a tale of two penalties yesterday as the Africa Cup of Nations moved to Limbe in Cameroon's southwest, a region on edge due to the conflict led by anglophone separatists. Ibrahima Kone's spot-kick shortly after half-time proved the different for Mali in the Group F game, but Tunisia could have earned a draw only for Wahbi Khazri to have his late penalty saved at the other end.

Mali held on despite having substitute El Bilal Toure sent off late on, and the result is a setback for Tunisia, the 2004 continental champions, as another of the tournament's leading contenders struggled in

the heat and humidity of a mid-afternoon kick-off in Cameroon.

On Tuesday it was Algeria, the title-holders, who were held by Sierra Leone in Douala, while 24 hours before that Senegal needed a last-gasp penalty to edge Zimbabwe. After an average of a goal a game in the first nine matches at the tournament, here was another encounter lacking in goal-mouth excitement, although the Malian supporters who comfortably outnumbered their Tunisian counterparts enjoyed their afternoon.

From the stands in the coastal town of Limbe the eye was regularly drawn to the stunning view down

the hill to the Gulf of Guinea rather than the action on the pitch, although just staging matches here at all is an achievement. Separate unrest in the anglophone region means the road from economic capital Douala to Limbe is lined with patrolling members of the armed forces, and there are checkpoints at the entrance to the town itself.

Mauritania and Gambia, also based here, were due to meet in the other Group F game later. A strong and athletic Mali side, whose line-up included six players based in Europe's big five leagues, were the better team on balance, coming closest in the first half from a Massadio Haidara shot that fizzed just past. They

were awarded a spot-kick for handball just after the restart and Kone, of Norwegian club Sarspborg, finished emphatically.

Khazri, the Tunisia captain, had a free-kick tipped over shortly after as they pushed for an equalizer, and their big chance finally came as the game entered the last quarter of an hour. The Zambian referee Janny Sikazwe initially waved away appeals for handball in the Malian box before changing his mind after a VAR review, but Khazri's penalty was superbly saved by goalkeeper Ibrahim Mounkoro. Toure was sent off for a reckless late challenge not long after coming on, but the 10 men held out. — AFP

'Mr Dakar' strikes as title beckons for Al-Attiyah

BISHA: The Dakar Rally's record 14-time champion Stephane Peterhansel powered to stage 10 success yesterday as only a mechanical meltdown appears now to stand between Nasser Al-Attiyah and the 2022 title. The Qatari three-time winner heads into today's penultimate stage 32min 40sec clear of France's nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb.

"The gap is too big and the race is no longer in our hands, but we're still hanging in there," shrugged Loeb after the 375km drive from Wadi ad-Dawasir to Bisha. Despite his runaway lead Al-Attiyah was retaining the caution required for an event where victory can disappear as easily as a mirage in the Saudi Arabian desert.

"We're getting there, little by little," said the multi-faceted sportsman who took skeet shooting bronze at the 2012 London Olympics. "It's not over yet, there are still two days to go and even a podium spot will be hard to get." Peterhansel, known as 'Mr Dakar', won last year, three decades after his first victory on two wheels in 1991. The only competitor to win the famed rally in Africa, South America and Asia, Peterhansel was thrilled to land a stage in his Audi hybrid.

"I'm not necessarily a stage hunter, but each Audi driver has now won a stage, and that's fantastic," the Frenchman said. "When Carlos (Sainz) became the first driver to win a Dakar stage in an electric car, it was a milestone, now we confirmed that performance." With Sainz taking second there was double reason for Audi

to celebrate. "This is good for morale, not least because it comes after a complicated start to the rally," said Peterhansel. "We need to win in 2023. Failure is not an option."

Brothers-in-law

In the bike category France's Adrien Van Beveren moved to the top of the rankings after a day marked by the premature end of Kevin Benavides' title defense. Argentina's 2021 champion came unstuck 133km into the stage when his KTM suffered a terminal breakdown. Benavides had started the day in fifth, 10min22sec adrift.

Another KTM rider, Matthias Walkner, also had a difficult day, losing the overall lead after going off course with a navigational error to finish quarter of an hour behind Australian stage winner Toby Price. Van Beveren, on a Yamaha, gave his chances of succeeding Benavides a massive boost by finishing fourth, at three and a half minutes, to reclaim the bike rankings' summit after briefly holding sway at the weekend.

With only two days to go he is almost six minutes clear of Briton's 2017 champion Sam Sunderland, his brother-in-law. Sunderland reflected: "All in all, I'm happy, I prepared well this year and I think it shows. I've led the race for seven days. Now we just need to go flat out again tomorrow." Today's 11th stage is a 346km special and the last day in the dunes ahead of the closing short drive to the finish in Jeddah tomorrow. — AFP

Grizzlies win 10th straight; Clippers stun Nuggets

LOS ANGELES: Ja Morant scored 29 points as the red-hot Memphis Grizzlies won their 10th-straight game with a 116-108 victory over the Golden State Warriors on Tuesday night. Morant seized control in the late stages of the fourth quarter, scoring five points in the final minute as the third-place Grizzlies closed the gap on the second-place Warriors in the Western Conference standings. "I felt like I was aggressive. I got going very early," said Morant. "I made them change their scheme up. If you blitz me I feel like I have a lot of guys who can score the basketball."

"Pretty much cat and mouse, we just had to take what their defense gave us." The Grizzlies are now within 2 1/2 games of the Warriors after having been eight games back on November 29. Ziaire Williams and Tyus Jones had 17 points each for Memphis in front of a crowd of 17,800 at FedExForum arena. Jones keyed a fourth-quarter rally that put the Grizzlies ahead for good. He connected on all five of his three-point attempts.

Stephen Curry led the Warriors with 27 points, while Klay Thompson finished with 14 points. Andrew Wiggins and Gary Payton II scored 13 each. Morant, the 2020 rookie of the year, is just a week removed from a sprained knee that sidelined him for 12 games. He has consistently been able to elevate his game against the best teams in the league, scoring 30 or more points against the Phoenix Suns, Brooklyn Nets, and Los Angeles Lakers during the 10-game streak. The Warriors were missing Draymond Green, who was out with a sore left calf.

In Los Angeles, Amir Coffey scored 18



MEMPHIS: Stephen Curry #30 of the Golden State Warriors goes to the basket against Ja Morant #12 of the Memphis Grizzlies during the first half at FedExForum on January 11, 2022 in Memphis, Tennessee. — AFP

points as the Los Angeles Clippers rallied from a 25-point second half deficit for a stunning 87-85 victory over the Denver Nuggets. The Clippers scored just 28 points in the first half before finding themselves down by 25 in the third quarter. They scratched and clawed their way back to take an 83-81 lead on Coffey's three-pointer with 2:30 remaining. Coffey also had seven assists and four steals.

Reggie Jackson and Terance Mann added 13 points apiece for Los Angeles. Marcus Morris had 12 points and Eric Bledsoe tallied 11 as the Clippers won for just the fifth time in the past 14 games. Aaron Gordon scored a season-high 30 points and 12 rebounds and Nikola Jokic added 21 points, 13 rebounds in the loss. Jeff Green had 12 points and Monte Morris tallied 11 for the Nuggets.

Elsewhere, Jae Crowder scored 19 points and Chris Paul finished with 15 points and 12 assists as the Phoenix

snapped Toronto's six-game winning streak with a 99-95 victory in Toronto. Devin Booker provided the late-game heroics for the Suns, nailing the go-ahead jump shot with 62 seconds remaining and then adding two free throws with six seconds left before fouling out. Booker finished with 16 points. Booker shot four for 13 from the field and two of seven from three-point range.

"It was a fight all night," he said. "They beat us up a little bit, but down the stretch we picked it up a little bit and did what we had to do." Deandre Ayton and Mikal Bridges scored 12 points in the win at Scotiabank Arena. "That's one of those games you've got to put your hard hat on," Paul said. In Chicago, Nikola Vucevic scored 22 points and DeMar DeRozan delivered 20 points and 12 rebounds as the Chicago Bulls clobbered the Detroit Pistons 133-87 to win their 10th game in the last 11. — AFP