

Tunisia up where they've never been



AFP, Tunis

Tunisia's long, painful wait for a meaningful piece of soccer silverware finally came to end here on Saturday when a 2-1 win over Morocco gave them their first ever African Nations Cup title.

Ziad Jaziri scored what proved to be Tunisia's winner in the 52nd minute after a dreadful error by Morocco goalkeeper Khalid Fouhami who spilled a sharp drive from Jose Clayton to present Jaziri with an easy chance.

Silva dos Santos, with his fourth goal of the tournament, had Tunisia the lead after just five minutes with a close range header but, seven minutes from half-time, Youssef Mokhtari pulled Morocco level to also register his fourth goal of the competition.

The victory handed French coach Roger Lemerre his second continental crown to add to the European championship he won with France in 2000 as the Carthage Eagles finally buried the misery of two previous Nations Cup final

defeats in 1965 and 1996.

"We have achieved our target and all the credit must go to the players, officials and supporters," said Lemerre who refused to take questions on his team's win preferring instead to make a short statement.

"They have made history for the country and this is a day of joy for the whole nation."

Morocco coach Badou Zaki admitted his side were the authors of their own downfall.

"We committed too many errors and Tunisia exploited them to score two goals," said Zaki whose team were the most attractive in the tournament and finished as top scorers with 14 goals.

"We are a young side and need more time and encouragement to be able to do better. I congratulate Tunisia. They put in a great effort but the real winner is Arab football."

Sadly for keeper Fouhami, it wasn't his first gaffe of the tournament as he had also spilled a shot from South Africa's Siyabonga Nomvete in an earlier group game which allowed Patrick Mayo to score.

Tunisia went into Saturday's match without suspended captain Khaled Badra but his absence was

soon forgotten as the hosts opened the scoring after just five minutes.

Jose Clayton's fierce long-range drive was turned around the post by Fouhami.

The resulting corner was only half-cleared with the ball falling to Mehdi Nefti out on the right and his clever cross was met by Santos who darted in between two defenders to head confidently into the corner.

However, Mokhtari, who plays his club football for Wacker Burghausen in Germany, was on target in the 38th minute for Morocco's equaliser.

Tunisia left-back Karim Hagui hit a lazy clearance which was intercepted by Walid Regragui whose quick pass released Youssef Hadji down the right flank.

Hadji then crossed for Mokhtari whose diving header was too good for Tunisia goalkeeper Ali Boumnijel.

Seven minutes into the second half, Tunisia hit the decisive goal.

Clayton played a smart one-two with Santos and his fierce left-foot drive slipped out of the grasp of Fouhami and the ball fell at the feet of Jaziri who had the simplest task to score from just six yards with the Moroccan keeper left to thump the ground in frustration.

Santos, who also had the satisfaction of joining Mokhtari, Cameroon's Patrick Mboma, Jay Jay Okocha of Nigeria and Mali's Frederic Kanoute as tournament top scorer with four goals, praised Lemerre.

"He is one of the best coaches I know. His style and way of training have brought a lot to the team," said the Brazilian-born player.

"I think that because of Roger Lemerre, we will reap the fruits of all his work in the future."

TOP SCORERS

AFP, Tunis

Leading scorers in the African Nations Cup after Saturday's final here:

4 - Patrick Mboma (CMR), Frederic Kanoute (MLI), Jay Jay Okocha (NGR), Silva dos Santos (TUN), Youssef Mokhtari (MAR)

3 - Tié Camara (GUI), Peter Ndlovu (ZIM), Youssef Hadji (MAR), Osaze Odemwingie (NGR)

2 - Hocine Achiou (ALG), Modeste Mbami (CMR), Mamadou Niang (SEN), Siyabonga Nomvete (RSA), Mahamadou Diarra (MLI), Pascal Feindounou (GUI), John Utaka (NGR), Marouane Chamakh (MAR), Ziad Jaziri (TUN)



PHOTO: AFP

THEIR PRODEST MOMENT: Tunisia's Riadh Bouazizi (R), Khaled Badra (C) and Karim Hagui celebrate with the African Nations Cup trophy after defeating Morocco in the final in Rades on February 15.

FA Cup Reyes sends Chelsea packing



Football

AFP, London

Jose Antonio Reyes rescued Arsenal by scoring twice in five minutes as the FA Cup holders came from behind to beat London rivals Chelsea 2-1 and secure their place in this season's quarter-finals here at Highbury on Sunday.

Reyes's first goals for Arsenal since the Spaniard's club record 17 million pounds move from Seville in January saw the Premiership leaders fight back against their third placed opponents after Adrian Mutu had given the visitors the lead five minutes before half-time.

The result saw Arsenal, unbeaten in the FA Cup since losing the 2001 final against Liverpool, keep alive their dream of a third successive Cup triumph, something no club has achieved since 1886, and an unprecedented fourth final in a row.

It was also their fourth FA Cup win over Chelsea in four seasons.

Arsenal were without Thierry Henry, the France striker ruled out with a foot injury, but Dutch forward Dennis Bergkamp was fit again following a calf problem.

Chelsea keeper Carlo Cudicini started the match after a groin injury.

In the 12th minute Robert Pires released Gilberto but a superb cover tackle by Chelsea captain John Terry denied the Brazilian a shot.

William Gallas then forced a good save from Arsenal's German keeper Jens Lehmann.

Chelsea thought they had the lead in the 35th minute when Frank Lampard's cross was headed in by Jesper Gronkjaer only for the goal to be ruled out for offside. But replays suggested that was an incorrect decision.

However, barely five minutes later

Mutu eventually gave Chelsea the lead five minutes before half-time when Scott Parker blocked Lehmann's poor clearance.

Romanian striker Mutu beat Gunners defender Kolo Toure before lashing his shot past Lehmann.

But just before the break Arsenal's England full-back Ashley Cole saw Italian Cudicini tip over his testing drive.

However, there was nothing Cudicini could do about the 56th minute strike from Reyes that levelled the match.

Given time and space on the edge of the box, the 20-year-old forward unleashed a fierce drive that flew into the top right corner of Cudicini's goal.

The Chelsea keeper went off soon afterwards, with what looked a recurrence of his old injury and replacement Neil Sullivan soon found himself picking the ball out of his own net.

Influential Arsenal skipper Patrick Vieira slipped in a precision pass behind the Chelsea defence that saw Reyes ghost in on the blind side of Mario Melchiot.

This time he opted for precision not power and although Sullivan got fingertips to the ball neither he nor the back-tracking Terry could prevent it crossing the line.

Reyes might have had a third minutes later when he twice had shots blocked in a goalmouth scramble.

Meanwhile Chelsea, for all the millions lavished on their squad by billionaire owner Roman Abramovich, never truly looked like equalising.

But Claudio Ranieri's men will have a chance for revenge when they face Arsenal at Stamford Bridge in the Premiership on Saturday.

Smith recalled

AFP, London

Leeds striker Alan Smith was recalled to the England squad announced here Saturday for next week's friendly away to Portugal in Faro.

Leeds striker Smith was summoned as a late replacement for England's previous squad against Denmark but was sent home soon afterwards after it was confirmed he had been arrested.

England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson said at the time he would give the 23-year-old another chance and the Swede was true to his word ahead of Wednesday's game against the host nation of Euro 2004.

But there was still no England call for Celtic midfielder Alan Thompson despite being watched by Eriksson's assistant Tord Grip.

Serie A Lazio blank Empoli



Football

AFP, Rome

Dutch international defender Jaap Stam weighed in with a goal as Lazio overcame a setback earlier in the season against Empoli to humiliate the relegation strugglers 3-0 here on Saturday.

Former Manchester United defender Stam drove a free kick past Daniele Balli in the visitors' goal to hand Lazio the honours ahead of

Sunday's main round of Serie A fixtures.

The result makes amends for Lazio's 2-2 draw with Empoli earlier this season.

The hosts got off the mark quickly at the Olympic stadium with Portuguese international defender Fernando Couto popping up to head home a Sinisa Mihajlovic corner to open the scoring after five minutes.

It took until the stroke of half time before Lazio doubled their lead - and when it came it baffled almost everyone.



PHOTO: AFP

VfL Bochum's Danish international Peter Madsen (L) scores past Bayern Munich's goalie Oliver Kahn at Bochum on February 15

Bundesliga

Bayern hit by Bochum



Football

AFP, Madrid

Champions Bayern Munich missed a golden opportunity to edge closer to Bundesliga pace-setters Werder Bremen on Saturday when they fell to a 1-0 defeat away at VfL Bochum.

Bremen can now move nine points clear of Ottmar Hitzfeld's side if they beat Kaiserslautern at home on Sunday.

Fellow title contenders VfB Stuttgart and Bayer Leverkusen also faltered, collecting a point apiece in draws with Borussia Monchengladbach and Hannover respectively.

VfL Bochum vowed not to be overawed by Bayern before the clash at the Ruhrstadion and they were true to their word.

Bochum, who are still unbeaten at home this season, went for the throat from the first whistle as Bayern, missing Michael Ballack through suspension, ambled in the early stages.

Munich's pedestrian start was punished after just eight minutes with Danish international Peter Madsen taking advantage of a stray pass from the returning Croat Robert Kovac to circle Oliver Kahn and slot home.

Despite having 82 minutes to get back into the game Bayern huffed and puffed but looked powder-puff in attack.

Bosnian Hasan Salihamidzic had the ball in the net in stoppage time but the effort was ruled out for offside.

VfB Stuttgart meanwhile missed their chance to leapfrog Bayern into second place after a late equaliser from Czech Vaclav Sverkos handed Borussia Monchengladbach a share of the points in a 1-1 draw at the Gottlieb-Daimler Stadium.

Hungarian international Imre Szabics headed the hosts in front after just five minutes with Horst Heldt's dangerous cross making the finish easy.

Boris Zivkovic, a winter recruit from Portsmouth, was then ordered to take an early bath, picking up a second yellow card on 34 minutes for complaining to the referee.

However, Gladbach had the numerical advantage for less than ten minutes as Enrico Gaede was handed his marching orders for two professional fouls.

Sverkos, who hit a hat-trick against Stuttgart in the 4-2 Cup win, continued his form against the club by netting the equaliser with six minutes remaining.

Bayer Leverkusen came from two goals down to secure a 2-2 draw with Hannover and pick up their first

points of 2004 after two straight defeats.

US international Clint Mathis pounced on a Diego Placente error to break the deadlock on 40 minutes and when Greek international Kostas Konstantinidis doubled that lead three minutes after the interval the points looked safe for the hosts.

However, Dimitar Berbatov reduced the arrears after the hour mark and Brazilian striker Franca struck to grab a vital point for Bayer.

Elsewhere Hertha Berlin lifted themselves off the foot of the Bundesliga with a 3-2 triumph away to SC Freiburg.

Goals from Arne Friedrich (24), Andreas Neuendorf (44) and new signing Giuseppe Reina (63) helped the capital club move out of the relegation zone, although two late Freiburg efforts kept Berlin coach Hans Meyer on his toes.

TOP SIX

German league table after Saturday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, against, points):											
Bremen	19	14	3	2	51	21	45				
Bayern	20	11	6	3	44	22	39				
Stuttgart	20	11	6	3	27	9	39				
Leverkusen	20	10	6	4	37	22	36				
Bochum	20	9	6	5	33	23	33				
Schalke	20	8	7	5	26	23	31				

Not a Cup to remember?



AFP, Tunis

Accusations of cheating, botched organisation, gamesmanship and scuffles between police and fans.

For many, they will be the bitter-sweet experiences of the 2004 African Nations Cup which was won by Tunisia here on Saturday after three weeks in which the standards rarely rose beyond the mediocre.

From the time Zied Jaziri scored the first goal of the tournament on January 24 until the same player buried the title-winning tap-in three weeks later, the Nations Cup posed more questions than answers.

How can a nation, who aspire to host a World Cup, tolerate national anthems being jeered?

What caused their opponents to constantly complain of their campaigns being sabotaged?

The Tunisian people will tolerate the detractors as their team, well-marshalled by the rehabilitated Roger Lemerre, made the most of Rades Stadium's intimidating atmosphere to swoop on a first African Cup with a 2-1 win against Morocco.

But their progress to the final was marred by controversy especially their 1-0 win in the last eight against Senegal.

Senegal's El Hadji Diouf was hit with a three-match ban for violent conduct as he argued with referee Ali Busjaim after he claimed he had been fouled at the start of the move which led to the only goal.

That ban was increased to four games while three members of the backroom staff were banned from the touchline for twelve months.

The winning goal was scored

by Jawhar Mnari and the irony would not have been lost on Democratic Republic of Congo striker Lomana LuaLua, who was sent off in his team's game against the hosts at Rades.

He had gently kicked-out at the ankles of Mnari who responded by collapsing theatrically to the ground, holding his head and writhing in agony.

"Ever since we arrived here, they treated us like shit," said LuaLua.

DR Congo coach Mick Wadsworth was equally unimpressed.

"All along there were problems. It's very difficult to play in this environment," said the Englishman who claimed that his team had been allocated a training ground two hours from their hotel.

He was also outraged that he and his staff were denied the traditional courtesy of being given tickets to watch Tunisia's opening match against Rwanda.

All six opponents who played Tunisia had their national anthems booed.

The local federation was fined 1,000 dollars but the problem persisted.

The wrong anthem, also jeered, was played for Nigeria at the start of the semi-finals with the organisers then adding a bizarre twist by eventually finding the right one and ordering both teams to line up again at the start of the second half.

"It was insulting," said Nigeria coach Christian Chukwu. "It was a deliberate attempt to destabilise the team. Even when the right one was played after half-time, we still couldn't hear it because of the whistling by the crowd. They showed a lack of respect and it is not acceptable."

Also deemed unacceptable was the behaviour of Algeria's

fans who cost their federation almost 40,000 dollars in fines.

Against bitter rivals Egypt, missiles were thrown onto the pitch and things got worse in the quarter-final defeat to Morocco where seats were ripped up and lobbed onto the field at Sfax before supporters got involved in running battles with police. Sixty-nine people were injured.

On the pitch, tournament co-favourites Cameroon, who had been bidding for a third successive title and record fifth in all, and Senegal both flopped in the quarter-finals.

Senegal set the tone for their poor campaign with a laboured 0-0 draw against Burkina Faso and always looked a pale shadow of the team which reached the World Cup quarter-finals in 2002.

Nigeria's Super Eagles lost their opening match to Morocco, kicked out three players for breaking a night-time curfew but, inspired by player of the tournament Jay Jay Okocha, made the semi-finals where they lost to Tunisia on a shoot-out.

If an old hand like Okocha had a good tournament, then so did new recruits to the African cause, Silva dos Santos, Brazilian-born but playing for Tunisia, and Frederic Kanoute.

The Tottenham striker traded in France for Mali and finished joint top-scorer with four goals, alongside Santos, Patrick Mboma, Okocha and Youssef Mokhtari, and fully justified his controversial switch of nationalities.

The tournament's minnows too can look back on a good Tunisia 2004.

Zimbabwe, who finished bottom of their group, had the satisfaction of taking the lead in every game they played while Rwanda, making their debut, came within a point of making it to the quarter-finals.