

Senegal stripped of AFCON title, Morocco declared champions

Senegal punished for player walkout during chaotic final

● Walk-off protest proved decisive

● Late penalty sparked chaos

● Senegal vow CAS appeal

AFP | Paris

Senegal say they will appeal after they were sensationally stripped of the Africa Cup of Nations title on Tuesday and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) instead declared Morocco champions, two months after their chaotic final.

Several Senegalese players controversially walked off the pitch in Rabat during the final on January 18 in protest when the hosts were awarded a penalty late in second-half stoppage time.

After Senegal's players eventually returned having been coaxed back onto the pitch by captain Sadio Mané, Morocco missed the penalty and Pape Gueye went on to score the goal in extra time that gave his team a 1-0 victory.

CAF said that having studied Morocco's appeal, "the Senegal national team is declared to have forfeited the match" and the result was "officially recorded as 3-0" in favour of Morocco.

The CAF Appeals Committee justified its decision by applying Articles 82 and 84 of the AFCON Regulations, which state that if a team "refuses to play or leaves the ground before the regular end of the match without the authorisation of the referee, it shall be considered (loser) and shall be eliminated for good from the current competition".

The articles add that the team contravening the regulations "will lose its match by 3-0".



Senegal and Morocco players clash during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) final (file photo)

The Royal Moroccan Football Federation (FRMF) said in a statement its appeal "was never intended to contest the sporting performance of the teams participating in this competition, but solely to request the application of the competition regulations".

"The Federation reaffirms its commitment to respecting the rules, to the clarity of the competitive framework, and to the stability of African competitions," the statement added.

Senegal's football authorities said they will appeal "as soon as

possible" to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

"The Senegalese Football Federation condemns this unjust, unprecedented and unacceptable decision, which brings African football into disrepute," it said in a statement.

Chaotic scenes

Minutes before the end of the match, some Senegalese supporters attempted a pitch invasion, while Senegal's players halted the game for nearly 20 minutes to protest the late pen-

alty awarded to Morocco.

The controversial spot-kick was awarded by Congolese referee Jean-Jacques Ndala right at the end of the allotted eight added minutes in normal time following a VAR check for a challenge on Brahim Diaz by El Hadji Malick Diouf.

The game was goalless at the time and Diaz could have won the trophy for Morocco with the spot-kick in the 24th minute of added time at the end of normal time.

But Senegal goalkeeper

Edouard Mendy easily saved the weak attempted 'Panenka' chip by the Real Madrid winger, who was clearly distracted by the long delay that followed the penalty award.

The game at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium then went to extra time, and Gueye's brilliant 94th-minute strike won it for Senegal.

Several of the team's players posted on social media after the announcement that they had been stripped of the title.

Defender Moussa Niakhate,

YOU
KNOW WHAT

In a bizarre twist, Morocco's Brahim Diaz actually missed the "Panenka" penalty that sparked the protest, meaning Senegal originally won the match 1-0 in extra time before the result was overturned by the committee

who plays for French club Lyon, posted a picture of himself lifting the Africa Cup of Nations trophy with a message that said "they're mad", in an apparent reference to CAF.

In the immediate aftermath of the final, FIFA president Gianni Infantino had condemned "some Senegal players" for the "unacceptable scenes".

"It is unacceptable to leave the field of play in this manner, and equally, violence cannot be tolerated in our sport, it is simply not right," Infantino, who attended the match, said.

In late January, CAF imposed a series of disciplinary sanctions, including fines amounting to several hundred thousand euros, on the federations of both countries for unsportsmanlike conduct and violations of fair play principles.

The appeal trial of 18 Senegalese supporters, imprisoned since the final and sentenced to prison terms ranging from three months to one year for "hooliganism," which was scheduled to take place on Monday, has been postponed until March 30.

The celebration that never came

A tasteless AFCON title for Morocco

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

Football is at its best in the heat of the moment, when victory is celebrated instantly on the pitch. Yet Morocco's 2025 Africa Cup of Nations title, awarded months after Senegal's 1-0 extra-time win was overturned, strips the sport of that immediacy. On Tuesday, CAF declared the Teranga Lions to have forfeited the final, handing Morocco the trophy on paper. On the field, however, the contest's authenticity and emotion were lost.

The rules are clear. Article 82 of the AFCON regulations states that a team leaving the pitch

without the referee's authorization can forfeit the match. During the final, Senegal's players walked off for about 15 minutes at the insistence of head coach Pape Thiaw after a late penalty was awarded to the Atlas Lions. Urged back by captain Sadio Mané, they completed the match and scored the winning goal in extra time. If a forfeit was justified, it should have been enforced immediately. Delaying the decision undermines the spirit of the contest and fuels long-standing criticism of African football governance.

The contrast between on-field action and off-field administration could not be sharper.

Brahim Diaz's missed Panenka drew scrutiny, yet Moroccan players endured the full 120 minutes. Had CAF applied the rule in real time, Morocco could have celebrated with fans, parades, and chants intact. Instead, the championship arrived administratively and awkwardly. In protest, Walid Regragui, who guided Morocco to the 2022 World Cup semi-finals, resigned before the ruling was announced.

This administrative title stands in stark contrast to Morocco's first AFCON triumph in 1976 in Ethiopia. Under Romanian coach Virgil Mardarescu, Morocco went unbeaten in a final four-team round-robin,

defeating Egypt and Nigeria before drawing with Guinea to seal the title. That victory was earned on the pitch, celebrated in real time, and remains a proud milestone in Moroccan football history.

Football shines brightest when triumph is earned on the field, not in boardrooms. Senegal, having completed the match and scored in extra time, was denied a rightful celebration and will continue to claim the trophy. Moroccans, meanwhile, are left with a title that feels hollow, its joy and immediacy lost. This championship is a reminder that football's beauty lies in the moments that unfold on the pitch.



An AI-generated image of Morocco celebrating the AFCON title