

Mahrez backs Algeria revival at AFCON

Captain says team ready to move past two poor tournament showings

- Mahrez calls past failures finished
- Algeria open against Sudan
- Fourth in Africa rankings

AFP | Rabat

Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez is confident his side can make up for poor showings at the last two editions of the Africa Cup of Nations as the 2019 champions prepare to begin their campaign in Morocco on Wednesday.

The Desert Foxes won their second AFCON title the last time it was played in North Africa, six years ago in Egypt.

However, their title defence three years later in Cameroon ended in first-round elimination with just a single point, and they also failed to win a match in going out in the group stage in Ivory Coast in 2024.

“There is no doubt that we



Algeria's forward #7 Riyad Mahrez in action (file photo)

were not good at the last two AFCONs but that is in the past now. All that is behind us,” Mahrez said yesterday in Rabat, where Algeria play Sudan on Wednesday.

“Now we have the opportunity

of a lifetime, the chance to make up for what has happened and do better. Tomorrow it is time for this generation.”

Algeria will be aiming to live up to their billing as the fourth-best side in Africa according to

the FIFA rankings.

A strong showing in Morocco will also set them up for the World Cup in North America in six months, after Algeria qualified for the first time since 2014.

Former Manchester City

YOU
KNOW WHAT

Algeria's squad features goalkeeper Luca Zidane, son of French legend Zinedine Zidane; though born in Marseille, he debuted for his father's ancestral homeland in October to solve Algeria's long-standing goalkeeping issues

winger Mahrez, now playing for Al-Ahli in the Saudi Pro League, turns 35 in February and so these tournaments may mark his swansong at international level.

But he is excited about Algeria's new generation, including VfL Wolfsburg forward Mohamed Amoura and the goalkeeper Luca Zidane.

Son of France legend Zinedine, Luca Zidane was born in Marseille and plays for Granada in the Spanish second division.

He made his Algeria debut in October and it is hoped he can be the solution to what has been a problem position for coach Vladimir Petkovic.

“Luca has integrated well into the squad and is trying to give everything for the team,” said Mahrez, who was born in France to an Algerian father and a Moroccan mother.

“I know his name is a big weight to carry but he is not letting that get to him.”

After Wednesday's game Algeria will also play Burkina Faso and Equatorial Guinea in a tricky Group E, and their path in the knockout phase could be complicated too.

Winning the section would mean a last-16 tie against the runners-up in Group D which includes Senegal and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Meanwhile, finishing second would mean a clash with the winners of Group F, which includes reigning champions Ivory Coast and Cameroon.

Tunisian Aziz Al-Waqi wins Arab Elite Tennis title in Bahrain



TDT | Manama

Tunisia's Aziz Al-Waqi was crowned champion of the fifth Arab Elite Tennis Championship after defeating Jordan's Mohammad Qutb 7-6, 6-2 in the final on Sunday, organisers said. The title match was played at the Public Security Officers Club courts under the patronage and in the presence of Bahrain's Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa.

The closing ceremony was

attended by Arab Tennis Federation president Shaikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdullah Al-Sabah, Bahrain Tennis Federation president Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, heads of national federations and sponsors, alongside a large crowd.

Shaikh Ahmad praised the tournament's technical, organisational and media standards, saying the fifth edition reflected the event's growing stature on the Arab sporting calendar.

He thanked Bahrain's Interior Ministry and the Public Security Officers Club for hosting the event, as well as long-time sponsors including Ahli United Bank and KGL, noting that increased backing had allowed prize money to rise to \$50,000 from \$30,000 last year.

Shaikh Ahmad said the championship had become a leading Arab event, bringing together the region's top players and showcasing the sport's development.

Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa highlighted the importance of sustaining Arab tournaments to raise players' technical and physical standards, expressing hope for broader Gulf participation in future editions.

He also thanked the Interior Minister for his continued support of tennis in Bahrain and the Arab Tennis Federation for entrusting the kingdom with hosting the championship for a second consecutive year.

Thunder bounce back to down Grizzlies, Nuggets sink Jazz



Shai Gilgeous-Alexander #2 of the Oklahoma City Thunder handles the ball while being defended by Jaylen Wells #0 of the Memphis Grizzlies

AFP | Los Angeles

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder got back to winning ways with a 119-103 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies on Monday.

Reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Gilgeous-Alexander led the scoring to give the Thunder a morale-boosting victory after their defeat in Minnesota on Friday.

“We weren’t at our best tonight but we did enough to win -- but we’ve still got to get better,” Gilgeous-Alexander told NBC television.

Memphis flirted with an upset after starting brightly, taking an early seven-point lead in the first quarter before Oklahoma City took control in the second quarter.

Gilgeous-Alexander was backed by 24 points from Jalen Williams while Ajay Mitchell had 16 off the bench.

Gilgeous-Alexander’s 31-point contribution extended his incredible scoring streak.

The Canadian star has now

scored 20 points or more in 100 consecutive games, making him only the second player to achieve that feat after Wilt Chamberlain.

“My teammates let me shoot whatever shots I want to out there,” Gilgeous-Alexander said.

“The coaching staff trust me and I put in the work to get better each and every day.”

The win improved Oklahoma City’s record to 26-3 at the top of the Western Conference standings. The Thunder were to play second-placed San Antonio yesterday.

In other games on Monday, the Denver Nuggets kept up their pursuit of Oklahoma City in the West with a 135-112 pummeling of the Utah Jazz in Colorado.

The Nuggets (21-7) led from start to finish with Nikola Jokic grabbing 14 points, 13 rebounds and 13 assists for his 14th triple double of the season and the 178th of his career.

Only Oscar Robertson (181) and Russell Westbrook (207) have scored more triple doubles than the Denver star.

Napoli beat Bologna to lift Italian Super Cup

AFP | Rome

Napoli won the Italian Super Cup on Monday as David Neres scored twice to secure the reigning Serie A champions a 2-0 win over Bologna in the final in Jeddah.

Brazilian winger Neres curled in a brilliant shot from distance to give Napoli the lead before half-time against last season's Italian Cup winners.

He struck again in the second half after intercepting a weak pass from Bologna goalkeeper Federico Ravaglia as he tried to



Napoli's players celebrate the win

play out from the back.

Neres finished with three goals in the Super Cup after also scoring in the 2-0 semi-final win over AC Milan last week.

It is the third time Napoli have won the competition, after 1990 and 2014.

“The lads deserve congratulations,” Napoli coach Antonio Conte told Sport Mediaset.

“They showed how much they wanted this trophy for the fans, and we’ll also have a great Christmas celebration now with a new trophy in the cabinet.”