

Senegal's World Cup campaign began with disappointment in New Jersey as missed opportunities proved costly in a 3-1 defeat to France in their opening Group I match.

The scoreline suggested a comfortable French victory, but the match told a different story. For much of the evening at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, Senegal matched the 2022 World Cup finalists and, at times, looked the more threatening side.

Pape Thiaw's team started brightly, using their pace and direct attacking play to trouble the French defence. They created the clearer chances before the break and could easily have gone into half-time with the lead.

Nicolas Jackson came closest when he struck the post with goalkeeper Mike Maignan beaten. Moments later, Ismaila Sarr missed a golden opportunity, sending his effort over the bar from close range.

Those missed chances would prove decisive.

France emerged stronger after the interval, although Senegal continued to pose a threat. Goalkeeper Edouard Mendy kept his side in the contest with a series of impressive saves, denying both Michael Olise and Kylian Mbappé.

The breakthrough finally came in the 66th minute. Olise threaded a precise pass behind the Senegal defence and Mbappé showed his quality, calmly finishing beyond Mendy.

Senegal thought they had found an immediate response, but celebrations were cut short after a lengthy VAR review ruled out an equaliser for offside.

The setback appeared to drain momentum from the West Africans, and France took full advantage. Substitute Bradley Barcola doubled the lead in the 82nd minute, finishing neatly from Adrien Rabiot's cross.

There was still time for late drama. Teenager Ibrahim Mbaye pulled a goal back deep into stoppage time with a powerful strike, briefly raising hopes of an unlikely comeback.

But France quickly restored their two-goal advantage. Mbappé collected possession on the edge of the penalty area before curling an effort beyond Mendy to seal both his second goal of the night and France's victory.

Despite the defeat, Senegal's performance offered encouragement. If they can maintain the same intensity and create similar chances in their remaining matches, qualification from Group I remains within reach.

Around the World Cup

Elsewhere in Group I, Norway made an impressive start with a 4-1 victory over Iraq in Boston. Erling Haaland scored twice on his World Cup debut as the Norwegians moved level with France on three points.

In Group J, defending champions Argentina opened their campaign with a convincing 3-0 win over Algeria in Kansas City. Lionel Messi scored all three goals, underlining his continued importance to the South Americans.

Austria also enjoyed a winning start, defeating Jordan 3-1 in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Earlier in the week, Iran and New Zealand shared a thrilling 2-2 draw in Group G at SoFi Stadium, while Saudi Arabia and Uruguay played out a 1-1 draw in Miami.

Mixed Results for African Teams

Africa's representatives have produced several encouraging performances in the opening round of matches, even if results have been mixed.

Ivory Coast secured a valuable 1-0 victory over Ecuador, while Egypt earned a hard-fought 1-1 draw against Belgium after a disciplined defensive display. Cape Verde also impressed by holding Spain to a goalless draw in one of the tournament's early surprises.

Not all the results went Africa's way. Tunisia suffered a heavy 5-1 defeat to Sweden in Monterrey, while South Africa were beaten 2-0 by co-hosts Mexico in the tournament's opening match.

Morocco, meanwhile, continued to show why they remain one of Africa's strongest sides, earning a credible 1-1 draw against Brazil.

With the group stage still in its early days, several African teams remain well placed to challenge for a place in the knockout rounds.