

After a gripping set of semi-finals, the picture at the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations is finally clear. Morocco and Senegal have emerged as the two last teams standing, setting up a final that feels worthy of the tournament's biggest stage. Meanwhile, the remaining sides will turn their attention to the third-place playoff.

As hosts, Morocco kicked off their AFCON journey against Comoros on December 21, 2025. Weeks later, the Atlas Lions are exactly where their fans dreamed they would be; in the final, with the chance to lift the trophy on home soil.

Inspired by the creativity and drive of Brahim Díaz, Morocco edged past Nigeria in a tense semi-final that finished goalless even after extra time. The match was decided from the penalty spot, where goalkeeper Yassine Bounou once again proved his big-game pedigree. He saved two spot-kicks, including a superb stop from Bruno Onyemaechi, before Youssef En-Nesyri calmly slotted home the winner to send the Rabat crowd into raptures.

There was relief as much as joy. Hamza Igamane, who had looked devastated after missing his penalty, was quickly embraced by teammates, while captain Achraf Hakimi led by example by converting his own effort.

Waiting for Morocco in the final will be Senegal. The Lions of Teranga sealed their place with a narrow 1-0 win over Egypt, thanks to a decisive late strike from Sadio Mané. Once again, when Senegal needed a moment of quality, Mané delivered.



Mane earned Man of the match after scoring the winner against Egypt in the other semifinal match

### **A final between Africa's best**

Sunday's showdown will pit the top two African nations in the FIFA world rankings against each other; a fitting finale for AFCON 2025. For Morocco coach Walid Regragui and his players, the pressure has been immense. The country has waited nearly 50 years for another AFCON title, and playing the final at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium only heightens expectations. Still, with the home crowd behind them, confidence is growing that this could finally be their moment.

For Nigeria, however, it was another painful exit. Two years after losing an AFCON final to hosts Ivory Coast, their hopes ended again at the hands — quite literally; of a goalkeeper in top form.

## **A familiar story for Mané and Salah**

Senegal's semi-final win also added another chapter to the long-running international rivalry between Sadio Mané and Mohamed Salah. When Mané scored with 12 minutes left in Tangier, Egypt had yet to register a single shot on target; a remarkable statistic given the attacking talent at their disposal.

Despite enjoying one of his most productive AFCON tournaments in terms of goals, Salah found himself isolated for long spells. Egypt defended deep, played cautiously, and struggled to get numbers forward. Senegal were not dominant, but they were just about the more adventurous side; and Mané's sharp reaction to a loose ball outside the box was all it took.

That moment underlined why Mané and Salah have defined African football for more than a decade. Yet, on the international stage, the balance continues to tilt Senegal's way. Finals, World Cup qualifiers, and now another AFCON semi-final; Mané has come out on top each time.

## **Legacy questions linger for Salah**

There is no serious debate about Salah's status as Egypt's greatest-ever footballer. His achievements at club level and his role in leading Egypt to the World Cup have already secured his place in history. Still, AFCON success remains the missing piece.

It may be harsh to judge him against past generations who won three consecutive titles under very different circumstances. Even so, Salah understands how legacies are written. Retiring without an AFCON trophy would always feel like unfinished business.

The good news for Egypt; and for Salah himself; is that time is still on his side. Unlike Mané, who has hinted this could be his final AFCON, Salah is expected to return. With the next tournaments scheduled for East Africa and beyond, there will be more chances to rewrite the story.

After eliminating Egypt, Mané even encouraged his old Liverpool teammate not to give up on the dream. Knowing Salah, that comment is more likely to fuel him than comfort him.

## **One last hurdle**

For now, though, the spotlight shifts back to Rabat. Morocco versus Senegal. Hosts chasing history against reigning champions hungry for a second crown. Two proud teams, packed stadiums, and a trophy that means everything.

AFCON 2025 could hardly have asked for a better ending.