

Morocco has made international headlines after their shock World Cup victory against Portugal 1-0 and qualification for the tournament's semi-finals for the first time in history. But will Morocco continue making history and win their upcoming match against defending champions France?

Africa's first World Cup semifinalist will lock horns with France in the tournament's semi-finals on Wednesday at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor. No African or Arab nation has ever gotten this far.

Wednesday's match has cultural and political connotations — Morocco was under French rule from 1912-56 — and the outcome is far from the foregone conclusion many would presume by looking at the names of the players and the rankings of the teams.

Despite predictions and statistics suggesting that Morocco was not going to make it past the group stage, the North African squad has defied all odds by topping its group and clinching well-deserved wins in the knockout stages.

Morocco's breakthrough started with a goalless draw against the 2018 World Cup's runners-up Croatia in the group stage, followed by a stunning 2-0 win against Belgium, which is ranked by FIFA as the second-best team in the world.

Morocco also defeated Canada 2-1 in the group phase and topped group F with a total of seven points.

In addition, Morocco sent home pre-match favorite Spain after defeating the European team in the round of 16, prompting Spain's Royal Football Federation (RFEF) to sack the team's head coach Luis Enrique.

The French squad seems determined to avoid the fate that overtook their fellow European teams. However, Morocco's head coach Walid Regragui is also adamant that his team can deliver another shocker against the highly ranked French.

"If you show the passion, heart, and belief, you can succeed and my players have shown that. It is not a miracle — those in Europe might say it is, but we have beaten Portugal, Spain, and Belgium and drawn against Croatia without conceding," Regragui said.

Speaking at a press conference following their latest victory, the Moroccan technician stressed that his team's performances are the result of months of "hard

work."

France's coach Didier Deschamps echoed these sentiments in recent comments, saying that his players will "take Morocco seriously" as they expect a "very difficult game" against a well-organized side that plays "with heart and belief."

The defending champions have just passed their own big test by coming through a tough quarterfinal match against England, on a rare occasion when Mbappé was kept quiet.

No player has scored more than his five goals in Qatar and it won't be easy for Mbappé to add to that tally against Morocco.

France starts as the big favorite, though, because of its star quality and experience.

In Mbappé and Antoine Griezmann, a forward who has reinvented himself as a midfield playmaker at the World Cup, the team has two of the World Cup's leading players while Olivier Giroud's winner against England took him to four goals — the same as Messi.

They have attacking threats from everywhere and that intangible quality of just knowing how to get the job done.

France center back Raphael Varane said there will be no danger of complacency among his teammates in a game against the world's 22nd-ranked team.

Sports Star reported the French coach as saying: "Few people can say that they expected Morocco to reach the World Cup semifinals. But, for everything they have done and for all the teams they have faced, for their performances, they've only let in one goal, it's a bit of a surprise, but they deserve to be where they are."

Similar to all of Morocco's previous matches at the ongoing World Cup, odds are in favor of their opponents to clinch a win.

"It won't come as a huge shock to learn Les Bleus are the clear favorites," Opta Analyst has said, indicating that France has a 64.3% chance of winning.

The Atlas Lions have a 13% chance of claiming a victory, while the likelihood of the game ending in a draw and going to extra-time stands at 22.7%, according to Opta Analyst.

The sports news outlet 90min predicts that the game will end with France defeating Morocco 1-0.

In addition, Sofascore predictions showed that 48.35% of voters guessed France would win Wednesday's match, while 39.9% voted in favor of Morocco. The remaining 11.7% predicted that the match would end in a draw.