

The Moroccan national football team's journey at the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) came to a crashing end on Tuesday night after a stunning 2-0 defeat against South Africa in the round of 16.

Despite being heavily favored to win the match and the entire tournament, the Atlas Lions were undone by a combination of South African resilience and their own missed opportunities, most notably Achraf Hakimi's agonizing penalty miss in the second half.

The opening 45 minutes were a tense affair, with both teams struggling to break the deadlock. Morocco dominated possession but found it difficult to penetrate the South African defense. The best chance of the half fell to Achraf Hakimi in the eighth minute, but his shot was deflected for a corner.

The second half saw South Africa come more into the game, and they took the lead in the 55th minute through Evidence Makgopa. The goal seemed to spark Morocco into life, and they pressed for an equalizer. However, their efforts were thwarted by a combination of poor finishing and some excellent saves from South African goalkeeper Ronwen Williams.

The turning point of the match came in the 73rd minute when South Africa defender Mthobeni Mhlabane handled the ball in the penalty area. Up stepped Achraf Hakimi, Morocco's star player, to take the spot-kick. However, the PSG right-back blazed his effort over the bar, sending shockwaves through the Moroccan camp.

With Morocco deflated by the missed penalty, South Africa took advantage and added a second goal in the 88th minute through Bongani Zungu to seal the victory. The win sent the Bafana Bafana into the quarterfinals, while Morocco's AFCON dreams were shattered in the most heartbreaking fashion.

Achraf Hakimi's penalty miss will undoubtedly be remembered as the defining moment of the match. The pressure on the young star was immense, and he unfortunately cracked under it. His miss not only cost Morocco the game, but it also raised questions about his mental strength and ability to handle pressure in big moments.

The defeat will be a major blow to Moroccan football. The Atlas Lions were widely expected to challenge for the title, and their early exit from the tournament will be seen as a major disappointment. Questions will now be asked about the future of

coach Vahid Halilhodzic, who has been under pressure from some sections of the Moroccan fanbase.

For South Africa, the victory was a moment to savor. The Bafana Bafana showed great resilience and determination to overcome the odds and reach the quarterfinals of the AFCON. The win will undoubtedly boost the confidence of the team and the nation, and they will now be hoping to go even further in the competition.

The Africa Cup of Nations is always a tournament full of surprises, and this year's edition has been no different. Morocco's unexpected defeat at the hands of South Africa is a reminder that anything can happen in football. While the Atlas Lions will be left to rue their missed opportunities, the Bafana Bafana can celebrate a famous victory that will live long in the memory.

In the other game, Mali are through to the quarterfinals after a nail-biting 2-1 win over Burkina Faso on Tuesday in Korhogo.

An unfortunate own goal by Edmond Tabsoba along with a second half strike by Lassine Sinayoko were enough for the Eagles to soar over the Stallions at a packed Amadou Gon Coulibaly Stadium.

It took just 3 minutes for Mali to take the lead after a powerful Amadou Haidara header came off the woodwork, but instead of it being cleared away, Edmond Tabsoba was unfortunate to see his clearance go into his own net.

Carried by the momentum, the Eagles continued surging forward but wasted numerous opportunities as they took the slender lead into the break.

Returning from the recess, Sinayoko capitalized on a lapse of concentration after beating the offside trap to face the keeper and comfortably slot home with just minutes into the restart.

The Stallions eventually gained their rhythm and piled on the pressure, but a resolute Mali defense kept them at bay, as the Eagles soar into the quarter-finals to face tournament hosts, Cote d'Ivoire on Saturday, 3 February in Bouake.