Rwanda 0-2 Mali Amahoro Stadiumm

Rwanda 2-5 Mali: Agg

Stephen Constantine's side lost the second leg at Amahoro four days after a 3-2 defeat in Bamako

Fans at Amahoro Stadium

Rwanda's hopes of reaching the Africa Cup of Nations took another blow at Amahoro Stadium on Tuesday, as Mali won the return leg of their Group K double-header 2-0.

Modibo Sagnan headed the visitors in front from a free-kick in the 27th minute, and Gaoussou Diarra sealed the result two minutes before the end, with supporters already drifting towards the exits.

Mali had won the first meeting 3-2 in Bamako on Friday after twice falling behind, with substitute Mamadou Camara scoring the winner in the 84th minute.

Rwanda made two changes for the rematch. Jojea Kwizera was suspended after a yellow card in Bamako, and Gilbert Mugisha came into the starting line-up. Mugisha, who has impressed for the national team, was one of Constantine's few surprises.

The coach has a reputation for keeping his tactics to himself, and Mali set up in a 4-4-2 that Rwanda had not seen before. The match was refereed by Algeria's Lahlou Benbraham.

Mali began quickly taking control of the game. A shot from Camara after seven minutes forced Rwanda's goalie Fiacre Ntwali into a save, and the visitors dominated the opening quarter of an hour, passing neatly and keeping possession.

Rwanda were unsettled by mistakes at the back. A second Mali effort on target followed around the 15th minute, and Ntwali saved again. Mamadou Sangare dragged a shot wide in the 20th minute.

Mali won their first corner in the 21st minute. Djihad Bizimana was booked for Rwanda in the 23rd minute, as was Mali's Sinayoko.

The breakthrough came from a set piece. Dauda Guindo delivered a free-kick from the right in the 27th minute, and Sagnan headed it in.

At the break, Mali had 63% of the ball and had a 6-1 advantage in shots, with four of theirs on target. Rwanda’s only effort on target was a long-range attempt. Mali goalkeeper Djigui Diarra was rarely troubled.

Mali could have doubled their lead when Ntwali went down after sliding in the area, but the visitors failed to take advantage. Guindo sent a free-kick w

Rwanda returned after a talk from head coach Stephen Constantine at half-time with more purpose, but Mali still created the better chances. Sangare put a free-kick off target in the 53rd minute, and the visitors once again were through on goal and missed a clear opportunity. Rwanda almost got a consolation around the hour mark, only for Mali to survive three attacks in quick succession.

Mali head coach Tony Silver changed their attack, bringing on Mahamadou Kane, Nene Dorgeles, for Cheick Diarra and Aliou Dieng across the second half.and Mamadou Dombia gave way for Moussa Kounfolo Yeo.

Claude Niyomugabo was booked for Rwanda. The injured Ange Jimmy Mutsinzi made way for Thierry Manzi. Shots from Kajeje and Bizimana both went off target by the 81st and 83rd minutes.

Elsewhere in Group K, Liberia beat Cape Verde 2-0.

Mali, who arrived in Kigali on nine points, now have 12 after four games. Rwanda remain second on six, ahead of Cape Verde and Liberia on three each. Two matches remain, in March 2027.

Only Rwanda can still match Mali’s total, so the win secures Mali one of the two qualifying places.