

*By Jeje Muhinde;*

Former Dallas Mavericks center Salah Mejri scored 22 points to help Tunisia repeat as African basketball champion in a 78-75 victory over Ivory Coast on Sunday.

The veteran squad included former UCLA star Michael Roll, a naturalized citizen who had 18 points and nine assists as Tunisia won its third AfroBasket tournament in the past 10 years.

Mejri hit a 3-pointer with 2:19 remaining to give Tunisia a 77-66 lead, but Ivory Coast closed the gap to three points when Souleyman Diabate was fouled on a 3-pointer and hit the free throw with 36 seconds left.

The Tunisians then ran the clock down but failed to get off a shot, leaving Ivory Coast with a chance to tie with 10 seconds on the clock. But Matt Costello's pass to the corner was easily snatched out of the air by Roll to end the game.

Costello, a former Michigan State forward who played briefly for the San Antonio Spurs in the 2017-18 season, was held scoreless in the first half and finished with nine points and eight rebounds. Diabate had a team-high 20 points and was 4 of 5 from 3-point range.

A FIBA rule allows countries to tap players with dual citizenships or a player who becomes a naturalized citizen. Several players at the Tokyo Olympics took advantage of the rule and it's common practice in Africa.

Tunisia, which outscored Ivory Coast 34-4 in the paint in the first half, became the first team to repeat since Angola in 2009. Mejri played for the Mavericks from 2015-19.

Senegal beat Cape Verde 86-73 in the third-place game earlier Sunday in host city Kigali, Rwanda. Veteran NBA center Gorgui Dieng, who recently signed with the Atlanta Hawks, had 30 points and 12 rebounds for Senegal. He shot 5 of 9 from 3-point range.

Two-time champion Ivory Coast last won the title in 1985.

At halftime of the title game, Liz Mills received a FIBA award for her contributions to the game. The Australian became the first woman to coach a men's team — Kenya — at a continental championship.

