Beat: Sports

Senegal Wins Africa's Biggest Sports Trophy

The Ultimate Feel Good Story

Hungary, 24.03.2022, 09:09 Time

USPA NEWS - For the first time in their country's history, the talented footballing nation of Senegal has taken home Africa's finest sporting prize: The African Cup.

They won The African Cup of Nations in thrilling overtime fashion, defeating Egypt 4-2 on penalties after extra time in the final. Their success throughout the prestigious AFCON tournament has been marked with scenes of extreme joy and inspiration. The President of Senegal declared February 7th a national holiday and a parade of tens of thousands turned out to meet the team as they returned home from the tournament in Cameroon. Senegal's top goal-scorer Sadio Mané was named The Player of the Tournament. He scored 3 goals and assisted on two others—and scored the penalty to win the shoot out.

A Premier League and Champions League player, Mané has taken every opportunity to use his world-class paycheck for acts of generosity, both at home in England and more recently during the AFCON. During the tournament, he paid for airline tickets so that 50 Senegalese fans could fly to Cameroon to watch the games. After the first round game against Cape Verde, Mané was hospitalized with a concussion and, while being treated he discovered that a local boy arrived in critical condition after he was struck by a motorcycle. After Mané heard the story, he paid the boy's entire bill, which the parents were unable to afford.

This was not the first time Mané has lent a helping hand in West Africa. He has donated more than $1 million to build a school, a hospital, and soccer academy in his home village of Banbali, where he grew up playing soccer bare-footed. He regularly shows up on social media in videos being helpful and kind, assisting roadies in loading the team bus, giving fans his jerseys, and even cleaning the toilets at his local Liverpool mosque. "Why would I want 10 Ferrari's, 20 diamond watches, or 2 planes?" says the man who will become a legend in African football. "I built schools, a stadium, we provide clothes, shoes, food for people who are in extreme poverty. I prefer that my people receive a little of what life has given me."

The Senegal national football team had already reached the final in the last continental Cup in 2018. Senegal's strategy is to retain their team's head coach, Aliou Cissé, after his failure to win the last tournament, has paid off. Analysts are describing it as a case of Africa "trusting one of its own." History has seen the continental teams rarely experience success unless lead by European or Latin American coaches. Cissé is one of a few yet growing number of successful African bosses. "I think this man deserves all the success he gets because he is the most criticized coach I have ever seen in my life, but he never gives up," said Mané after Senegal beat Burkina Faso 3-1 in the semi-final. "We would like to win for our country and for him because he deserves it after everything he has been through as a player and now as a coach."

Cissé reached the AFCON final as a player and captain in 2002, but missed his penalty in the shoot out that year, which cost his team the title. In the 2002 World Cup, he captained Senegal to beat the previous world champions France 1-0, before taking the team all the way to the quarter finals, becoming only the second African team to progress that far. "Since independence we have been running to catch up. Now we too have a star on our shirt," said Cissé before his players swamped him at his press conference.

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Sources: CNN and Skydigitalagenzia

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20282/senegal-wins-africas-biggest-sports-trophy.html

Editorial office and responsibility:
V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Wendy Westhoven

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