

Mamelodi Sundowns finish with nine men in loss at Raja Casablanca

AFP- South African club Mamelodi Sundowns had two players sent off as they fell 1-0 away to Moroccan outfit Raja Casablanca on Saturday in a fiery CAF Champions League clash.

Midfielder Bathusi Aubaas was shown a straight red card late in the first half after a studs-up foul on Younes Najjari in the matchday 4 Group C showdown.

A similar offence 10 minutes from time resulted in Raja substitute winger Marouane Zila being sent off by the Mauritanian referee.

Full-back Khuliso Mudau was the second Sundowns player to be expelled after he struck forward Nawfel Zerhouni in the face during added time.

Raja won through a goal in the second minute of added time at the end of the first half with centre-back Benaissa Benamar firing into the net from close range amid appeals for offside.

It was the first win in the group stage for three-time former champions Raja and the first loss for Sundowns, winners of the premier African club competition in 2016.

Group leaders FAR Rabat, the other Moroccan contenders, won 2-0 at home to Maniema Union from the Democratic Republic of Congo in northern city Meknes.

Military team FAR, who in 1985 became the first African champions from Morocco, top the table with eight points after four rounds. Sundowns have five, Raja four and Maniema three.

Victory has opened a path to a top-two finish and a quarter-

finals slot for Raja, who sacked Portuguese coach Ricardo Sa Pinto after losing away to Sundowns in the previous round.

– Blunder –

Raja will make the knockout stage if they beat FAR next Saturday and Maniema eight days later in the final round.

FAR have occupied first place since matchday 1 and a blunder by Maniema goalkeeper Efonze Brudel at the end of the first half helped them stay on top.

Brudel failed to grasp a free-kick from outside the area by El Amine Zouhrouh and the ball landed in the net to give the Moroccan side a 2-0 half-time advantage that they retained.

Khalid Ait Ouarkhane had put FAR ahead on 12 minutes with a close-range shot after a goalmouth scramble following a low cross.

Elsewhere, Orlando Pirates of South Africa rose from third to first in Group B after cruising to a 3-0 win over bottom club Stade Abidjan of the Ivory Coast in Soweto.

Relebohile Mofokeng tapped the ball into the net midway through the first half, Patrick Maswanganyi doubled the advantage on 50 minutes and Namibian Deon Hotto added a late third goal.

Pirates have eight points, defending champions Al Ahly of Egypt seven, Chabab Belouizdad of Algeria six and Stade one.

Young Africans of Tanzania got back into contention for qualification from Group A after coming from behind to defeat TP Mazembe from DR Congo 3-1 with Clement Mzize scoring twice.

Al Hilal of Sudan top the table with nine points ahead of a home match against Mouloudia Alger of Algeria on Sunday.

Hilal, forced to stage home fixtures in Mauritanian capital

Nouakchott due to the civil war in Sudan, have nine points, Mouloudia and Young Africans four each and Mazembe two.

AFP