

Lightning kills an entire football team Congo

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FOOTBALL FANS in the central African state of Congo were hurling accusations of witchcraft at each other yesterday after a freak blast of lightning struck dead an entire team on the playing field while their opponents were left completely untouched.

The bizarre blow by the weather to all 11 members of the football team was reported in the daily newspaper L'Avenir in Kinshasa, the capital of Congo.

"Lightning killed at a stroke 11 young people aged between 20 and 35 years during a football match," the newspaper reported. It went on to say that 30 other people had received burns at the weekend match, held in the eastern province of Kasai. "The athletes from Basanga [the home team] curiously came out of this catastrophe unscathed."

The suspicion that the black arts might be involved arose firstly because the opposing team emerged unharmed and then again because the score at the time was a delicately balanced one all.

"The exact nature of the lightning has divided the population in this region which is known for its use of fetishes in football," the newspaper commented.

Much of the detail about the match remains obscure as the Congo - officially known as the Democratic Republic of Congo - remains stricken by civil war between the government of Laurent Kabila and rebel forces, backed by neighbouring Rwanda, in the east of the country.

Witchcraft is often blamed for adverse natural phenomena throughout western and central Africa. It is relatively frequent for football teams to hire witchdoctors to place hexes on their opponents.

In a similar, though less deadly incident in South Africa over the weekend, six players from a local team were hurt when lightning struck the playing field during a thunderstorm.