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Nine female footballers, two coaches die in auto accident

From Isa Abdulsalami, Jos

TRAGEDY struck in Plateau State when nine footballers and their two coaches died in a motor accident along Mangu and Pankshin local councils' road on Sunday.

A source said that the all-female team comprising 15 athletes were returning from a football match with a local team in Pankshin Township Stadium in Pankshin local council area of the state when the Peugeot J5 in which they were travelling had a head-on collision with a commercial Volkswagen Golf car in the evening. Nobody in the Volkswagen Golf died.

It was learnt that the vehicle conveying the athletes somersaulted several times and eventually caught fire with occupants therein. Before good Samaritans within the vicinity could get to the scene of the incident and rescue the occupants, 11 of them had already been consumed by fire.

It was learnt that six of the athletes who sustained injuries were initially rushed to a nearby hospital before they were taken to Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH) for further treatment.

The state Commissioner for Youths and Sports, Mr. Joel Gwatau, who confirmed the unfortunate incident to reporters on phone, said the team from Jos North Local Council Area of the state had finished from a local tournament, which they lost to another team and they were on their way back to Jos when the sad incident occurred.

Gwatau said those who lost their lives in the incident were burnt beyond recognition and those in the hospital were responding to treatment, adding that the casualties were high because there was no one to come to their aid on time.

The commissioner added that the government was in the process of reaching out to the parents of the deceased and those who sustained injuries in the accident with a view to arranging a meeting between them and the government.

When reporters visited the state Ministry of Youths and Sports at Rwang Pam Stadium, Jos, most of the workers and other athletes were seen in a pensive mood discussing the unfortunate incident.

Barely three weeks ago, FIFA-graded referee, Adigun Ojo-Oba, died while travelling to Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State to officiate a group match at the maiden WAFU Under-20 football competition.

This latest tragedy occurred four days after a Heartland striker,

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Kelechi Arima, was killed by armed robbers in Owerri while driving home after his team's match against Gateway of Abeokuta.

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