

Sunday, 16 June 2013

Tunisia on the brink of final playoffs for World Cup



Tunisia moved to the brink of Africa's final playoffs for the World Cup without even playing on Saturday after group rival Sierra Leone's 1-0 loss in Cape Verde. In a good weekend for North African teams, Libya was closer to its first World Cup appearance after Friday's 2-0 home win over a weakened Togo, with two of Togo's France-based players refusing to play in the qualifier in Tripoli because of security concerns. The Tunisians need just a draw from Sunday's game with Group B's bottom-place Equatorial Guinea to seal a place in the final playoffs involving the 10 group winners, competing for five African places in Brazil next year. Libya leads Group I by three points ahead of Cameroon's visit to Congo on Sunday. Ghana's hopes were boosted on Saturday after Zambia was held to 1-1 at home by Sudan, giving the Ghanaians the opportunity to leapfrog the Zambians at the top of Group D with victory over Lesotho. Burkina Faso won 1-0 in Republic of Congo to open up Group E and get within a point of the Congolese at the top with one round of games to come. Gabon beat Niger 4-1 for an outside chance at stealing that playoff spot. Uganda beat Angola 2-1 to go above Senegal in Group J before Senegal plays in Liberia. Africa's long and complicated qualifying competition is nearing its end, with one more round of group games after Sunday before the deciding playoffs. Along with Tunisia, Egypt will book its place in the playoffs if it beats Mozambique away on Sunday, another lift for North African football after poor 2012 and 2013 African Cups for the region. Algeria also leads Group H. But West Africa's powerhouses are still expected to challenge, with Libya being chased by Cameroon, Algeria by Mali, and Nigeria and Ivory Coast also closing in on the playoffs. Ivory Coast, Africa's top-ranked team, will be through if it wins in Tanzania in Group C on Sunday. Morocco was playing Gambia later Saturday, needing victory to have a chance at going through instead of Ivory Coast. Libya's 2-0 win over Togo came through a Faisal Saleh penalty in the seventh minute and a Komlan Amewou own goal in the 18th in Tripoli, taking the Libyans past an opposition missing Alexis Romao of Marseille and Jonathan Ayite of Brest, who flew back to France last week in protest against the situation in Libya. The game was moved to Tripoli from Benghazi because of deadly clashes there last weekend. Zambia's 1-1 draw with Sudan was a big blow to its hopes and a major boost for Ghana. Jacob Mulenga put former African champion Zambia ahead in the 70th minute, only for Mohamed Abdalla to equalize just two minutes later. Gabon striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang had a hat trick in penalties, with his third spot-kick in the 98th, in the 4-1 win over Niger. Defender Bruno Ecuele scored the other goal, in the 97th minute, while Niger had two players sent off after leading in a hectic game at Stade de Franceville. Uganda scored twice in the last 10 minutes for a come-from-behind win over Angola, eliminating Angola and keeping its World Cup dream alive. Botswana beat Central African Republic 3-2 in Group A, but that group will see top two Ethiopia and South Africa meet on Sunday, when an Ethiopian win will send it through to Africa's last 10 for the World Cup just months after it made its return to the African Cup following a 30-year wait.