# France, Italy and Portugal target Nations League quarters

AFP – France, Italy and Portugal lead the teams attempting to secure a place in the UEFA Nations League quarter-finals, while England's promotion hopes have been hit by a series of withdrawals.
With European champions Spain and Germany already qualified for the last eight, six spots are still to be filled going into the final two rounds of group matches over the next week.

Unbeaten Italy and Portugal require just a point to advance, while France are well positioned too ahead of the visit of Israel on Thursday – a game that will be played surrounded by a large police presence.

The Paris fixture take places a week after clashes in Amsterdam around a match between Israeli club Maccabi Tel Aviv and Dutch team Ajax.

Israel has urged fans to avoid the Nations League tie over fears they could be targeted amid a tide of rising anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim abuse since the start of Israel's war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

"I can understand why people don't want to come," said France defender Dayot Upamecano.

"It's their choice," he added. "I'm just here to play.

"I like peace and I hope one day will have it again, in all countries."

Kylian Mbappe is again missing from the France squad, with coach Didier Deschamps insisting the absence of the Real Madrid superstar "is for the best".

The national team captain sat out last month’s double-header in order to recover from a minor thigh injury and instead travelled to Stockholm for a short break.

It was following that trip that Swedish media reported he was being investigated for an alleged rape. Mbappe himself said those reports were “fake news” while his lawyer said the player would take action for libel.

A Swedish prosecutor confirmed that an investigation had been opened, without naming Mbappe.

“I am not going to set out my argument, but I can say two things. The first is that Kylian wanted to come,” Deschamps said last week.

“The second is that it is not to do with the off-field problems because the presumption of innocence exists.”

After the Israel match, France head to Milan where they face Group A leaders Italy on Sunday.

Italy go to Belgium first knowing that anything but defeat guarantees Luciano Spalletti’s side a quarter-final berth.

Portugal host Poland and then travel to Croatia in Group A1, where Scotland are bottom of the pile with only a point from four outings.

The Netherlands and Hungary meet in a crucial A3 showdown with both countries level on five points, while Germany can wrap up top spot by beating Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Denmark and Serbia will battle it out for the other qualifying spot in Group A4 alongside Spain.

The Danes host Spain and Serbia go to Switzerland before a potentially decisive clash in Leskovac on November 18.

The two-legged quarter-finals are scheduled for March and the

four-team finals will take place next June.

– England in must-win situation –

England must beat Greece in Athens to stay in contention for promotion back to the top tier.

Greece are the only nation with a perfect record in League B and won 2-1 at Wembley last month.

Lee Carsley will oversee his final two fixtures as interim England boss before handing the reins to Thomas Tuchel, but he will be without Declan Rice, Bukayo Saka, Cole Palmer, Phil Foden and Trent Alexander-Arnold.

Georgia can become the first team to climb from League D to League A since the Nations League began in 2018, if they beat Ukraine and Czech Republic in Group B1.

San Marino, who earned their first-ever competitive win in September, would make the leap to League C for the 2026-27 edition by defeating Gibraltar on Friday.

Teams finishing third in League A, and second in League B, will face off in relegation/promotion play-offs, with identical play-offs between Leagues B and C.

There is an impact on World Cup qualifying too.

The 12 group winners in European qualifying will go to the World Cup, with another four places going to winners of play-offs featuring the 12 runners-up plus the four highest-ranked teams in the Nations League who have not otherwise made it.

Reports: AFP