# Gary Lineker’s controversial BBC exit sparks staff fury over impartiality double standards



At the BBC, two stories have dominated conversations this week: the blossoming romance speculated between Morning Live hosts Helen Skelton and Gethin Jones, and the uproar surrounding Gary Lineker's recent departure from the network. While the former has sparked a flurry of hopeful gossip among colleagues, the latter has provoked outright fury, particularly following the circumstances surrounding Lineker's exit following controversial social media activity.

Last week's developments prompted turbulent meetings at BBC headquarters, with multiple sources reporting that certain executives reacted with visible anger over what many perceive as preferential treatment towards the once immensely popular host of Match of the Day. The situation has raised probing questions about the stringency of the BBC's impartiality rules, especially in light of Lineker's most recent conduct. Beyond the allegations of antisemitism linked to his reposting of inflammatory imagery, which included an illustration of a rat—a symbol historically associated with antisemitic propaganda—many are questioning why he was not dismissed immediately for such serious misconduct.

Instead of an ignominious exit, sources within the corporation suggest that Lineker is set to receive what has been described as a ‘hero’s farewell’ as he prepares to present his final episode of Match of the Day alongside friends and colleagues Micah Richards and Alan Shearer. Furthermore, the public narrative crafted around his departure—endorsed and facilitated by his formidable agent Jon Holmes—has allowed Lineker to frame this exit as a voluntary ‘stepping back’ from his role, thereby avoiding the harsh ramifications that many in the organisation believe would have beenfalling any other presenter under similar circumstances.

This incident is not the first time that Lineker has tested the BBC's commitment to impartiality. Earlier in 2023, he faced suspension for tweeting that language used by government ministers to promote an asylum policy was “not dissimilar to that used by Germany in the 30s.” While Lineker claimed these were merely statements of fact, this significant breach of their guidelines has set a concerning precedent, highlighting a potential double standard in enforcement practices. The BBC admitted that it takes misconduct seriously, yet many employees feel that such breaches should not allow for a narrative of leniency.

The broader implications of Lineker's controversial exit are underscored by sentiments expressed within the BBC. Some staff members contend that if they had acted in a manner similar to Lineker, they would have faced immediate termination. His continued presence at the BBC, during a time of stringent budget cuts and an ongoing push for impartiality, has sparked discontent among colleagues who claim they operate under a different set of rules. Insiders emphasise the significant divide this perceived double standard has created, breeding resentment not only over Lineker’s stature but also regarding the broader values of the organisation.

Complicating matters is the role played by Holmes, often referred to as a 'rottweiler' for his reputedly aggressive negotiation tactics. Amid criticism surrounding a Walker's commercial that saw Lineker embroiled in a race row, Holmes's reputation for being “hard as nails” is widely acknowledged within industry circles. His influence appears to have enabled Lineker to maintain lucrative commercial agreements while navigating the complex relationship with BBC’s editorial standards. Colleagues have recounted encounters that illustrate his combative nature, suggesting that his tactics frequently achieve desired outcomes for Lineker, notably in steering the portrayal of the recent controversy.

As Lineker prepares for what some term a ‘soft landing’ from his BBC tenure, reports indicate that there will be a highlights reel of his time on the show, a decision met with mixed reactions. As Danny Cohen, the former director of BBC Television, remarked, many within the Jewish community would find it difficult to watch Lineker present in such a celebratory context after allegations that cast doubt on his sincerity regarding the issues of antisemitism.

Amidst these revelations, the overarching sentiment among BBC employees is relief at the conclusion of this chapter with Lineker, a figure they respected for his sporting achievements but have grown to view with disdain due to his perceived arrogance and the tumultuous fallout of his actions. While his impact on sports journalism and broadcasting in Britain has been profound, the controversies surrounding his departure leave lingering questions about the future of the BBC's commitment to impartiality and fairness, especially amidst a changing media landscape.

The BBC now faces the ongoing challenge of establishing and maintaining a clear stance on its impartiality guidelines moving forward, a necessity underscored by the public and internal scrutiny surrounding this high-profile exit.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14746179/Exposed-Gary-Linekers-henchmans-vicious-personal-email-KATIE-HIND.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/696065a23214d8fe1b5b22de5530ea02)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14746179/Exposed-Gary-Linekers-henchmans-vicious-personal-email-KATIE-HIND.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.fourfourtwo.com/news/gary-lineker-bbc-tweet-i-wasnt-concerned-id-done-anything-wrong-i-stated-a-fact-it-was-taken-out-of-proportion-and-people-have-recognised-that-they-misread-the-situation-a-bit)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/ex-england-striker-gary-lineker-leave-bbc-presenting-role-2025-05-19/), [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-66940530)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/696065a23214d8fe1b5b22de5530ea02), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/posts-about-linekers-match-day-absence-missing-context-2024-02-20/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.lemonde.fr/sport/article/2024/11/13/gary-lineker-ex-gloire-du-football-anglais-devenu-icone-en-impertinent-presentateur-va-quitter-la-bbc_6391976_3242.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14746179/Exposed-Gary-Linekers-henchmans-vicious-personal-email-KATIE-HIND.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/ex-england-striker-gary-lineker-leave-bbc-presenting-role-2025-05-19/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14746179/Exposed-Gary-Linekers-henchmans-vicious-personal-email-KATIE-HIND.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.lemonde.fr/sport/article/2024/11/13/gary-lineker-ex-gloire-du-football-anglais-devenu-icone-en-impertinent-presentateur-va-quitter-la-bbc_6391976_3242.html)
* Paragraph 8 – [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/ex-england-striker-gary-lineker-leave-bbc-presenting-role-2025-05-19/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/posts-about-linekers-match-day-absence-missing-context-2024-02-20/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14746179/Exposed-Gary-Linekers-henchmans-vicious-personal-email-KATIE-HIND.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/696065a23214d8fe1b5b22de5530ea02> - Gary Lineker, former England footballer and BBC presenter, will step down from the BBC after controversy over a social media post about Zionism. The post included an illustration of a rat, historically used in antisemitic imagery. Lineker apologized, stating he was unaware of the offensive content and removed it upon realization. The BBC confirmed his departure following the final 'Match of the Day' episode of the season. Lineker had previously clashed with the BBC over impartiality and had been briefly suspended in 2023 due to political commentary. His departure marks the end of his significant contribution to BBC sports journalism since 1999. The BBC acknowledged his influence and thanked him for his service. The Campaign Against Antisemitism welcomed his departure, criticizing his repeated breaches of impartiality. Starting the 2025-26 season, Kelly Cates, Mark Chapman, and Gabby Logan will host 'Match of the Day,' marking a shift in the program’s presentation style.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/ex-england-striker-gary-lineker-leave-bbc-presenting-role-2025-05-19/> - Gary Lineker, former England soccer star and long-standing host of the BBC’s 'Match of the Day,' has announced his departure from the BBC following controversy over an Instagram repost that critics deemed antisemitic. The repost included commentary critical of Zionism and an image of a rat, a symbol historically used in antisemitic propaganda. Lineker, 64, issued an unreserved apology, stating it was a genuine mistake and affirming his anti-racist stance. The BBC, maintaining neutrality, had previously cautioned him over political commentary, and BBC Director General Tim Davie confirmed Lineker would step down after the season concludes. Although originally set to retire from MOTD, Lineker was expected to cover the 2026 World Cup and FA Cup matches. The Board of Deputies of British Jews supported his decision to step down. Despite stepping back from BBC presenting, Lineker will continue his involvement with Goalhanger, a podcast company he co-founded. Renowned for scoring 48 goals for England and never receiving a yellow card, Lineker transitioned to broadcasting after a successful playing career with clubs including Everton, Tottenham, and Barcelona. His outspoken political views had previously placed him at odds with BBC impartiality policies.
4. <https://www.fourfourtwo.com/news/gary-lineker-bbc-tweet-i-wasnt-concerned-id-done-anything-wrong-i-stated-a-fact-it-was-taken-out-of-proportion-and-people-have-recognised-that-they-misread-the-situation-a-bit> - Gary Lineker, a long-time presenter of BBC's Match of the Day, was briefly suspended in 2023 for a tweet criticizing the UK government's asylum seeker policy. Lineker called the policy 'immeasurably cruel' and compared the language used to that of 1930s Germany. Despite the backlash and calls for political impartiality from the BBC, Lineker insisted he did nothing wrong, merely stating facts and advocating for kindness towards all people. His suspension led to a show of solidarity from colleagues Ian Wright, Alan Shearer, and Micah Richards, who refused to appear on the show, forcing the BBC to air a stripped-down version. Reflecting on the incident, Lineker emphasized his pride in working for the BBC despite the challenges and scrutiny it faces.
5. <https://www.lemonde.fr/sport/article/2024/11/13/gary-lineker-ex-gloire-du-football-anglais-devenu-icone-en-impertinent-presentateur-va-quitter-la-bbc_6391976_3242.html> - Gary Lineker, former English footballer and iconic presenter of the BBC's 'Match of the Day,' is set to gradually step back from the British public service broadcaster. The BBC confirmed that he will present MOTD for the last time at the end of the season, continue to comment on the FA Cup until the 2025-2026 season, and the 2026 World Cup before retiring. Lineker, nearly 64 years old, had expressed his intention to slow down due to his high salary, which weighed on the BBC's difficult financial situation. The arrival of Alex Kay-Jelski at the head of BBC Sport also contributed to this decision. Lineker, famous for his phrase 'Football is a simple game... and in the end, the Germans always win,' saw his relationship with the BBC deteriorate after a controversy in 2023 regarding a criticism he made on Twitter about the British government. Despite his departure, his popular podcast 'The Rest is Football' will remain hosted on BBC Sounds.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/posts-about-linekers-match-day-absence-missing-context-2024-02-20/> - Some headlines on Facebook have misleadingly suggested that Gary Lineker was 'silenced' regarding his social media posts in 2024. However, the former England soccer captain clarified on X that he could not present 'Match of the Day' on February 10 due to a severe cold, not due to social media posts. Various news outlet headlines shared on Facebook lacked this context, leading to assumptions among users that Lineker was forced to step aside again, similar to 2023 when the BBC temporarily suspended him for sharing political views. Despite some user comments indicating he was silenced, the claim lacks accurate context, and Gary Lineker's absence was solely due to illness.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-66940530> - The BBC announced a review of its social media guidelines following a controversy involving Gary Lineker's posts earlier this year. The BBC stated that Lineker had breached its impartiality guidelines and took him off air. This led to a staffing revolt, with fellow 'Match of the Day' presenters, including Ian Wright and Alan Shearer, pulling out of the show in solidarity. Lineker returned a week later, with the corporation announcing the review to address 'grey areas' in its rules. The new guidelines stress the importance of 'high standards of civility in public discourse,' including treating others with respect and not using offensive or aggressive language. The BBC stated that the new guidance 'balances freedom of expression, the responsibilities of freelancers to the BBC, and the expectations of audiences, while also ensuring our rules are clear, simple, transparent, and enforceable.' The report also states that BBC staff and freelancers outside the flagship shows and news and current affairs are not required to uphold the BBC's impartiality on social media.