# Gary Lineker makes emotional exit from Match of the Day after 26 years amid social media controversy



Gary Lineker's final appearance as the long-standing presenter of BBC's **Match of the Day** marks the end of an era, concluding a relationship with the broadcaster that spanned 26 years. In a moment filled with a mix of nostalgia and tension, Lineker opened the broadcast with a self-deprecating joke, reflecting the recent controversies that have surrounded him. “It wasn't meant to end this way,” he remarked, alluding to the circumstances that led to his earlier-than-planned exit from a programme that has become synonymous with his identity.

Lineker’s departure follows a significant backlash triggered by his social media activity. While sharing a pro-Palestinian post, he inadvertently included an image of a rat, a symbol historically associated with antisemitic propaganda, which provoked outrage. Following this incident, he issued an apology, stating, “I would never knowingly share anything antisemitic,” and acknowledged the hurt it caused. His decision to step back, he explained, felt like the responsible course of action considering the sensitivities involved.

The controversy reinforces a long-standing tension between Lineker and BBC management regarding the broadcaster's impartiality guidelines. Previously, in March 2023, he had faced removal from his presenting role after making comments that were perceived as politically charged, namely a comparison of the UK government's language regarding asylum seekers to 1930s Germany. Such incidents have consistently placed him at odds with the BBC's commitment to neutrality.

Despite these challenges, Lineker remains a significant figure in football broadcasting. His illustrious playing career, marked by stints at clubs like Tottenham Hotspur and Barcelona, alongside his role as the highest-paid presenter at the BBC—with an annual salary estimated at £1.4 million—adds to his public profile. Although he anticipated stepping down at the end of the season, he had initially planned to cover not only the FA Cup but also the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup.

As he transitions away from **Match of the Day**, his contributions to the sport will continue through ventures such as his podcast, **The Rest is Football**, co-hosted with former players. The BBC has confirmed that while he will no longer present **Match of the Day**, he will still commentate on the FA Cup and World Cup coverage, ensuring that his voice remains a part of football’s ongoing narrative.

This moment of departure is significant not only for Lineker but for the BBC as well, as it navigates its role in broadcasting impartiality against a backdrop of politically charged discussions. With the pressures of public sentiment and internal policies pushing for adherence to neutrality, Lineker’s exit illustrates the complexities faced by public figures in navigating political discourse within their professional spheres.

His legacy, built over decades, will not be easily forgotten, as he has shaped football broadcasting in the UK and has continuously engaged with the public on vital socio-political issues. As he steps back, it remains to be seen how this pivotal moment will influence both his future and the broader landscape of sports journalism.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/gary-lineker-match-of-the-day-bbc-motd-b2757553.html), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/gary-lineker-match-of-the-day-bbc-motd-b2757553.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/gary-lineker-match-of-the-day-bbc-motd-b2757553.html), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/ex-england-striker-gary-lineker-leave-bbc-presenting-role-2025-05-19/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/gary-lineker-match-of-the-day-bbc-motd-b2757553.html), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/df07e66d-3813-42ad-a684-594f67c6f885)
* Paragraph 4 – [[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), [[6]](https://www.fourfourtwo.com/news/gary-lineker-bbc-sky-sports-ive-had-talks-with-sky-at-various-points-but-i-just-loved-being-with-the-bcc-also-im-quite-loyal-ive-had-the-same-guy-cut-my-hair-for-the-last-40-years)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.fourfourtwo.com/news/gary-lineker-bbc-sky-sports-ive-had-talks-with-sky-at-various-points-but-i-just-loved-being-with-the-bcc-also-im-quite-loyal-ive-had-the-same-guy-cut-my-hair-for-the-last-40-years), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/apr/22/gary-lineker-bbc-match-of-the-day)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/gary-lineker-match-of-the-day-bbc-motd-b2757553.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/gary-lineker-match-of-the-day-bbc-motd-b2757553.html> - Gary Lineker delivered an emotional final speech as the presenter of BBC's 'Match of the Day' before his departure amid an antisemitism controversy. After 26 years with the BBC, Lineker, along with pundits Alan Shearer and Micah Richards, made a self-deprecating joke to start the show, referencing the recent turmoil. Lineker's exit was accelerated following a row over a pro-Palestine social media post featuring a rat, a symbol used in antisemitic propaganda. He apologized, stating he would 'never knowingly share anything antisemitic' and recognized the upset caused by the incident.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/df07e66d-3813-42ad-a684-594f67c6f885> - Gary Lineker, former England football captain and BBC’s highest-paid presenter with a £1.4 million annual salary, is stepping down from the BBC by mutual consent, without a payout. His departure follows controversy over an Instagram post supporting Palestine that featured an image widely viewed as an antisemitic trope. Lineker acknowledged the offensive nature of the post, expressed regret, and took full responsibility. He stated that leaving now is the responsible action. In addition to the social media incident, an interview in the Telegraph critical of BBC management further strained relations. His exit ends a 26-year broadcasting relationship, during which he was scheduled to cover next year’s World Cup and FA Cup coverage, though he had earlier announced plans to step down from Match of the Day after this season. Lineker’s past tensions with BBC management include a 2023 suspension over political comments. BBC Director-General Tim Davie emphasized the importance of upholding the corporation’s values and policies. Lineker also runs a successful podcast business, Goalhanger Podcasts.
4. <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.
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 international footballer and iconic presenter of the BBC's 'Match of the Day' (MOTD), is set to gradually leave the British public broadcaster. The BBC confirmed that he will present MOTD for the last time at the end of the season, continue to commentate 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 as 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 critical tweet about the British government. Despite his departure, his popular podcast 'The Rest is Football' will remain hosted on BBC Sounds.
6. <https://www.fourfourtwo.com/news/gary-lineker-bbc-sky-sports-ive-had-talks-with-sky-at-various-points-but-i-just-loved-being-with-the-bcc-also-im-quite-loyal-ive-had-the-same-guy-cut-my-hair-for-the-last-40-years> - Gary Lineker, a renowned football presenter, has led televised football coverage for over twenty years, primarily with the BBC. Since succeeding Des Lynam as host of 'Match of the Day' in 1999, Lineker has anchored major events, including World Cups and FA Cup finals. He also presented Champions League football for BT Sport between 2015 and 2021 but left to support Leicester in the Europa League with his sons. Lineker will step down as 'Match of the Day' host in May but will continue presenting FA Cup matches and the 2026 World Cup. Despite offers from Sky Sports, Lineker remained loyal to the BBC due to its larger audience and the impact on his other ventures. He anticipates reducing his football presenting roles and focusing more on his podcast.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2025/apr/22/gary-lineker-bbc-match-of-the-day> - Gary Lineker, the former England striker and long-standing host of BBC's 'Match of the Day,' has expressed that it is the 'right time' to leave the program after nearly two decades. In an interview, Lineker mentioned that he felt the BBC might prefer him to step aside to bring in new presenters. Despite this, he will continue to host BBC Sport's coverage of the 2026 World Cup and the FA Cup in 2025-2026. Lineker has been the BBC's highest-paid on-air talent for seven consecutive years, with an estimated income of £1.35 million in the 2023-24 year. He will also continue with the 'Match of the Day Top Ten' podcast and the BBC-hosted 'The Rest is Football' podcast on BBC Sounds.