

Lineker leaving his mark before Japan decision

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THIS is likely to be Gary Lineker's last season for Tottenham and England. He could end it with records at both club and international level.

Lineker, who has another year of his contract at Tottenham to run, may leave Tottenham to end his career in lucrative style in Japan; he confirmed as much after a Japanese club had contacted Tottenham, as reported in Saturday's Daily Telegraph.

Lineker said: "I cannot deny there is interest from Japan. I always thought I would play this season and next at Tottenham and finish when my contract expires."

"But the interest from Japan does give me another option."

He is also planning to finish his illustrious England career after the European Championship finals in Sweden, having scored the goal, in Poland last week, that confirmed England's qualification.

It is believed Lineker could earn something like £3 million from a two-year contract in Japan, the money coming from Toyota, who sponsor the interested club, Grampus Eight, in Nagoya.

The first season of soccer in Japan begins in March 1993; Lineker would thus, should he choose the option, be able to take a six-month break after the European Championship finals.

He may even have broken

By John Ley

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the coveted England goal-scoring record, set by Bobby Charlton, by the time England reach Sweden.

England have six friendlies in which Lineker could score the four goals he needs to pass Charlton's 49.

He is also on course to match another goalscoring achievement — the 49 goals scored by Clive Allen for Tottenham during the 1986-87 season.

On Saturday a floodlight failure, the return to White Hart Lane of David Pleat, and the first goals from a promising young man still failed to overshadow Lineker, and the talk of his matching or beating Allen's record.

Lineker's goals ended Luton's hopes of their first away win since March, with Houghton adding his own brace.

That took Lineker's total to 19 from 21 League and cup games, his best start to a season. Allen, after the same number of matches, had scored 21 but did not have European games to look forward to. Lineker does, in the Cup Winners' Cup.

Mr Pleat, who resigned four years ago at Spurs, returned determined to keep a dignified silence on the circum-

stances surrounding his departure, yet dropped the odd hint of the bitterness he still feels.

He was, however, happy to talk of the comparisons of Allen — whom he failed to sign for Luton in the summer and who remains in Manchester City's reserves — and Lineker.

Mr Pleat, manager at Spurs during Allen's time there, said: "He is probably the best finisher I have worked with. Gary has the greatest anticipation of any modern-day striker and relies on a lot of good service."

The turn-around in this game was remarkable. Spurs, missing Stewart and Durie, were trailing to Harford's first-half goal when the lights on one side of the ground went out.

For 16 minutes, White Hart Lane was dimmed, but from the restart Luton, relying much on youth, yet refreshing in their approach, were suddenly on the defensive.

Within seven minutes of the restart Spurs were level.

Walsh, in his first full League game of the season, supplied the pass for Houghton, once a Luton schoolboy and signed by Mr Pleat for Spurs, to score his first goal for the club.

Lineker produced the second, three minutes later. Houghton added the third and Lineker the fourth.