

Words: Gavin Buckland

Lineker joins the Blues



When Howard Kendall was keen to add pace to the Everton attack in the summer of 1985 his search took him to Leicester City, where a relatively unknown Gary Lineker was making a name for himself and had scored more than 70 league goals over three seasons.

Lineker had made his debut for the Foxes on New Year's Day 1979 in a 2-0 victory against Oldham Athletic and scored his first goal against Notts County in April of that season.

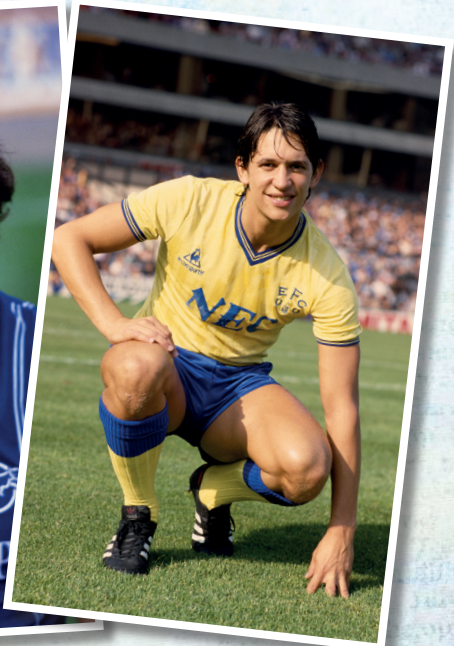
Six years later and the Toffees held off competition from Liverpool and Manchester United to clinch a £800,000 deal. For the *Match of the Day* host, it was meeting with the Everton boss that made his mind up.

'He was very engaging, very passionate, a lot of fun and he knew how to get the best out of players,' Lineker recently told the Official evertonfc.com Podcast.

As the season started, the striker discovered that replacing fans' favourite Andy Gray was going to be a challenge. He didn't score in any of his first three games, which included a 3-1 defeat away to Leicester City on his Everton debut when he walked into the home dressing room at half-time by mistake!

But a diving header at Spurs at the end of August brought a first goal and he was up and running. A first Everton hat-trick immediately followed against a Birmingham City side that had his future England colleague David Seaman in goal and former Toffees defender Billy Wright at centre-half.

Lineker ended up netting 40 goals in 57 games in all competitions – the best



return of his career. His tally included another two hat-tricks.

He scored three past Manchester City when future Tranmere Rovers legend Eric Nixon was between the sticks and he bagged another treble against Southampton at Goodison when the Saints had a 17-year-old rookie goalkeeper Keith Granger making his first-team debut. Granger hadn't even played for the reserves but a goalkeeping crisis left manager Chris Nichol with no option.

Lineker told our podcast that his team-mates could take enormous credit for that achievement. "Graeme [Sharp] was great to play with and we complemented each other very well... and when you've got the width of Trevor Steven on one side and Kevin Sheedy on the other there were always going

to be chances." With the World Cup taking place in the summer of 1986, Lineker was a hot property and interest intensified after he finished top-scorer with six goals. He was the first Everton player to ever score at a World Cup finals tournament.

Barcelona had enquired and when Everton accepted their bid, Lineker was off to the Nou Camp after 12 memorable months. The striker retains a great deal of affection and respect for the Blues. "The best club side I ever played for," he said.

Considering that includes Johan Cruyff's Barcelona, that's saying something.

Listen to the exclusive evertonfc.com podcast with Gary Lineker by searching for 'Official Everton Podcast' in iTunes or visit the audio section on evertonfc.com.