

Lineker forced to say sorry for Muslim gaffe during commentary on Al Jazeera

- **Pundit said players - who had adopted the Islamic prayer position - were 'eating grass'**
- **Apologised and said he was 'not aware of every player's religion'**
- **Comment has attracted criticism online**
- **'I'm off to the mosque for Friday prayers shortly. Or "eating grass" as Gary Lineker likes to call it,' one said**

By Liz Thomas



Sorry: Gary Lineker has apologised after accidentally ridiculing two Muslim football players

Gary Lineker has been forced to apologise after accidentally ridiculing two Muslim footballers during a match commentary on TV. When the players celebrated a goal by dropping to their knees and bowing their heads in the Islamic prayer position, Lineker said they 'ate grass'.

The gesture is often used by Muslim players to celebrate.

He was commentating on Al Jazeera TV, which is mainly aimed at audiences in the Middle East and has a huge Islamic audience. Lineker, who is one of the BBC's biggest faces in sport, has a clause in his contract that allows him to freelance for the other channel.

The gaffe was made during Wednesday night's Champions League game between Schalke and Montpellier when discussing the French side's opening goal.

He said: 'A terrific effort from Karim Ait-Fana, who scored from just outside the area and then ate grass . . . as you do.'

Viewers saw images of Ait-Fana, 23, and Younes Belhanda, 25, adopt the traditional Muslim prayer position, known as Sajda. The comment attracted criticism online.

One viewer wrote on Twitter: 'Lineker's comment about Muslims [is a] very stupid remark and [one of] sheer ignorance.' Another said: 'I'm off to the mosque for Friday prayers shortly. Or "eating grass" as Gary Lineker likes to call it.'

According to football website Goal.com, London-based Imam Ajmal Masroor said: 'The players are not asking anyone else to join in their worship, they are making a gesture in thanks to God – saying they are "eating grass" is outrageous.'



Prayer position: Montpellier's French midfielder Karim Ait-Fana (left) and Montpellier's Moroccan midfielder Younes Belhanda (right) celebrate by assuming prayer position

Lineker insisted he did not realise what they were doing.

The 51-year-old pundit wrote on his website: 'I'm sorry but I'm not aware of every player's religion.'

The BBC said it was not a matter for them to comment on.

The commentator, a former England and Spurs player, is facing a pay cut to his £2million-a-year salary at the corporation.

Match of the Day pundit Alan Hansen has taken a £500,000 pay cut and Lineker is expected to do the same as part of an economy drive.