

Austin has a yen to succeed

HE arrived in Japan with just a few yen, no job and unable to speak the language.

Yet a young Scot is following in Gary Lineker's footsteps, playing professional football in the Land of the Rising Sun.

Just two years ago Austin MacPhee (23), from Cupar, suffered a knee injury so severe, it was only thanks to basketball star Michael Jordan's surgeon that he was able to carry on playing.

As a teenager, Austin dreamed of becoming a full-time footballer, but although he trained with a number of professional clubs, he never quite made the big-time. Instead, he

By Iain Harrison

enrolled to study psychology at the University of Dundee.

That's where he heard about an agency who fix up promising young players with football scholarships at American universities. He applied — and was astonished when five scouts came to watch him play for the Dundee Uni team.

He must have impressed — Austin was offered places at 52 American colleges!

In autumn 1999, he went to the University of North Carolina on a four-year contract worth £50,000 to study and play football.

In his first season Austin's team did really well and he won Young Player of the Year. But in their final game he badly hurt his knee.

He was back playing after surgery

and months of rehab, but just four games into the new season his knee gave way once more. He was told he'd never kick a ball again.

"I wasn't prepared to accept that," explains Austin, currently home to see his family. "The university paid for me to see leading US surgeon, Dr Louis Almekinders.

"He has operated on basketball stars such as Michael Jordan and Vince Carter. The operation meant sawing my knee-cap in half."

After 10 more months of rehab — and a life-threatening blood clot in between — Austin was still in pain.

Dr Almekinders' answer was a procedure that was so experimental Austin had to sign a waiver stating he wouldn't sue if it went wrong!

"He injected growth hormones into my knee," says Austin. "The improvement was incredible but it

took yet another 10 months of rehab before I could play again."

Austin went on to captain the team and gain a degree in English and Psychology.

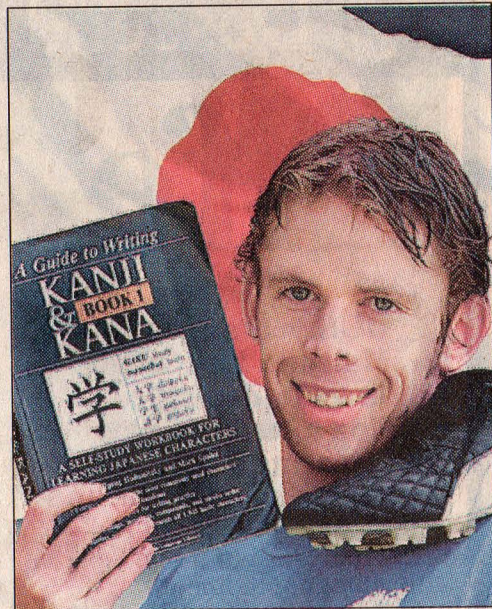
Back in Scotland before Christmas, he started training with East Fife, but within a couple of months he got the travel bug.

Austin headed to Japan where, to his delight, the second club he contacted, FC Goal, offered him a two year contract.

Now, after four months, he's settled well into the Japanese lifestyle. Though he's trying to learn the language, he has still only picked up a few phrases.

But there's only one he really needs to know.

That's when the fans are singing, 'Austin MacPhee ichi ban' — 'there's only one Austin MacPhee'!



■ A revolutionary knee op led to a contract for Austin with Japanese club FC Goal.