Lee Trundle - ‘Having someone say you’re a rapist was just hell...’

During his spells with Swansea and Wrexham, Lee Trundle became a cult football hero to thousands of Welsh fans thanks to his goal-scoring prowess and dazzling on-field skills. But in this extract from his new book, More Than Just Tricks, the Liverpool-born striker speaks for the first time about his darkest moment in the public spotlight – when he faced the terrifying ordeal of a false rape accusation...

I SOMETIMES used to go and get a sports massage in this college. I happened to be waiting outside for an appointment one day when this girl walked past with her mate.

A minute or two later, the friend came back, handing me a slip of paper with a number on it. She said that her mate had mentioned that she liked me and for me to give her a call.

Normally I’d have no problem with that, but I happened to be waiting with a group of older ladies and I felt a bit embarrassed. I told the girl thanks but no thanks and that was that.
The next day I was with my mate who lived not far from the college and I happened to see the same girl. I waved 'hi', called her over and apologised for the other day and for not taking her number, explaining I had felt a bit funny about it.

She was fine about it and when I suggested we meet up later she agreed.

She was a good-looking girl, seemed normal enough, and the plan was to have a couple of drinks at mine before heading out somewhere.

But when she turned up at the house, it didn’t take long before she was turning the conversation to sex, talking really openly about her fantasies and things, about how she’d love to have a threesome – to a point that she said she might have a girlfriend that might be up for a bit of fun.

It was full-on stuff. We met the next day and we both had mates with us, all agreeing that we’d meet at mine later.
It was harmless fun, we were all young and single, and when we got back to mine the talk about sex began again, only this time the girl was suggesting I slept with her friend – so I did.

It wasn’t out of the ordinary, I’d always been confident and comfortable with sex, and I’d always been a bit of a Jack the Lad.

The girl stayed downstairs with me mate, just chatting away in the front room, before she said something that startled him – she asked whether he thought Lee was ‘ready to settle down yet?’

Me mate checked she meant settling down with her, which she did – even though she’d been the one setting it up for me to sleep with her friend.

It was all a bit strange and I told her as much, that it was just a bit of fun, as I dropped both girls home.

We had an away match not long after, and when I came back I noticed there was paint over me front door.

Me mind immediately went to this girl, so I gave her a call, but she was more interested in why I’d never called her back like I’d said I would.

She came round crying, and I started to feel bad about the whole thing, beginning to think it wasn’t her, that she wouldn’t come back to me house if she’d been the one who’d damaged the door. Stupidly, as one thing led to another, we ended up having the threesome she’d asked for.

By the next morning, I’d decided it was better not to get any more involved with this girl and decided not to call her when I’d told her I would.

Later, when I was watching telly, there was a knock at the door. One of me neighbours was stood there, telling me how she’d just seen lads running away and if I was quick I’d catch them. There was white paint all over my new BMW.”

Suspicious, Lee confronted the girl’s father who denied any involvement by his daughter. But soon after, Lee received a call from police to say they’d received a complaint he had been harassing her. A short while after, he received a chilling phone call from the girl.

“I answered the phone and she told me if I slept with her one more time everything would stop. I told her not to threaten me, but later she called again, this time asking whether I’d thought any more about her offer. I told her exactly what I thought of her offer, but she came back saying she’d been to the newspapers and they would take her story.

‘Big deal,’ I said. ‘So you’ve slept with a League Two footballer.’
‘No,’ she replied. ‘Raped.’ And she put the phone down.

The words cut right through me – I was scared stiff.

There can be nothing, nothing worse than for someone to say that to you, to accuse you of rape when you’ve done nothing wrong.

I knew this was no time for messing around. I headed for the police station and told the officer what had just happened, what she’d said, what she’d threatened.

He took it all down, told me I’d done the right thing and told me to just go home when I asked what I should do about this whole mess. I followed his instructions and was pulling out of the car park when I saw the girl walk in – she was going through with this, with these lies.”

Returning to his nan’s house to await his fate, the police van eventually turned up at 3am, just hours before a crunch Wrexham promotion match Lee was desperate to play in.

“The cuffs were on as I went to the station, me shoes and socks removed and me rights read out to me. Fingerprints, photos, all that, and then into the cell.

This horrible cold cell with its light-blue walls, thin blue mattress, no pillow and a brown stitched blanket, the light from outside shining through.

The night before the biggest game of me life and I wasn’t sleeping. Even if it had been a five-star hotel I wouldn’t have slept a wink; I honestly thought I was going to go mad.

The fear of not knowing what the hell was going on was eating me up. I wanted to cry but couldn’t because me mind was racing so much. I wanted to be angry but didn’t have enough energy.

I’d done nothing wrong so there shouldn’t have been anything to be scared about, but yet it had already gone this far.

The thoughts went over and over in me mind, ‘I haven’t done anything wrong, but are they going to believe me? I’ve already told them what happened yet I’m still in this cell.’

I felt sick just to think someone would believe I’d do what she was accusing me of, to be that evil. And that was the thing – being locked up was something I could deal with; having someone say you’re a rapist was just hell.

They read her statements out to me – I didn’t know what to say. I lost count of the times I fell back in to me chair in disbelief at what she’d said.
So many things were just false, obvious things like we’d been seeing each other for more than a month, that I was getting aggressive because she wouldn’t get serious with me, going to her house threatening to kill her and, then, that I’d raped her and kept her in my house.

They didn’t charge me; they released me on bail. It was half-past three. Even at one I thought I’d have half a chance, I might make the bench, get a few minutes as sub.

When the clock turned past half two and didn’t stop, me heart just sank lower. I was missing the biggest moment of me career for something I’d never done.”

With the full backing of his North Wales club, he returned to the team for a match against Leyton Orient – where he had to endure the sickening taunts of the opposition fans – and went on to play in the season’s remaining games as he sweated on news about the false rape allegation.

“I’d played what ended up being me last game at the Racecourse on the Thursday, scoring twice in a 6-1 win over Newport County to win the FAW Premier Cup. And then it was all over.

By the Friday, the police came and said they wouldn’t be taking it any further. She’d withdrawn her claims.

How that came about I don’t know, whether she came to her senses to drop all the crap or what – don’t know, don’t care. All that mattered was that it was done and the accusation was no more.

About two weeks after it all ended, I drove through Liverpool and saw her standing on the side of the road. She saw me and laughed as I went past. It turned me stomach.

I wonder if she ever thought about what she did to me, how I still have that fear that [my daughter] Brooke will have to hear from some kid that her dad was supposed to have raped someone.

I wonder if she realises how that will never go away.

I wonder if she realises that every time I meet someone new in me life, someone I want to get close to, I have to go over the story again and tell them meself, rather than worry they’ll hear it first from someone else and get it wrong.

Mud sticks, doesn’t matter how clean you are.

It’s still there now, still in the background, people only knowing half the story.

Even now people think I left the area because of what happened, that I was in trouble and couldn’t stay in Liverpool.
Can you believe that? That I couldn’t even live in the area that I’d grown up in, where I was born, that I’d been forced out of me own home?

It was a tight-knit community that had backed me from the start, so why would that have been an issue? People just jump to conclusions, no matter if they’re wrong or not. The truth was, I’d already made my mind up I was leaving before any of that happened.

Lee Trundle: More Than Just Tricks, by Lee Trundle with Chris Wathan (Mainstream Publishing), is out now priced £16.99

I’D have huge parties. I remember one pool party with everyone in Hawaiian shirts. Plus, there would be a new girl to bring back every week, every night almost.

When I’d first go out on the pull back home it was a case of chasing after them, buying the drinks, talking for hours to try and get lucky – here it was girls chatting me up.

I couldn’t believe me luck at times – and neither could the girls from Huyton every time they’d come down to see me. I’d go out on the weekend, pick up different numbers which would sort me out for a different date for the week and then start over at the weekend. In the space of one season I went out with a Miss Wales, a Miss England and a Miss Great Britain – I’d have gone to Scotland and Northern Ireland to complete the Grand Slam if I’d not been so busy.

There was a lot of talk that I went out with Imogen Thomas, former Miss Wales who ended up on Big Brother, but we’d only met once or twice and it was nothing serious.

I’d get invited to a load of different events, different dinners and dos, and a I’d pick up a different girl at each one – even if they knew I wasn’t looking for a girlfriend.

I’d always made that clear and especially after what happened at Wrexham I was quite wary at times.

Not long after it happened I’d always send a text to the girl the next day saying I’d had a nice night and hoped they’d enjoyed themselves, waiting to get a text back saying they’d had a nice night too, so I knew there could be no way of anyone saying anything like that again.

On that T-shirt worn at the Millennium Stadium as the team celebrated their 2006 LDV Trophy final victory

I WAS on me own side of the pitch when a T-shirt got thrown in front of me.

I shoved it on for a few seconds without really paying much attention to what was on it. When I did look properly as I took it off, there was a cartoon picture of a Swansea player p***ing on a Cardiff shirt, the kind of thing you’d see up and down the country with different teams.
I’d seen loads of them in Liverpool with Liverpool-Everton, Everton-Liverpool, Liverpool-Man Utd, on all sorts of things from T-shirts to car stickers. I thought nothing of it.

I made me way to behind the goals where the rest of the lads were, including Tatey.

He had hold of this big Welsh flag and I held it up with him. As ever, he was acting the clown with his big jester’s hat on and as I looked across to him I noticed what was on the flag.

In big capital letters, in this thick black paint, someone had written ‘F*** off Cardiff’.

I dropped it – I knew that it wouldn’t be the best idea to be waving it around.

**On his former relationship with Atomic Kitten Liz McClarnon**

THE first proper date was a George Benson gig. I already had two tickets because I knew I’d be taking someone, I just didn’t know who when I bought them.

It just happened to be Liz, who just happened to be famous. At the end of the day, she was a normal girl from a council estate in Liverpool, and that’s why I think we got on.

Not that the lads back in Swansea saw it that way, winding me up because they’d never known me have a girlfriend as such, and now they were trying to say I’d only gone out with her because she was a pop star.

But I liked her. I ended up loving her.

It was exciting – but not for the reasons people might expect.

https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/lee-trundle---having-someone-1889117