

Tom Brown and Lee Roche, photographed at the PFA Education department's Making The Transition 2019 event.



# TALENT PIPELINE

**Meet Tom Brown and Lee Roche.** Two players with different career paths facing a common question – what next after football? All before a plumbing qualification helped them come unstuck

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**PHOTOGRAPHY:** JOE BRANSTON

**Why the transition into plumbing: was it just an option put in front of you or a chance to earn decent money?**

**Tom Brown:** A bit of both really. I just bought a house with my girlfriend and my kid last year and we gutted the whole place. I did a bit of the work myself. I'm obviously happy doing a bit of hands-on work. The plumbing NVQ level 2 came up and, because it's hands-on, I went straight into it. I always wanted to pick up a trade to go alongside my football.

**Lee Roche:** I'd been speaking to Oshor [Williams] in the PFA's education team since I came out of football and went into the cavity wall trade. I was doing a tough job and I enjoyed it but I wanted that next progression where I had a trade. The work I was doing started dying out. Getting that trade behind me would mean I could do my own work eventually.

**What convinced you to take part?**  
**LR:** It was just that I thought it would

suit my skillset. Oshor mentioned the possibility of doing NVQs and asked if I would be interested. He just said they were looking for lads who really wanted to do it and it was important the lads got through it. He didn't want them dropping out.

**There's a five-week intensive training centre on this course. How did you find that?**

**LR:** It was quite enjoyable, really. The hardest thing for me was the prep ▶



**Tom Brown**

**Born:**  
1 October 1994, Bolton  
**Clubs:**  
Manchester United  
Blackburn Rovers  
FC United  
Stalybridge Celtic  
Radcliffe Borough



**Lee Roche**

**Born:**  
28 October 1980, Bolton  
**Clubs:**  
Manchester United  
Wrexham (loan)  
Burnley  
Wrexham  
Droylsden



Lee Roche was at Man Utd for six years as a youth and pro player before moving down the leagues and leaving the game in 2011.



Tom Brown started out as a youth player at Man Utd and also played for FC United of Manchester.

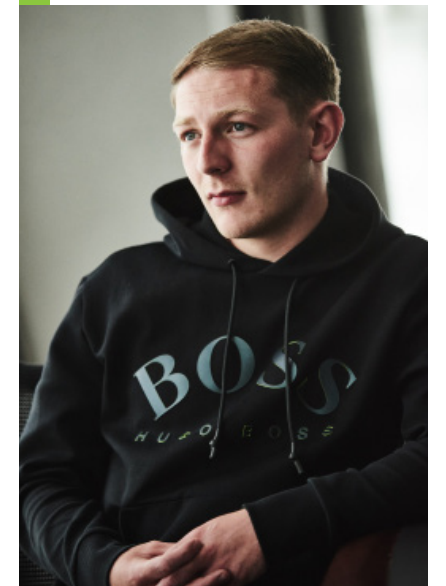
DIFFERENT PATHS

**TOM AND LEE HAVE SO MUCH IN COMMON. BOTH WERE BORN IN BOLTON, STARTED THEIR CAREERS AT MAN UNITED AND MET AT THE PFA-SUPPORTED NVQ LEVEL 2 PLUMBING COURSE. BUT THEIR PLAYING CAREERS TOOK VERY DIFFERENT TURNS...**

“I was released by United at under 14s,” recalls Tom. “I went to Blackburn, then did my ACL. I came back and got player of the year. Then I did my cruciate again. That was the end of that, really. I wasn’t going to get a new contract and I went part-time.”

Lee was fortunate to stay injury-free and turned out for Man United’s first-team, coming on for a debut at a packed Old Trafford. “That was a highlight, as well as playing in the Champions League,” he says. “Hearing that tune gives you goosebumps, it was unbelievable.”

“I loved playing with the local lads – Nicky Butt, Ryan Giggs, the Nevilles and Scholes – who had been through what you had been through and tried to help you as best they could.”



work before you even got there. You’re doing all these modules on the laptop and looking at all this plumbing information and you don’t really know it. When you get to the training centre, that’s where it all starts to click. It did for me and a lot of the other lads.

**Was it like school?**

**TB:** A lot of it was practical. Because they crammed it in over five weeks solid there is that much practical we were hardly in the classroom. The only study was back at home, so it would just be a couple of hours at night, then we’d have an exam the day after. That was probably the hardest part. It was in Leeds, so by the time I got home – plus

alongside my football – it was trying to cram that time in. I got through it eventually, which was good.

**LR:** A lot of it is hands-on. A lot of it was workshops, not just sat in a classroom. There were tests two or three times a week where you go to the computer room in exam conditions to get through 12 modules. If you failed, you had to sit them again. Obviously, you’d have to get them all passed before you could get it ticked off. It was good. The trainers are really good. They know that you come from a football environment and you will enjoy the workshops rather than just sitting in the classroom.

**Then you did three weeks on site – how was that experience?**

**TB:** We’d have a couple of jobs to do and a bit of paperwork. That was where they just told you the jobs and that’s it – they said you had learned it in the training centre and you just do it. The first few days were a bit difficult as you had to get your head around it. But once you did it was pretty straightforward.

**LR:** It was a big thing! You walked into these apartments and there was nothing there and they just said ‘go on, measure out your pipework and the fittings then you’ll come back to the workshop and let us know what you need’. It was like a shop, as if you were

buying them. And we were thinking, ‘are we ready for this?’

**Did you feel prepared?**

**LR:** Yes, but it was different. A lot of the time you were getting helped along during the workshop. You could go to Mike, the instructor, and ask him a question and he would help you along. Going into the on-site work you were on your own in the rooms and you were left to it. I was thinking ‘stay calm and try to piece it together’. If you look at it like a massive picture you’re going to fail – you do stages at a time and try to get it right.

**What was the banter like?**

**LR:** There were bits. Even Mike was good with us. He wasn’t really strict. Obviously, you have to respect all the health and safety in the workshop. There were times when we had a bit of banter – we all come from that football background and that really helped us a lot of the time.

**TB:** It was a little bit different – a little bit more work had to be done. I don’t think there’s much better banter than

you get in a changing room, it’s a completely different environment.

**What are you doing now you’ve completed the course?**

**LR:** I’m plumbing. I started in late March at a company in Altrincham, which installs all different plumbing in new-build sites. I’m based at Stalybridge, installing bathrooms, kitchen sinks. Some of the lads are doing boilers and everything else. It’s a big learning curve but as soon as you’ve done it once or twice you pick it up. It’s just getting your speed up. We get paid on priced work so the more you get through, the more you get paid.

**TB:** I’m trying to build up experience. When I’ve been looking for jobs they all want three years’ experience. It’s getting your foot in the door and trying to get your experience that way. I’m still looking once or twice a week to see if something comes up but nothing has so far. I’ve done a few bits and bobs.

**LR:** There is a learning curve, going from the training centre for the NVQ assessment and then going in the ▶

**“They know that you come from a football environment and you will enjoy the workshops rather than just sitting in the classroom”**





## PROUD SPONSOR

**BUSINESSMAN AND PHILANTHROPIST JAN TELENSKY SUPPORTED THE PLAYERS AS A SPONSOR AND WAS IMPRESSED BY THE COMMITMENT, HARD WORK AND DEDICATION OF THE TRAINEES**

■ Jan suggests the competitive world of football is a perfect apprenticeship for people who want to get on in the world of work. He says: “You have footballers that finished the course in six months when it normally takes two years. They are special people, let’s face it. It takes a special character to lose and win and win and lose and self-motivate each game.”

The course was assessed by Paul Conway, who echoes the view that footballers have what it takes to succeed once they hang up their boots. “I think the players have done fantastically considering they’ve come from a completely different background,” he says.

“They are really good with processes and they are good with their level of discipline, I suppose that is something that they have transferred from football into their training environment here.”

**“I recommend the course 100%. I can only say I’ve done it and I do enjoy going to work”**

first day and being left to put things in. Some lads have been doing it years and years. You have to think on your feet and learn yourself.

**Would you recommend the course to other players looking to learn a trade?**

**TB:** Definitely. Other lads who went on the course who know plumbers are half in there anyway. The qualification is the hardest bit to get. There a lot of people out there who haven’t got the qualification. I definitely recommend it.

**LR:** Yeah, I’d recommend it 100%. I can only say I have done it and I do enjoy

going to work. That’s a big thing. It gives you that freedom. You can go and do a job anywhere. It’s recognised everywhere – for example, in Australia. You could travel and do it. As soon as you’ve got that qualification it opens a lot of doors for you. If I could have done it a lot earlier it would have been better for me but I’m glad I’ve done it. It’s all about getting more experience now and seeing where it takes me.

*For details on the plumbing NVQ and all other courses supported by the PFA Education department, contact Oshor Williams on [owilliams@thepfa.co.uk](mailto:owilliams@thepfa.co.uk)*