**Rhian Cleverly, Lewes FC Team Captain chats to Bo and Rosa about her journey to becoming Captain for Lewes FC and asks them about their own ambitions for the future.**

**Rhian –**

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**Bo –**

Is it Goal Power or Girl Power? Hello everybody, welcome to Goal Power.

**Rhian –**

So, my name is Rhian Cleverly, and I’m centre back and captain for Lewes FC, which is the best club in the world.

**Rosa –**

How did you get into football and how old were you when you started?

**Rhian –**

I think I started playing around the age of 9. I joined my first team; it was supposed to be a mixed team, but I was the only girl. But yeah, I just loved it. My mum was a bit reluctant. I am bit older now, I’m 27 but when I was younger it wasn’t really the norm for girls to play football still. So, I had to do like dancing, ballet, all those sorts of things, try those first but I think she realised that the more she said no, the more I wanted to do it. So, she gave in in the end, and yeah, I played with the boys team for 5 years before joining a girls team.

**Bo –**

What are your favourite stand-out moments in your football career?

**Rhian –**

I think for me it’s the friendships and the places I have been from playing football. I’ve played in America and got a scholarship to play in New York for a team called Hofstra, so that was an amazing 4 years. And my roommate there was from Australia, so from that I had a best friend for life, and I went on holiday to Australia and so stuff like that, football gave me amazing opportunities. Again, playing in France and living there for a year was really cool. But I think in terms of on the pitch, I scored on my debut for Wales. I was 14 but playing for the under 16s. So that was pretty cool, I was playing rightback at the time so it was one on one to score, and I think that was the moment, I can remember, now that I was like, I want to do this, I want to do this forever, play football as my job. And it sounds funny, but I got released when I was in France. So, I got to the end of the season, I’d played every game, I thought I was a key player on the team and I wanted to stay another year but I got released. That was two days after the season ended so I was devastated. I was crying a lot and obviously at the time it wasn’t my proudest moment but looking back now I’m really proud of how I overcame that and still kept playing and ended up at Lewes, so it was a bit of silver lining.

**Rosa –**

Have you experienced any sexism in your time playing football?

**Rhian –**

I wouldn’t say obviously but I think indirectly. Growing up I was the only girl in the team, there was quite often comments, like ‘there’s a girl on the team’ or ‘what’s she doing here, it’s not fair’ or just being called a lesbian or being called a boy, just things that they’re not used to. I think the more I developed, there would always be less opportunities, so I had to join a boys team as there were no girls teams where I lived. I lived in Wales, but I had to travel to Bristol every day, it was an hour drive to play a good level of football when I was growing up. I was playing a good level in Bristol but knew I needed to go to America to study at the same time because it wasn’t professional. So, I think, sexism but maybe just less opportunities and a bit more discrimination I would say, would be the right word.

**Rosa –**

Would you say things have improved?

**Rhian –**

I am at Lewes so, as you know, you play for Lewes, we’re very privileged, we play for a club that really cares about and values equal opportunity so I think yeah, I think we are biased being at Lewes. I would hope the rest of the football community gets on board. It’s happening and I think women’s football is growing. And hopefully you guys will have better experiences than me and it will be easier for you. But yeah, I definitely think it’s getting better but not as fast as we’d hoped, right?

**Bo –**

Will you be watching the Women’s Euros and what are you looking forward to?

**Rhian –**

Yeah, without a doubt. I would love to have been there. I think Wales didn’t qualify and I haven’t been in the squad for a couple of years but one of our teammates, Rebecca McKenna, she plays for Northern Ireland, so she’ll be playing in the Euros. Potentially a couple of others, so yeah, I’ll be supporting my teammates, women’s football in general. I watch it as much as a I can, and I know quite a few of the games are down in this area so I think going and attending the matches live and the atmosphere, hopefully with some big crowds, and yeah, a good day out.

**Bo –**

What’s it like playing for your country?

**Rhian –**

Yeah, I loved it growing up. I played for the 16s, 17s, 19s and the day before I flew to America for my scholarship, I got my senior debut. I think it was hard, because as a centreback you need quite a lot of experience to start games and I was really young at the time, so I think maybe going abroad didn’t help me. I would love to get more caps. The Welsh squad are really good and yeah, it’s just a different type of pride, I think. You only meet up every so often and you know you are the best sort of players. It’s quite a privilege.

**Rosa –**

Who is the best player you’ve ever played against?

**Rhian –**

Mmm, Kim Little is really good. I remember making my debut for Bristol for the First Team and Bristol were one of the best teams in the UK when I first joined them growing up. We had the FA Cup Final against Arsenal a week later, so our coach was like, we’re going to play all you youngsters because we don’t want to play our best players and give them our game plan. We want to rest them for the next week, so I took that as a positive that I was going to start against Arsenal and it was in the Conti Cup at the time. Kim Little was playing that game and I remember Alex Scott was playing too. We were actually winning at half term, and they came back and won, I think it was 3-2. But yeah, good memory of them, and Kim Little was definitely pulling the strings that game.

**Bo –**

What’s it like being a Captain?

**Rhian –**

I love it. I think, even from growing up, I was always barking orders and think that’s my favourite thing about football and being part of a team, is trying to get the best out of others. I know I am not the best player technically. Physically I’m quite slow, but I know through positive encouragement and stuff and getting to know players on the team, I can make them play to their potential. So I really love that and the role I can have as captain. Even off the field, like organising team bonding events, I think it helps you when you are winning to play better and when you are losing to get through the tough times. So I think as a captain even if I didn’t have the armband I would try and have a role like that just to get the best out of others in the team. Yeah, it’s cool, it’s really cool.

**Rosa –**

What advice would you give to girls wanting to get into football?

**Rhian –**

I’d say go for it. Yeah, like it’s given me the best experiences and friendships I’ve ever had in my life. There’s been tough times but it’s also prepared me for, like being released from France, I lost my home, I had a boyfriend at the time so we broke up, I lost my car, lost my job, and I was like, oh, what do I do now. So I think little things like being injured and having surgery, it’s not a big deal. Or there’s a global pandemic and I have people on my team around me, so it is preparing me for other things in normal day life. So I’d say, yeah, if you enjoy it, like it makes your heart pump and makes you smile then definitely go for it because you won’t regret it.

**Rhian –**

I have a question for you guys, is that ok? What’s your goals, have you got like goals? Do you know who you want to play for or what you want to do? It could be football; it could be non-football…

**Bo –**

Erm, I’m not sure. If I am old enough and good enough but I don’t know if I will be. I want to be like a filmmaker for an animal documentary.

**Rhian –**

That’s cool too. It’s good that you have passions outside too. I do sports psychology and I think when football is not going well, you have something else to fall back on. Yeah, really cool. How about you, Rosa?

**Rosa –**

I want to play for Man-City.

**Rhian –**

Yeah? Not a bad team, eh?

**Rosa –**

If not, then something else in women’s football.

**Rhian –**

I am sure you will.

**Bo and Rosa –**

Thank you.

**Rhian –**

Thank you.