

Australian rugby league star Matthew Lodge sued over alleged US frenzy

Former Sydney Wests Tigers player faces multimillion dollar civil claim after allegedly stalking two women and assaulting a man in New York

By Sean Farrell Tuesday 22 December 2015 14.31 EST



Matthew Lodge, a former player for Sydney's Wests Tigers, is due to face criminal charges over an alleged rampage in New York in October. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

Australian rugby league player Matthew Lodge could be liable to pay millions of dollars in compensation to the alleged victims of a rampage in New York for which he already faces criminal charges.

Lodge was arrested and charged for [allegedly stalking two women and assaulting](#) a man on Manhattan's Upper West Side on the night of 16 October. During the incident he is alleged to have told the women "this is the night you die", before wrecking an apartment occupied by another woman and her son.

The 20-year-old former Sydney Wests Tigers prop is on bail and due to face criminal charges over the incident, which occurred while he was on holiday in New York.

Lawyers for three of Lodge's alleged victims filed a civil complaint against him on Monday in the US district court for the southern district of New York. The plaintiffs are seeking a jury trial and claiming compensation for damage to property, mental anguish and punitive damages for the effects of the alleged incident.

The plaintiffs are Carolin Dekeyser, one of the women allegedly stalked by Lodge; Joseph Cartright, whom Lodge is claimed to have assaulted when he tried to calm Lodge down; and Ruth Fowler, Cartright's wife, who was in the apartment with their son when Lodge allegedly broke in and wreaked havoc.

The New York law firm Wigdor LLP is representing the plaintiffs. The case is being handled by partners Jeanne Christensen and Douglas Wigdor, who represented the New York hotel maid who claimed she was assaulted by Dominic Strauss-Kahn. If a jury finds against Lodge he could be liable for millions of dollars in compensation including for alleged lasting mental trauma to a nine-year-old child.

In their claim, the plaintiffs allege that Dekeyser, who was visiting New York from Germany, and a friend found themselves harassed by Lodge outside the apartment building where they were staying. After asking them to return to Australia with him, Lodge allegedly told them “this is the night you die” and forced his way into a small entrance hall to the building with them.

The women rang the bells of the apartment building and Cartright, a fashion photographer, came out to see what was happening, the plaintiffs claim. Cartright tried to calm the former rugby player, but Lodge put him in a headlock and repeatedly punched him in the left ear and skull before barricading himself inside Cartright’s and Fowler’s apartment, smashing property and trying to force his way into the bathroom, where Fowler and the couple’s son, aged nine, were hiding, the claim says.

Fowler and other residents of the building had called the police and when officers arrived Lodge threw a two-litre bottle of wine out of the apartment door at them, the claim says. The police entered the apartment with their guns out to find Lodge cowering in a bedroom cupboard, it goes on to say.

Wigdor and Christensen said: “Our clients were all innocent victims that were forced to endure what can only be described as bizarre and violent conduct by Mr Lodge. We will utilise all of our resources to ensure that he is held accountable for his actions.”

Lodge faces two felony burglary charges, which carry a maximum sentence of 25 years in prison. A judge [ordered Lodge on 21 October to stay away from his alleged victims](#) and the court heard that he had surrendered his passport. Lodge’s father arrived in New York soon after the alleged incident and bail of \$20,000 (£13,500) cash and a bond guarantee of \$30,000 were posted to secure his release from a Rikers Island facility.

West’s Tigers tore up Lodge’s contract after the latest in a succession of controversies. He had not played since August, when the club stood him down [following assault charges and a provisional apprehended domestic violence order](#).

Lodge’s New York-based lawyer declined to comment when contacted by the Guardian on Tuesday.