

# PGA Championship

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

Kiawah Island, South Carolina, USA

The Ocean Course at Kiawah Island

## Steve Stricker

### Press Conference



JULIUS MASON: Welcome back to the 2021 PGA Championship at Kiawah Island, and U.S. Ryder Cup Captain Steve Stricker is joining us now.

Steve, you're playing very well on both the PGA TOUR champions and PGA TOUR. Can you talk about your state of the game today and how it fits The Ocean Course where you finished tied 7 in 2012?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, thanks Julius. The state of my game okay. But I played the back nine yesterday and the back nine, I hit a lot of woods. Hit a lot of -- took a lot of head covers off my woods to hit them but it's a tough place. You know, the wind, the conditions add to that and it's a beautiful place. It's in great shape. But I hope they move some of the tees up (chuckles).

JULIUS MASON: Let's turn to The Ryder Cup. You made a decision on format for September's event; correct?

STEVE STRICKER: Yes, we have. We are staying status quo with the -- I always say alternate-shot. I guess it's called foursomes, in the morning, both Friday and Saturday, and then fourball in the afternoon.

**Q. The distance measuring, how do you feel about that being used in competition?**

STEVE STRICKER: It's a step in the right direction for sure. I don't know if I'm there totally for myself. It's just to trust the yardage device. Sometimes there's not a backdrop behind you or it may pick up a tree or something behind you.

So Nicki, who is on my bag this week, we have been testing it out, and obviously the rangefinders are all spot-on for the most part, but I'm going to pace it off on a sprinkler head and just coordinate with her that we're getting the same number, but I think it's exciting for golf and the casual fan to see us using the lasers like they normally do when they go out and play.

**Q. Where do preparations stand right now, four and a**

**half, five months out?**

STEVE STRICKER: Since we've had this extra year we have been able to have so much of the prep done because you're preparing for this last year. A lot of it now is watching players and see how they are doing during tournaments and playing practice rounds with some of these guys. I played with Will Zalatoris Monday and Jordan yesterday. So it's a great opportunity for me to come out and see some of these guys that are making their way up the points list. Played with Collin Morikawa earlier in the year. Just to, some of these guys I don't even know really or have met. I haven't met Will before. So I'm taking this opportunity, this extra time to get to know these guys. A lot of the prep is done. It's just about watching these players and watching the point list and seeing how they are doing, how they are playing.

**Q. How much do you want to have Tiger a part of your group at The Ryder Cup as a vice captain and have you reached out to him about this?**

STEVE STRICKER: I've talked to him. I don't know if we are there yet to commit to him being there. He's still got a lot going on and his spirits of great, though, as of late and we just -- we were on a Zoom call with him just this last week and he seems like he's in a better place. Like I said, though, he's still got some ways to go.

But yeah, I'd love to have him there. Who wouldn't, right? The guys really respect him and he did a great job obviously as a captain but he was an assistant captain of mine in 2017 of the Presidents Cup and he was unbelievable. He would do anything for you and he's totally, totally vested in the situation and the process and almost to the point of he's on it early and so much, it's like, dude, we've still got months to go yet.

He's really good at being interest and being an assistant and I'd love to have him be there if it's at all possible.

**Q. Whether he is or not, it sounds like already that you could lean on him leading up to that week for advice?**

STEVE STRICKER: Sure. To that point, I don't know if I



can be there or not but you know I'm here for you all the way up to The Ryder Cup. That shows his level of commitment to me to the team and his desire to be there if he can be.

**Q. What was the purpose of the Zoom call?**

STEVE STRICKER: I can't tell you.

**Q. If there was a word, what would it be?**

STEVE STRICKER: You know, it's all little stuff at this point, really, it is. Just I don't even remember what it was about. Actually it wasn't even about The Ryder Cup. It was actually about something else to tell you the truth, to be quite honest, it was.

**Q. For years when you would go to either the Masters or any of the majors, you probably had a mental image in your head of what you were expecting for the week. What would that have been for the PGA Championship?**

STEVE STRICKER: Here? Well I've been here before, so -- I have that mental image. What's your question?

**Q. What were you expecting when you go to a PGA Championship, not so much the course but just what kind of test you're expecting and things like that. What do you expect generally out of the PGA and is your thinking different this week?**

STEVE STRICKER: You know, the PGA Championship in my mind has always been the fairest championship and probably the strongest field of all the major championships. I think we have 99 of the top hundred here in the world. So that's pretty tough to beat, right. So those two things always stick out in my mind. It's probably the toughest to win because it's so strong and it's always been set up very fairly. Difficult but fairly. Difficult but fair.

So you know, that's what comes to my mind. Obviously thinking of The Ocean Course, knowing what I experienced back in 2012, I knew conditions are going to play a pretty big role. It usually gets windy here. That finishing stretch -- you're going to miss some greens because of the conditions but those are the things that come to mind.

**Q. Early in Tiger's career there was a theory that The Ryder Cup didn't suit him and he struggled in that environment. The way you speak now, he's immersed in it and he's very helpful to you. Was the early perception unfair or do you think something changed?**

STEVE STRICKER: I think the earlier perception was a bit

unfair. Although he's a difficult guy to pair with, I think. You know, I can say that because I was his partner and we had a great partnership. But he's the best player in the world, and his partner has to be -- I don't know what the word is, it's just you have to be -- you have to be okay with playing with the best player in the game and there's some expectation put on as partner, and he doesn't put that on the partner. He was always a great partner to me and I enjoyed those.

I think it's just that, you know, hey, I'm Tiger's partner, kind of mentality. So I think that's difficult for the guys. So that's always a tough, tough deal. Jim Furyk I know was a partner of his, and -- yeah, I think that's a bit unfair. He's always been this way on the teams I've been around, very into the whole team and the process and yeah, I think it's been unfair. As assistant captain, it's almost like he's taken it up a notch. He can worry about the whole team where when he's a player, he's just thinking about getting his own game ready so he can get those blinders on a little bit.

But as an assistant captain, he is all-in with everybody and the players love it. They love being around him and he adds a tremendous amount when he is there.

**Q. In 1979 The Ryder Cup expanded to let players from the European continent play, to be more inclusive, what would you think of eventually allowing players from Africa, Asia, the rest of the world?**

STEVE STRICKER: To The Ryder Cup? I think we have that competition already in The Presidents Cup, and I think this is a special event, and history has proven that. I think two separate events is what we have and it's kind of in my opinion the way it should be.

**Q. How much time have you spent thinking about how Whistling Straits can play as a match-play course? I know it's none of my business.**

STEVE STRICKER: It's none of your business (laughter). I was up there last fall, and I've been up there this spring. We've made some tweaks, and I'm sure everybody knows what they are going to be. I'm not going to get into that part of it.

Yeah, we did some things to kind of enhance the benefit towards our side just like they do when we go over to Europe and play their side. So it's minor little things. It's not going to change the way the course plays dramatically.

You know, to be quite honest, it's going to be I think similar to this, so I'm interested in watching this week and watching the players this week who play well here because

it's kind of got a very similar feel. That's not Lake Michigan out there but it's got the same look and same feel and the wind can blow at Whistling Straits, as well.

This course, it's not true links either and neither is Whistling Straits. It's kind of play it up in the air and you have to fly it into the numbers. Same designer, right, I think Pete Dye both places, so it's got a very similar feel.

**Q. We had Collin Morikawa in this morning, he was talking about he's 180-something in strokes gained putting. As someone known as a great putter, do you feel you can make yourself a putter or do you feel like some great putters have something innate that allows them to excel?**

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I think you can make yourself a great putter. Obviously he putts great at times. You know, he's won some big tournaments and to do -- to do that, you have to putt well. So I think it's a mentality at times, you know, to get yourself thinking that, hey, I am a good putter and if I won a PGA, I won a World Golf Championships event, obviously he's doing something right. I know he hits the ball incredibly well. But yeah, I think you can trick yourself and start to make you think to yourself that you're a great putter and you keep working on those mechanics over and over and something may click and then you're off and running for a while.

**Q. And as a Ryder Cup Captain as a follow-up, how much will you target putters?**

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it's important. I mean, I look at that all the time and putting is a huge deal, getting it in the hole, getting it around because in match play, that's the key part, making crucial putts, getting it up-and-down. Scramblers, you know, are very important. So when you look at it all, when it comes down to it, can the guy make the putt when he has to.

**Q. Part of the process of Ryder Cup is making the people feel more like a team and together and the relationships. Is there anything you're working on and with having so many picks is that going to be more difficult?**

STEVE STRICKER: Actually because we have more picks, I think in my opinion we have the ability to create teams that we want to create for that cohesiveness. So that's the benefit from my side is that we are able to be real flexible.

And we are working on things, trying to get guys there. We picked out some times to try to get guys there as a whole to see the course, to be together. Yeah, so we are working

on that.

**Q. What kind of schedule have you set yourself out in your bid to make the Playoffs?**

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, here this week and then I'm -- that stretch of I think it's Rocket Mortgage, maybe Travelers, John Deere I'm going to play this year instead of the U.S. Senior Open. Wyndham probably. Maybe even -- maybe even go to one of the opposite-field events out there, what's the one --

**Q. Tahoe?**

STEVE STRICKER: Stableford.

**Q. Tahoe. Stableford; it's got a title. I don't remember what it is.**

STEVE STRICKER: Barracuda. So I'll hopefully get in about four more after this one to try to sneak in the Playoffs.

**Q. I relate this to Phoenix where they gave you a lot of hope in terms of contending and competing, but in your limited experience, when you win on the Champions Tour, does that boost your confidence or does it give you a false sense of hope? Which one?**

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it's a good question because it's two totally different deals, right. Shorter course like where I won at Chubb, I think I hit driver once or twice and a lot of short irons, kind of plays right up to my strengths.

Then I come to a place like this and I'm hitting -- I hit a 3-wood in on 17 yesterday. You know, so that doesn't give -- I mean, it's a hard hole, right. 18, I thought I hit a good drive and I couldn't reach the green in two. You're right, it kind of gives you a little bit of false hope. I can lean on Honda Classic and Waste Management after playing well at both of those places.

Waste Management, I've never really played -- I've had a couple good tournament there but typically it's not a course that would suit me. Honda does for some reason. I've played well there in the past. So I can look back and lean on those to give me some confidence moving forward.

**Q. Curious as you wander around the range or play practice rounds, do you kind of catch your mind wandering and looking at players that you have a feeling will be on the team or on your list to be on the team and how much does that take away from your preparation sometimes?**

STEVE STRICKER: Oh, yeah, I'm looking at these guys all the time and if -- you know, I say "hi" to a lot of people but I'm focusing a lot on the guys that are in the Top-25 or Top-10 or 15 or whatever, if I see somebody, I'll stop and say "hi."

Yeah, it detracts from what I've got going a little bit, but you know, I think I'm still able to compartmentalize and get into my own little space and work on my game to figure out what do I need to do well here this week to compete.

But so yeah, so I'm kind of juggling and doing both.

**Q. Just was curious a year ago, you wouldn't have been playing a practice round with Will Zalatoris, but things have changed pretty quickly. Wondering how many holes you guys played together and what were your impressions of his game?**

STEVE STRICKER: We played nine holes together. Phil was my partner. Zach Johnson was Will's partner, and let me just say, Phil did a lot of talking. So when Phil does a lot of talking, that means that usually he's playing well, and him and I beat up on Zach and Will a little bit.

So that was always -- that was good. And it was good just to be out with those -- all three of those guys really, and his -- his game is strong. He hits it a long ways. You know, he's got a great imagination. I was talking to his coach a little bit and yeah, so you know, it's a guy if he continues to play well would be a great fit for Whistling Straits.

**Q. I'm assuming you questioned the pairing. Why those two guys?**

STEVE STRICKER: Oh, no --

**Q. You didn't request that?**

STEVE STRICKER: You mean --

**Q. First round pair --**

STEVE STRICKER: No, I didn't request it. I just left it up to Julius to put me in whenever he wanted to put me.

**Q. Following up on your U.S. Senior Open, how much did you wrestle with that to play John Deere?**

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it was a big decision. You know, but I'm excited to go back to John Deere. I think it's their 75th anniversary I think coming up. It's a milestone for the John Deere, 50 or 75, I can't remember.

But it's a special place for me, and they have always

treated me so well. They ask each and every year if I'm going to come back and play even when I'm in my 50s, so they want me to come back and play, which is always nice, and so it's a tournament I can hop in my car and drive down the road and play a tournament and a course that means a lot to me.

**Q. The Ryder Cup captaincy obviously is a hell of a responsibility. How do you describe what that responsibility is the honor of having it is for you?**

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, it's a big responsibility, but I -- you know, I've grasped it with a gratitude and a humbleness. I'm excited to do it. You know, it's in my home state of Wisconsin. The Ryder Cup has meant a lot to me over the years. I've been on one of the winning teams in 2008 which was a thrill. A couple of the other ones we could have won, kind of thing.

It's an unbelievable week. And to be part of it, no matter how you're part of it, is a special week. I'm just so lucky to be able to be the captain, especially in Wisconsin. So I owe a lot to the PGA for giving me that opportunity and my peers for thinking of me to be the captain.

I'm excited. I'm truly -- I wish we would have played it already but I'm still looking forward to September and that opportunity to win the Cup and bring it back home. So I guess the biggest word I can use, the best word, is I'm just humbled by it and thankful to be able to do it.

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