

The Presidents Cup

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

Charlotte, North Carolina

Quail Hollow Club

Fred Couples

Zach Johnson

Webb Simpson

Steve Stricker

Press Conference



PRESIDENTS CUP™

guys, these young kids. They're so talented, they're so driven, they're so focused. But they still have fun. Both sides.

So honored to be a part of it, honored to represent our country and certainly the PGA TOUR and the Presidents Cup. It's special.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to go ahead and get started here. We'd like to welcome the 2022 U.S. Team captain's assistants to the interview room. We'll get a few opening comments and then flip it over to media and open it up for questions there.

Fred, we'll start with you. Three-time Presidents Cup captain, and this year is your fourth time as a captain's assistant. Just some opening comments on this week and this special group of guys.

FRED COUPLES: Very excited to be here, for Davis to choose me to be an assistant with these three guys.

I love the golf course, love Charlotte. Played here a few times, and it's a little different.

I'll keep it quick. There are 12 great guys on our team, and I met a few guys last night on the international team that I'd never met before. It's fun to see young faces. Our guys aren't exactly old, but it's going to be a great week. Weather's perfect, and we'll have a good time.

THE MODERATOR: Zach, we'll go to you next. Second time as a captain's assistant, and you're actually preparing for Ryder Cup captaincy next year. How valuable is this experience for you before you take on that role in '23?

ZACH JOHNSON: Any time you can be a part of one of these teams, it's extremely valuable and extremely fun.

I'm grateful that Davis asked me to be a part of it. Webb and I and Steve just walking down the steps over there, Webb's like, I can't believe how much fun a practice round is, I mean, and we're not hitting a shot.

So it is an absolute blast. Freddie said it. These young

THE MODERATOR: Webb, you're captain's assistant for the first time and also pretty knowledgeable about this course, being a member. How special is it to be a part of this team at a place you're so familiar with?

WEBB SIMPSON: It really is amazing. Growing up, I'm watching Davis Love and Freddie Couples just win golf tournaments left and right. I've been fortunate enough to be on Davis' teams and Freddie's teams, and played with Strick on some teams, and Strick's been great to me.

This guy to my right, Zach and Kim, my rookie year on TOUR, kind of took us under their wing as well.

I feel like I'm the guy joining the team, and I'm just kind of all smiles, taking it all in. It is special to be home. I do have a bit of experience here, but these are the 12 best players our country has put forward with 12 amazing caddies. So they don't need a whole lot of help.

I'm looking forward to getting to tomorrow. I think all the players are itching to tee it up and start competing.

Yeah, my first time as an assistant, and I've loved every second.

THE MODERATOR: Steve, you led the U.S. Team to victory the last time the Presidents Cup was held on the U.S. soil in 2017, and you were a captain's assistant in 2019. Just some opening comments on this week and how it's any different or what you're excited about.

STEVE STRICKER: I'm just going to echo everything that these guys said. It is truly a blessing and a treat to be a part of this team, to be with Davis again, Freddie, Zach, and now Webb. All great friends.



And it's a treat for us, it really is, to watch these guys play. The amount of talent that they all have is pretty remarkable. It's fun to watch.

I've said it each and every year. If you're not going to play in one of these events, this is the next best thing, to be a part of it as a captain or an assistant captain. So it truly is a great week for us to be part of it.

Q. Steve, I wanted to ask you, obviously it's been quite the year since the Ryder Cup, especially for you personally. Could you just summarize the health ordeal you dealt with? And then you've come back from that, and you're playing really well right now too. So just that whole scenario from a year ago.

STEVE STRICKER: I'm not going to go back into how I really felt. I was pretty bad for a while. I'm out of that, thankfully. Still don't know what it was to this day. Yeah, it's been a journey for sure.

This year has been a progression trying to, first of all, get my health back and then really just trying to get my game back and trying to work towards getting stronger. I'm finally feeling like I'm 100 percent. I'm starting to get some speed back, starting to hit a little bit further again really the last month.

So it was a weird time and something that I learned from. Gave me some perspective for sure. Stuff like this makes it even more valuable to be a part of with what I went through last November.

Q. It's obviously different seeing these guys practicing together here versus a typical PGA TOUR event, but I was wondering if any of you guys could explain exactly what that difference is in dynamics and the way they're practicing in pairs and playing games and what that specific different feeling is from just a typical PGA TOUR event?

FRED COUPLES: That's a great question. I feel like when I -- for me personally watching, it's just amazing how they strike the ball. But at the same time, when you pair guys up, they're not all best friends in these pairings. I mean, obviously we're putting two guys together that look like they may play together. But then when you play them with somebody they may have only played three times this year, I particularly think they're gambling not for a lot of money, but just to keep sharp, and they're trying to impress the other guys and beat them.

So it's completely different for me. And it's not a grudge match. You watched. You were out there walking. I mean, they don't miss many shots, and they have a good

time doing it, and they like to show off a little bit and chirp.

Q. This one's for Zach and Steve. You've both been involved in the different methods of making pairings between here and the Ryder Cup, you know, the snake draft versus the blind draw. My question is how does the preparation differ between the two, and is there one that you prefer from whatever standpoint you want to say?

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't know what Steve is going to say. I don't prefer either one. I think the beauty of the established Cups we have is that they're different. I think that's what's unique.

When we come to the Presidents Cup, we know it's going to be different than the next year and vice versa. I just think that's special. It requires a little bit more data processing and thinking, which I'm not very good at.

Q. (No microphone)?

ZACH JOHNSON: No, no, each year. You've got to kind of change your mind frame in the sense that the bottom line is this: Depending upon what we do this afternoon, you have control over who you put out when two or three times, Thursday and Friday, and then you have control over, what, four of the matches on Saturday and six on Sunday. That's different than the Ryder Cup.

You just kind of line it up, and you're going on history based on what they do, and it's just different.

We're such creatures of habit and routine in what we do as a job, when we can add a different element and still maintain the beauty of golf, it's fun.

STEVE STRICKER: I feel like we have this unique opportunity to take advantage of each of these Cups. Zach is here this week to see what we're going to do, see what kind of pairings come out of this week that he may be able to use next year.

So we have this ability to use each of these Cup teams for the next year's team to produce these pairings.

So it really becomes -- I feel like it's the same each and every year. We've gotten to that point. That's why you're seeing better team results from USA Golf because it's gotten more consistent from team to team.

From the stats guys that we use, from the pairings, to the communication to the players, all that has gotten really a lot more consistent, I think, from each team.

I think that can only help us and benefit us for next year's matches in the Ryder Cup, and then we'll do the same all over -- next year at the Ryder Cup, we'll use stuff that Zach did for the next year's Presidents Cup. So we have this ability to go from each year to learn more and more and to create these pairings that we know, or hope we know that will work.

Q. This is for Webb. Davis Love has said that you're a natural leader, and of course you played in this event before. He says that you can make a great captain one day. I wanted to see how it feels for you to have this experience to represent your country for the first time as a captain's assistant at a place where you call home.

WEBB SIMPSON: I remember 2011 in Melbourne, Jim Furyk said -- it was my first time on a team event playing for Freddie, and Furyk said, at the end of your career, you're going to remember your wins and your team events, and he was certainly right. They've been the best memories I've had as a professional golfer.

So certainly -- you know, I'm 37. I believe in myself to still be able to play some good golf. I hope to make a couple more teams. But, yeah, it would be a crazy honor, probably the biggest honor I could receive in this game to be -- I mean, up here right now, I feel like it's an honor.

Yeah, that certainly would be a goal. Kind of my thought process going into the week was I don't know what goes on on this side. But I'm kind of taking notes, learning from these guys, and they put in a lot of work. It's been really fun to jump on Zooms with them and see how they're thinking through certain matchups.

You've got to sit guys. It's a hard thing to try put two guys out who may be playing great golf, but it's part of the process. That part has been really fun for me, and I've been, I guess, surprised how much fun it is to kind of get in here and hear from them and what they think on who's going when and all that kind of stuff.

So it's been great. Yeah, maybe one day, but we'll see. It would be an honor.

Q. Webb, I guess we see the Wells Fargo Championship here so often. We had a PGA Championship a couple years ago. How special is it for you to have these premier events on your home course here in Charlotte, and what have players been asking you about?

WEBB SIMPSON: It's great. Living here, I can hop on a cart and get to work in about 30 seconds. So I certainly

spend a ton of time out here.

It is something to look forward to every year with Wells Fargo coming back here in just a few months. I definitely get a lot of work done, more than the average PGA TOUR player, which means I should have won this tournament a few times. Never won before.

It's great. Like I said before, I don't have a whole lot to offer to these guys in terms of course knowledge. One, most of the guys have been here and know it. And I'm telling you, these caddies, they know what they're doing. We get to greens, they're putting the holes down exactly where I would have put them, and they're telling players to hit this putt and this chip.

More than anything, I've been a flag holder and a raker the last few days. But whatever they need from me, I'll give it to them. I won't hold back.

Q. Steve, the Americans opened up a sizable lead Saturday at Whistling Straits. How did you guys avoid against complacency then, and what sort of lessons can be applied here when, on paper at least, the U.S. is pretty significant favorites?

STEVE STRICKER: It goes back to what I was talking about when we have the opportunity to play all these team events, and we learn from them. We learned from the 2012 Ryder Cup team and how we had this opportunity to win the Ryder Cup at Medinah, four-point lead going into Sunday, and we didn't take enough time, really, or do the right things.

Davis would be the first to acknowledge that, I think. We just didn't -- we didn't think that through enough probably.

So when we went to work last Saturday of the Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits, we put in a lot of time, and we made sure that we got that right, that we put the guys in the place where we thought they should be, knowing kind of the past history of what the Europeans did. Again, another learning thing.

Yeah, there's no complacency here at all. These guys know that over a course of 18 holes, anybody can beat anybody at this level. The international team is a very good team. Our guys are ready. They're excited to play. They're working hard at it. There's not one of them that isn't taking this very, very seriously.

That's been Davis' approach to this and messaging, that we can't just show up and think we can show up and win this thing. We've got to go out and play well and take care of business.



Q. Zach, after hearing what Strick was saying about how year to year how you guys are picking things up all the time, how much do you actually believe you take out of this week for next year, and do you think you'd learn more from a loss versus a win?

ZACH JOHNSON: Second part of the question, I'll be brief -- no. No. I don't want to get into that. No. This team came here, they have one common goal in mind, and they're focused. So no, I don't think I will learn more.

I've learned a lot, both from the captains that I played for and then, obviously, the ones that I've served alongside.

The beauty of having that leadership role is that, especially over the last almost ten years -- I'd say seven, eight years -- is we've kind of got a template, a system in place. However, the beauty of it is the personality of that leader can jump into that system and still have his own form and his own -- kind of add his own nuances to it, and it can be their team, if that makes sense. You can personalize it even within the system.

And I think Steve arguably did it as good as anybody. Granted, the result speaks for itself. He made it about those 12 guys and not about himself, but he also took on the leadership role and made the hard decisions, which are very difficult.

I'm thrilled to be in the position I'm in. Granted, I'm not really focused on that right now. This is my priority and has been over the last -- well, since Captain Love asked me to be a participant.

I'm going to learn, and I'm going to keep learning. I'd be lying to you if I said I'm not taking notes. I'm taking notes. Sometimes they're very, very large in magnitude, and then sometimes they're really small, but sometimes those small things can go a long way.

I can tell you one thing. I'm not going to reinvent the wheel next year. That's not going to be my goal. I think the synergy -- and Steve kind of alluded to it. The synergy we have year to year is there. The rhythm of it is there. But, again, you can add your own personal touch to it without deviating away from your common goal and staying on the same street.

Q. All four of you guys have given a lot of time and effort to this event. Are any of you concerned about the future of this event, what can happen to it if it continues to be such a lopsided result?

WEBB SIMPSON: Look, we were down, I think, by at least

a couple in Australia in '19 going into Sunday. So I think you're going to see the international team continue to produce better players.

Obviously, they lost a couple of great players to LIV, but it seems like their team is, as I mentioned, very young, and they're getting better every year.

I don't know the future. I don't know what's going to happen, but it certainly seems like these things are becoming more competitive even if we do have a great year where we play great.

I hope they stay competitive. Obviously, I want the result that we want. But I remember last year, we were down going into Sunday. So I think that says a lot right there.

FRED COUPLES: I play golf. I can answer as an individual. I've played L.A. Open 40 times and Augusta like 35. That's 75 times on my two favorite courses in the world, and I've won twice -- three times. I guess I won L.A. three times.

So you don't really go playing places because you think you're going to lose. You happen to lose. And the internationals, we have beaten them, but it's only a couple times where it was kind of lopsided.

But I will tell you that a lot of friends ask the same question someone else answered about complacency. These guys, why would Cam Young not want to win five matches if he plays five matches? He's never been on a team. He is focused and ready to roll.

Again, we focus on our team. And come Sunday, we're all hoping to win. It would be great if we won on the last green like Bill Haas did in Korea.

But I get what you're saying. I mean, it's deflating. Webb lives here. He's played Quail Hollow. He wants to win this so bad. Hopefully it comes true. But you keep fighting back, and you keep playing.

Again, this is being shown all over the world. So if you're K.H. Lee or Si Woo Kim or Trevor Immelman leading your team, he's going to lead them to the best of his ability, just like our leader Davis is going to lead our 12 guys.

I don't know if that's an answer or not but ...

Q. I'm going to embarrass Fred here and ask Zach and Steve about his -- he's been on a lot of teams as a captain or assistant captain. Just curious, what have you learned from him, and what does he bring to these teams because they seem to do well.



STEVE STRICKER: Well, Fred's the best. We all want to be like Fred. We all love being around Freddie.

He was an assistant for me at both my captaincies at Liberty National and then last year. He brings a lot. He's very insightful. He knows the players very well. Players gravitate towards him. We all do. We all want to be around him.

So he's a great guy to have in the team room. He's very calm, relaxed, rubs off on everybody. And he's not afraid to jab people, have fun with people, but when it comes time to be serious, he's right there to be serious and, like I said, to provide that knowledge and that insight that he has.

That's why he continues to be on these teams, because he does. He brings a tremendous amount of positive energy to the team, and it's a blast to have him around.

ZACH JOHNSON: I guess kind of the beauty, again, of what we've established is that these kids, these guys take a lot of ownership in their own team. Steve made all the hard decisions last year, granted, and made the captain's picks. I mean, sat these guys, and that's hard, and it's difficult. But these guys have ownership in some of the other key decisions that you don't see.

One of those is they love being around Freddie. It doesn't matter if they're 19 or 37. I mean, they just -- and I get it. He was my captain twice. He's been my assistant captain multiple times. He's passionate about the Cup. He's passionate about American golf.

Inside the team room, it may seem like he's got this really easygoing, simplistic view, but it's extremely cerebral. There's a lot of thought, and he puts a lot into it. He's invested. You just want to be around that.

Then I like that he chirps. He gets on these kids. He's not going to let them get on him or get complacent. He's going to get after 'em, and that's what you want in a leader.

He's been one of my favorite guys that I've ever had to play for, period.

THE MODERATOR: With that, we'll wrap it up. Thank you guys so much for the time this afternoon.

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