

The Presidents Cup

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Montreal, Canada

Royal Montreal Golf Club

Jim Furyk

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome United States Presidents Cup team captain Jim Furyk. Jim, you just finished up on Golf Channel announcing your six captain's picks: Sam Burns, Russell Henley, Keegan Bradley, Brian Harman, Max Homa and Tony Finau to round out your 12-player team. Just overall excitement on having your 12 and looking ahead to Royal Montreal here in a few weeks?

JIM FURYK: Yeah, it's a long process getting to this point. Being named captain over a year ago.

I guess it seems like the train is moving really slowly to get to this point. It picks up a lot of speed for the next three weeks getting us to Royal Montreal.

Good to have 12 guys on our team. I know they're bonding, gelling, talking a lot about the event, and now we'll put some finishing touches on our pairings and getting these guys ready to go in three weeks.

Q. Jim, I just saw you on The Golf Channel and you said there's 18 or 19 guys you would have loved to have taken. There's only one guy who's been the best match play player of his generation and who's off the team but who seems to be in good form right now. A year ago everybody was asking Zach Johnson how could you possibly have taken Justin Thomas. Now I'm asking you how can you possibly have left Justin Thomas off the team?

JIM FURYK: Yeah, and I did say that. There are a bunch of guys that I would want on this team. It was a difficult decision with JT. Definitely a difficult call to make.

But as a captain, you're trying to make the best decision, put the best 12 guys together, fit the puzzle pieces together, the pairings together. It's tough. He's got a great record in these events. But ultimately that was the decision that was made.

Q. Was there any part of the negative optics from last time that influenced this?

JIM FURYK: I think everyone on this call probably knows me pretty well, and no. As far as was I worried about what would be said? Absolutely not, because it didn't matter who I picked, you guys are going to pick on me anyway, right? No matter who I pick, there's going to be a push-back that I left someone off the team that should have been on there. From an optics perspective, the only thing I really care about is getting these 12 guys together, getting them to gel, getting them to bond moving forward towards Montreal, and being prepared and ready to go.

No, I think when I look back to my past experiences with this and going back to '18, no, I didn't make picks off of popularity, I didn't make picks off of how it would be perceived in the media because ultimately it matters what the 12 guys inside feel, and definitely JT would be a great addition to this team, there's no doubt about it. He's got a great record. He's an emotional guy, a feisty guy, a leader. He definitely would have been a good pick.

But it has nothing to do with optics. That's definitely not part of my thought process.

Q. Why did you pick Max Homa over Justin Thomas and Akshay, two guys who kind of outplayed Max pretty significantly throughout the summer?

JIM FURYK: Yeah, I definitely don't want this to be about why one person was picked over another. I don't know if the right way to look at it is why this guy versus that guy. I look at Max's attributes and look at how he's played the last two years. Undefeated record in Charlotte, our best record last year in Rome, and I think then you go to a lot of the intangibles, as well, as far as -- I guess when I say an emotional leader, I also look at kind of the glue, a guy that pulls the team room together. That doesn't mean he's the most popular. It just means it comes very natural to Max, whether it's his social media presence, the way he interacts with fans, his take on things, all golf related. He has a way of drawing folks into him. He's kind of the glue on a team, so ultimately that weighed into the situation.

I think there are parts of his game that have been very strong statistically, even through a little bit of a rough break this summer, and I think we can utilize those in Royal



Montreal and find a way to make him very productive.

Q. What was your level of communication with him throughout this? Obviously he really wanted to make this team.

JIM FURYK: They all do.

Q. Was he, like, surprised or relieved when you gave him a call?

JIM FURYK: He was happy. You'd have to ask him whether that was surprise or relief. He was definitely happy.

But no, I sat down with Max even back in Memphis, talked a lot about his game, what he wasn't happy with in his game, what he was doing the work on. Started to kind of turn the corner a little bit at BMW, but unfortunately we knew he was going to run out of tournaments, so it put he and Brian Harman in a very difficult place, not being in Atlanta, not having more golf to play, and kind of being on the bubble.

Ultimately I thought it was a good idea and a wise idea to bring both those guys to Montreal.

I don't know, you'd have to ask Max. As far as I know, he was happy. How's that? I would hope it wasn't relief and I would hope it wasn't surprise. I would hope that he was just excited and happy and ready to go.

Q. Did you call the guys that were on the bubble and didn't make the team?

JIM FURYK: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q. Not that you'd have to -- how many guys did you end up calling?

JIM FURYK: I ended up calling more guys that didn't make the team than did. But I did call JT if that's what you're asking.

Q. Could you give us the tenor of that conversation?

JIM FURYK: Classy. I think that as a captain, when you make those calls, you kind of need to be kind of to the point. I don't know if brief is the right word. We discussed it a little bit. All class. Definitely disappointed, as I would expect, but just real classy, in my opinion, and I would expect nothing less.

I think those conversations -- I've said it on a couple interviews already. People say, how difficult is it as a

captain. You know what, it's way more difficult being the player. I've been in that seat a couple times, too, getting a call saying you're on the team, and I got one saying you're not on the team. It's way harder on the player. Just trying to be, I guess, as nice as we can about it, explain your point and move on.

I love the guy to death, and I think when you are friendly with folks and when there is already a bond, because I really do respect JT and have spent more time around him on these teams than anyone else, it makes it a little bit more difficult emotionally.

As a captain, you try to make the best decisions you can. You stick with them, and you move on.

Q. When was Keegan inside your top 12 in your mind, because you've been on both sides. You've been a captain and a player. Do you think he would benefit more as a Ryder Cup captain being a captain than a player?

JIM FURYK: We're talking about Keegan?

Q. Yes.

JIM FURYK: Well, I guess we'd all have to be pretty honest about it. He almost didn't make it to the BMW, correct? I think he was 50th going in there, the last guy in the field, and then goes for a wire-to-wire victory. That definitely caught a lot of folks' eyes.

I think my assistant captains, the leaders on the team, knowing that a guy's season is on the line, his back is to the wall and he goes out there and performs under the ultimate pressure, I think at that point those guys were -- one by one, it seemed to them it was a foregone conclusion that he was joining our team.

I think for me, that moment of having all that pressure on him and knowing that it was pretty much win or he would not be joining the team and he was able to go out there and do it was pretty key.

There was a second part to that about being a Ryder Cup captain?

Q. Yeah, he's only had two Ryder Cups behind him. He's never been a vice captain of anything. You've been on both sides of this. Where would he have benefitted more if you were trying to mold the next Ryder Cup captain? Would he benefit from being a vice captain on your team or is he going to benefit more from being a player on your team?

JIM FURYK: Yeah, he spent a little bit of time with us behind the scenes as a captain and then as we got to BMW and season on the line and took the lead early, we kind of gave him a little reprieve to let him go focus on golf and on himself and trying to win a golf tournament.

I've had some discussions since with Keegan, and it's in his best interest right now as a player to go out there and prepare as a player. It's not fair to him to ask him to do duties of both, to be a player and a captain and try to mix and match his time.

What I will do, what our stats team will do, what our assistants will do is we'll all circle back with Keegan. I've assured him that I want to help him as much as I can prepare and be ready for the Ryder Cup. So circling back -- I know it's not like being part of the process in real time, but let him know how we came to certain decisions, how we got where we were, and then who we put ultimately on the team, how we paired them and how the week went.

We'll have that after the event happens, and I'll spend as much time as he wishes just to kind of help him out and lead him through the next steps.

Q. Jim, we've talked a lot about JT. Would it be fair to say he was the 13th guy?

JIM FURYK: You know, there was a lot of good choices. It's not fair to anyone -- I will say he was an extremely difficult decision, and it's tough.

I think it was Shane that last year, how did you put him on the team, this year how did you not was the words you used. It was a difficult decision. Again, I love the guy and respect his game. I respect the way he carries himself and how he's played in these events has been incredible. Tough decision.

Q. How much did the course fit way into that decision?

JIM FURYK: You know, I've always seen -- I kind of told JT this. I see him as a little bit of a chameleon. I think he's a smart player. I think he can change. If the golf course had asked for us to hit the ball straight and get it in the fairway and get it in play, he can do that. If it asks you to bomb away and power is more important, I think he does it.

It has a bearing and a weight on it. I think present form has a bearing and a weight. I think your history has a weight. I think there's a lot of things that go into it.

As far as when I looked at my team, when I looked at the record, I know a lot of guys are looking at this summer, I

know a lot of guys are looking at the last few weeks of the year, I weigh that in. I also weigh in a body of work. I also weigh in who's played well this season, who's played well the last 12 months. All that's important to me.

You kind of put it all together and you've got a big puzzle piece and you try to figure out the best answers.

Q. Was it a factor that Jordan Spieth wasn't going to be on the team due to injury?

JIM FURYK: No, zero. Zero. I think JT has the opportunity to pair with a lot of different guys and also be a leader, if that makes sense. Take the young guy under his arm.

We don't happen to have that many rookies on this team, when you look at it. I think Sahith and Russell are two guys that haven't played either on a Presidents Cup or Ryder Cup team. We have a lot of veteran status, but JT -- I realize I didn't pick him, but I'm not going to say anything but great things about the guy because I love him to death.

Q. Did you get any input from Tiger Woods in determining your choices?

JIM FURYK: No, I did not. Tiger and I have been friendly over the years, but I didn't give him a call to talk about the picks at all. I think the last time that he was -- correct me if I'm wrong. I think Australia is probably the last time he sat in as one of the captains, I believe. I'm sure Davis leaned on him a little bit for Charlotte, but from afar.

Q. Wanted to follow up on Keegan. It sounds from your previous answers he will not have any role as an assistant for you, just strictly as a player, and if so, will you replace him?

JIM FURYK: Yeah, we'll add another assistant for sure. I would have the ability to add two if I wanted, but we'll definitely add another assistant. You can call him an assistant, you can call him whatever you want, but we've already talked about his duties now will be that of a player for the event because there's just too much that goes into it, too much that we do while the guys are preparing to play that I just don't think it's fair to him for his preparation as a player.

Q. Before he even kind of got into the thoughts of being a player, before he won at the BMW, he had already talked about having been in touch with you quite a bit. He felt like he was learning a lot from you already. I'm sort of curious, were you surprised when he got the Ryder Cup pick as captain? It sort of was a surprise to everyone else. I'm curious what you see in

him in that role and sort of nurturing him on now for the next year.

JIM FURYK: I think I can sum that up really easy by saying I think one of Keegan's first remarks when he was named captain was he was surprised. So if he was surprised, I think the rest of us were a little bit, correct?

What does he bring to the table? I think there's a lot of enthusiasm. I think of Paul Azinger, a lot of enthusiasm, a guy that kind of can draw folks in. Keegan has got a big passion for it. I think that he's kind of been given -- in his mind, probably the biggest role of his lifetime and one he cherishes, so he's going to spend a lot of time on that doing the very best that he can, and I think it's my job as the captain this year to always want to invite the Ryder Cup captain for the next year on to the staff. You're going to have a lot of the same players.

We as the United States team, even though the Presidents Cup and Ryder Cup are different, we've tried to keep a lot of symmetry over the last, say, 10 years throughout. You'll see a lot of the same captains repeated, but we try to do a lot of things the same way. It's a little bit of a new era for us in the captains' role with the Freddies and the Davises and Strick and me and there's a bunch of us that are kind of aging out, and I see my role as bringing in a little bit of a new era, and part of that was including Keegan, and I would hope he would do the same on his Ryder Cup staff for our next Presidents Cup captain.

Q. Since you're apparently not in the mood to make any news today in terms of the assistant captain, can you at least give us a hint? Can we assume it's been someone you've been with on the phone giving them bad news?

JIM FURYK: I'm not going to even hint to you. I'm going to leave it at that.

Q. Why?

JIM FURYK: I just need some time for some things to play out and try to find the right fit at this moment.

I've got some good leads and ideas, and I've made some phone calls. I'm just waiting for things to play out, if that makes sense.

Q. So you don't know who it is yet, you're not just waiting for the TOUR to put out a press release?

JIM FURYK: As much as we have a great relationship, and I have a good relationship with everyone, I'm not even going to hint. I'm just basically lying right now trying to

blow you off the best I can.

Q. You've been on teams where Crenshaw threw out Tiger and Duval or Hal put out Tiger and Phil --

JIM FURYK: The answer is no. I'm not playing Scottie and X together, if that's what you're asking.

Q. I think we're done here.

JIM FURYK: (Laughs.)

Was that the question, Scottie and X together?

Q. It was.

JIM FURYK: I mean, could it happen? I guess it could. It's not something I've looked into or thought about. Both guys, honestly, they're both so easygoing guys and so calm and unflappable. You could pair them together.

But I feel like why would you take the two best players in the world, put them together, when you can split them up and still have two amazing pairings, if that makes sense.

I kind of feel like those guys -- well, I won't even go there. They're just so easy to pair and put with guys. I don't think I'd put them -- their games are so -- no weaknesses, so good in every area that they pair up well with so many different guys, it probably doesn't make sense to put the two of them together and also put your two best players together this year.

Q. On that note, Scottie and Sam play all the time together and are close friends, but their record wasn't too Sterling at either Marco Simone or Quail Hollow. Is that a given?

JIM FURYK: It's not a given. I would say in Charlotte -- Marco Simone they were probably both struggling with parts of their game. Scottie wasn't putting his best that week.

When I go back to Charlotte, they were thrown together, and although their record wasn't well, their scoring was well. They just happened to play against groups that scored very well, also. They would have won almost every match on the golf course in some of those sessions, they just happened to not win the one they were in because the team they played against played so well.

I wouldn't rule it out, but it's definitely not a given. I think both of them know that, and I'd have no issue pairing them together in certain formats.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

But it's definitely not a given.

Q. Are you lying? I'm just kidding.

JIM FURYK: Not at all. That time I'm telling the dead truth. I'll tell you when I'm lying. I already did.

Q. With the Ryder Cup last year, there was a lot of talk about how the U.S. Team by and large didn't really play in the lead-up, whereas the European team, I think all 12 of them, played just two weeks before. Obviously it's the end of a long season. How do you balance them coming rested and then also are you telling them they should play once or twice? Are you leaving that up to them? How are you handling the balance between freshness and readiness?

JIM FURYK: It's a good question, and I'm really glad you asked it.

I personally kind of looked at last year, knew the guys felt like they were a little rusty, self-admitted they were a little rusty going into Rome, and I had dinner with a bunch of our leaders in Memphis. They talked about coming into this event sharp. We started throwing around ideas about possibly getting together, playing some golf together, maybe not necessarily Royal Montreal, maybe taking a trip to Royal Montreal, and the leaders in that room said, you know what we should do, one, if we're going to go play a bunch of golf, we should do it at Royal Montreal. Two, why don't we, coming off a long season, coming off the TOUR Championship, everyone is going to be wiped for a while, why don't we just go in early, so why don't we go to Royal Montreal, go in on the weekend, go in well early. We can see a little bit of the city. It's supposed to be an amazing city. We never get a chance to do that. We'll get extra work on the golf course we're going to play.

I looked at my leaders and I looked at four or five guys in the room and they said, do you all want to do that, and they said, absolutely. I said, well, if you tell the team that's what we're going to do, trust me, they're all going to follow you.

We're going up early; we're going to prepare. They all have it in their mind they're going to be sharp. Three weeks isn't that much. I know they're tired, and this week I would hope they're just putting the clubs down, getting away, maybe starting to think a little bit about the pairings that I'm throwing their way, and then next week we're going to have a few guys probably two to four guys in Napa, then we have a week off, and I think those guys should be ramping up and showing up in Montreal over the weekend ready to go.

I think getting some extra work around the golf course --

we always talk at these events about how the guys feel rushed because there's extra requirements, whether it's media, whether it's dinners, whether it's -- they just get basically taken out of their normal routine and now have to fit in the team routine. If we can go in there and play nine holes a day and they get to see the golf course, they get to see every nine twice, and they can do it at their own pace, I think it'll be great.

It's kind of a captain's dream to have those guys step up and make that decision on their own and push that.

Q. How much earlier would that be then like a normal Presidents Cup cycle?

JIM FURYK: I want to say I never arrived before like a Sunday night. Sometimes I arrived on a Monday, to be honest with you. Depending on the golf course, how well I knew it.

But usually you kind of went Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday at best, usually sometimes Tuesday, Wednesday, and then straight to the tournament. Get those guys in there -- the golf course opens for us on Sunday at noon, so we're going to be there a day or two early.

Q. Jim, I just wanted to know, what's your approach or how is your approach different this time than it was for Paris?

JIM FURYK: Well, I think some lessons learned. I think probably my -- I would say probably are already a little different in some captain's picks idea. I think I'll have some different ways and thoughts on pairing these guys together. I have a very -- I think I have a much easier group to pair this year. I think just our chemistry, our team room.

I'll definitely take some lessons. I'm me. I'm the same guy. These guys know what to expect from me, and even though I'm young, I've been an assistant or a vice captain on a lot of their teams. They have an expectation of who I am and how I'm going to do things, and that won't change, but definitely apply some lessons, and really my goal is this is their team. I've already had some leaders step up. I see myself and I kind of told them, I'm just steering them in the right direction. It's our goal and our job as the captains to just put them in situations where they're comfortable and let them shine, let them go do what they do the rest of the year and play the best golf they can.

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