

WM Phoenix Open

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Scottsdale, Arizona, USA

TPC Scottsdale

Luke Donald

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Luke Donald into the interview room. He is making his 10th career start at the WM Phoenix Open. It's great a tournament here. If we can get your comments on being back and what it's like to play in this event.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, this event is quite unlike most events we play with the buildout and the atmosphere. I was at an interview with the Golf Channel yesterday and joking that this was a nice little precursor to what New York and Bethpage might feel like. But it's always a fun event.

It's a pretty solid golf course with this finish, 15, 16, 17, 18. It's quite the atmosphere, the rush, the intensity. I think that's fun for all the players here to experience something like that now and again, and nothing quite like the energy you feel as a player playing here.

Always nice to be back playing again. It's been a while since my last PGA TOUR event was I think the Wyndham classic. Good to be back competing against all these great players.

Q. It's your season debut; what's the state of your game coming into the week?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, I took a little time off after the Ryder Cup, enjoyed the victory. Played a couple events in Dubai, and the game was reasonably solid. I feel like the iron play has been good. The putting has been pretty good. Driving is improving. We'll see.

This isn't necessarily a course I've excelled at the nine times I've played here previously, and with these weather conditions, I think it's going to play a little bit longer. Cooler wet conditions potentially could make the course a little bit longer.

But excited to get out there and compete like I always to.

Q. With the chance of some rainfall to occur throughout the week, how do you prepare for that going in?

LUKE DONALD: Well, you pack some sweaters, which I did. It's going to be cooler. You're going to have to do a little bit more work on the range today and tomorrow, certainly checking my numbers, seeing how far the ball was going. Usually this week it's about 1,500 feet altitude. Usually it's a little warmer, the ball is traveling a little bit further. Now with the altitude but the cooler weather, it's sort of getting back to almost my stock numbers. I'll keep continuing to check that depending on the conditions.

But the course is going to play a little bit longer, a little bit softer. Softer doesn't usually mean harder, it just means longer irons into some of these greens, especially for me.

Q. Mentally how do you approach that?

LUKE DONALD: Well, golfers play in lots of different conditions. We're very capable of adjusting to those conditions. Some weeks are wet and windy, some weeks are warm and dry, and you do that work in the practice to figure out how far the ball is traveling and just adjust for it that way.

Q. You're about to be the Ryder Cup captain for the second time, so this has been something you've been participating in for years now. Do you feel like you have enough energy mentally, physically to stay play at an elite level where you can win golf tournaments, or do you feel like you've moved into a new chapter of the career?

LUKE DONALD: I would say I've changed my expectation a little bit because I have this role that takes up a lot of time in the captaincy. I think as a competitor for so long, you still keep those expectations really high.

I've had to sort of rein those back a little bit, but in a way, sometimes lowering those helps you just kind of go and play and not have too much expectation and do fine.

I certainly have enough time to do both. I don't think I'll be playing quite as many tournaments this season as I did the last two seasons. I don't think it's necessary, plus my status on the PGA TOUR would require some invites. I'd



rather play a little bit more next year leading up to New York than kind of burn through some potential invites that I might be given this year.

I want to play enough here, enough in the DP World Tour to keep an eye on some of the potential players and keep the communication and relationships going, but again, if I play 15 events this year instead of 25, that would probably be more likely.

Q. With Jon and Tyrrell being on LIV now, what have the conversations been like with the rest of the European team, and do you see them being a part of the team in Bethpage?

LUKE DONALD: Well, conversations. Again, this is my first week out. I haven't seen too many of the guys. We still have a group WhatsApp chat, and we're all participating in that chat that we created for Rome.

There's nothing adverse or anything within that chat. Everyone understands each individual wants to do the best for themselves, and I don't think anyone is judging Tyrrell or Jon's decision.

In terms of whether they're going to be --

Q. Do you see them on the team --

LUKE DONALD: Do I see them? It's really hard for me to answer that question now. What I did so well in my captaincy last year was just control what I can control. We're seven months out probably since qualification starts. We have all this talk about being potential deals with the PGA TOUR, with DP World Tour, with the PIF. I have no idea what's going to happen, and for the next seven months, I don't really need to know what's going to happen because qualification for the Ryder Cup won't start until then.

Q. How did you feel about Rory making it sound like it's no big deal for those guys to be on the team?

LUKE DONALD: Well, again, Rory's comment, he was a little inaccurate in terms of changing the rules for Jon to be a part of it because currently right now you have to be European and be a member of the DP World Tour. Jon, Tyrrell, as far as I know are still members of the European Tour and would be eligible. Nothing has changed there.

Even going back to last year, there was a couple guys playing on LIV that maintained their membership, and I kept an eye on everyone that was eligible for me to be able to pick. The guys that decided to resign their membership, yeah, at that point I couldn't pick them, but at this moment

those are the rules, and so far I'm sure Jon, I'm sure Tyrrell, they want to be a part of it, and they will hopefully adhere to whatever the rules are that allows them to play in the Ryder Cup.

Q. You already brought Edoardo back for next year. Do you envision a scenario where some of the LIV guys could be in the back room?

LUKE DONALD: It's always a possibility. Again, I do think the vice captains that I had in place last year obviously were very much in touch with a lot of the players that were eligible. Again, the Sergios, the Lees, the Ians, those guys have a legacy and a history and part of the Ryder Cup. But again, it's very hard to tell. A role of a vice captain is being around the players and having those relationships.

We didn't have anyone on LIV in the 2023 Ryder Cup, so we'll have to see whether those relationships are good enough.

Again, these are all questions that I don't really need to make decisions on right now.

Q. How do you feel when some of your guys in the European team will pay for being in the Ryder Cup but then they go to LIV and put at risk that privilege?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, Jon is someone who decided that was the best choice for him. A lot of guys have decided that going to LIV is the choice that they were comfortable with, and they thought it was, again, the right decision for them. I'm not here to judge that.

Sometimes there are consequences to those decisions. There's been a lot of talks about the World Rankings and should LIV guys get it. Again, I think sometimes there are consequences to certain decisions, and I think a lot of these guys knew that going into it.

Again, I have a long way since qualification begins, seven months or so. A lot can happen with the game. It's continuing to change. It's continuing to evolve. We don't know what's going to happen over the next few months. Until I know, I'm not going to make any decisions.

Q. The environment on No. 16 obviously is unlike anything else on TOUR, but what is going through your head on No. 15 knowing you're headed to the stadium right after?

LUKE DONALD: Well, I think you get a visual sense. You see the massive structure to the right of the green. You hear the roars. It's like, again, a little bit like walking into a Coliseum. You're excited. Your heart rate starts to get a

little bit higher, and it's up to the player to obviously control that enough to hit a good shot. 16 is a great par-3. It's not overly long. But you can certainly easily miss the green, and you'll be welcomed with some boos if you do.

Again, it's a great hole. I love shortish par-3s that test you. Certainly it tests you physically and mentally.

Q. What is the best way to play No. 15, just the way to shoot the ball?

LUKE DONALD: If you can reach it in two, I think you're advised to go for it and try and make birdie that way. I played it on Monday, and it was into the wind, and I had no chance of getting there in two. It was a lay-up and a wedge and try and make birdie that way.

Q. When you look back at 2012, what do you think made that team so special?

LUKE DONALD: Medinah?

Q. Yeah.

LUKE DONALD: Well, I think if you think about José María's role as captain, he certainly talked a lot about Seve. Seve has always been kind of the legacy figure in the Ryder Cup that we kind of look up to, what it meant to him, how much he tried to inspire his teammates, how much history of the Ryder Cup was important.

Obviously with the passing of Seve a few months or I can't remember the exact date, but a few months before that Ryder Cup, he was certainly a presence that we felt that was sort of guiding us a little bit.

It really helped, I think, on that Sunday. We didn't have a lot of momentum the first couple days. We got a little bit of it Saturday evening. Going into Sunday, we had a positive thought that something good could happen. I'm sure Seve's spirit and some of the conversations and stories and inspiration that José María kind of gave us inspired us to that comeback.

Q. How would you say hole 16 has evolved through the years when you first started in 2002 to what it's like now?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, it seems to get bigger and bigger each year. More and more people, more and more atmosphere. I've been coming here -- maybe '03 was my first year. There weren't any stands then. I think it was just people around. It's gotten bigger and bigger. It attracts a very strong field, I think, most years, because it is such a fun event.

I think even as good as 16, 17 is just as good a hole. One of the best drivable par-4s we get to play on the PGA TOUR. It's a very well-designed hole, and with 16 and 18, it's one of the best finishes that we have out here on the PGA TOUR.

Q. I couldn't find the video, but there's a story of Bernhard Langer hitting it to five feet on 16 and flapping his arms. What does a hole have to be like to get him to do that during a tournament?

LUKE DONALD: Well, yeah, he doesn't tend to show too much emotion. We feel it as players. We feel the pressure. There's definitely that expectation from the crowd that they want to see a good shot, but you know if you don't hit a good one, you're going to feel it. Your heart rate definitely goes up a little bit more than you would on a normal shot.

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