

Zurich Classic of New Orleans

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Avondale, Louisiana, USA

TPC Louisiana

Zach Johnson

Steve Stricker

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started. I'd like to welcome Zach Johnson and Steve Stricker to the interview room at the Zurich Classic of New Orleans.

Zach, can you start us off with thoughts about the partnership this week and your excitement to be here with Steve.

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure. This is my second time in this format. I have played the golf course individually. I don't know how many times I was here. But I've always actually admired would probably be the appropriate word, Pete Dye and his eye. I know there's some collaboration there, but I don't mind the golf course at all.

Pretty much got to hit every shot, I think, which is a good sign, a lot of character.

As far as our partnership, yeah, one, we've been good friends for a very long time. Two, any time we can hang given the season of life we're in, I think it probably -- certainly something that's worth our time, and it's just rare. He can't get younger. I just need to go three more years from now to hang out more. Champions Tour is around the corner.

Always admire Steve and certainly how he goes about his work and what he does and how he does it. To partner up with him -- I don't know if we've ever really partnered in an event, have we?

STEVE STRICKER: No, we haven't.

ZACH JOHNSON: Which is probably bizarre considering we played on I don't know how many teams together. A lot of fun. He asked me to think about it, and I really at that point wasn't going to play for a number of reasons.

And then I talked to my boss, my wife, and she said, it's better if you play there than somewhere else. So I said, yes, ma'am. And I wanted to play anyway, so it worked out

great.

We're going to have a great time. We're going to play some fun golf, some good golf, and enjoy the week.

THE MODERATOR: Steve, some thoughts from you on your partnership as well and just response to Zach's comments.

STEVE STRICKER: Very much looking forward to it. It is kind of amazing, when this partnership started just a few weeks ago, I'm like, you know, we've never played together on some of these teams together, and our games are eerily similar.

ZACH JOHNSON: Eerily similar, yeah.

STEVE STRICKER: Excited about the opportunity to hang with Zach for a while. This week in New Orleans has always been a fun week for me coming here, playing in these events over the years, looking back at the history of the event.

Obviously the food in New Orleans and just the way the tournament is run and the people that come out and support the event has always been nothing but first class. So it's fun to be here. It's even more fun to play with a friend like Zach.

We're looking forward to it. We've got our challenges this week for sure. One of them is length.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah.

STEVE STRICKER: But we're looking forward to the challenge and seeing what we can do.

THE MODERATOR: One more question before we open it up to the media. Can you just talk a little bit about what each of you bring to the table in terms of your game on this golf course? You talk about length a little bit, but what are some of the areas that you each bring to the table that you'll lean on this week?

ZACH JOHNSON: Steve said it: our games are eerily



similar just from a facet of if we're going to play successful golf, it's pretty boring golf. When you have somebody by your side that understands that and kind of sees it from that lens, I think it can be a distinct asset.

What it lends itself to specifically is we need to hit fairways. We need to hit -- we keep the golf course in front of us is probably the best way to put it. We understand that fairways are important, greens in regulation are important, and then we take advantage of the holes that get a little bit of loft in our hands typically.

That's bode well for us. That's how we've made a living.

This golf course, if it can get bouncy, well, then it obviously narrows up and it probably helps us a little bit. But given the forecast, and we are in the bayou, getting very bouncy is probably not realistic.

That being said, solid quality shots down the fairway still pay off. So we're going to rely heavily on our short game. We're going to rely heavily on the things that we thrive on in our bag, and I think we read greens similar.

So I think we're going to be good. We're going to be fine.

Q. Zach, have any decisions been made in regard to whether or not you are open to picking LIV players for the Ryder Cup this year?

ZACH JOHNSON: Personally, no. No decisions have been made. There's still a lot of time left in that regard, and so many fluid factors involved. As far as personally making decisions, no.

I will add that, when it comes to that notion, there's numerous factors, like I mentioned, but I am going to rely heavily on -- actually, looking back at my previous Cups that I've been a vice captain, I'm going to rely heavily on the guys that actually make the team because it's their team.

So I don't know who those six are going to be, obviously, but their ownership and their opinions will weigh heavily into what I, what we, decide to do.

Q. But they haven't been ruled out necessarily as captain's picks yet?

ZACH JOHNSON: As far as rules and regulations, is that what you're alluding to?

Q. I suppose, yes.

ZACH JOHNSON: So not to get overly in the weeds of all

this, but in order to garner Ryder Cup points or be eligible for PGA of America Ryder Cup points and PGA Championship points, you have to be a member of PGA of America.

Those individuals that have left the PGA TOUR; to my knowledge, are still members of PGA of America. There's a grace period involved there. I don't know the specifics.

Q. Steve, I couldn't help but notice you have Joe on the bag this week. How did that come about?

STEVE STRICKER: It's a little bit longer story than what it needs to be probably. I asked his son first. I've had his son on my bag already this year. Delightful kid, Joe Jr.

But he was working on the Korn Ferry Tour, I think for Brandon Hagy the next couple weeks and he couldn't make it.

I literally said, I can ask Joe, but I don't think he's going to want to come. 65-year-old guy, washed up TOUR player. Do I really want to come all the way from New York down to New Orleans?

So my thinking went away from Joe Sr. right away. I'm like, he's not going to want to come here. I asked a bunch of people. I told him the story already. I asked a bunch of other guys and nobody could make it.

My wife was on Joe Sr. the whole time. Just ask Joe, just ask Joe. Finally I asked him and he was like, oh, heck, yeah, I'll come. I should have asked him right after I asked his kid, and now he's upset I asked his kid first.

He's such a great guy, fun to be with, easy to be with. Obviously is very good at what he does.

We've been having fun with him so far. But that's -- short story made long, that's how it ended up being.

Q. It didn't take much convincing to get him to come out?

STEVE STRICKER: No. And he's friend with Zach and Zach's caddie, Brian Smith, so it was -- from his standpoint, I think he said it was an easy choice just to come here.

He's looking forward to being here, and we're having fun with him so far.

Q. Just a one week thing at this point?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, yeah.



Q. Just on another Ryder Cup question, you're grouped with the other two, the European captain and vice captain. Any friendly wagering going on between the groups yet?

ZACH JOHNSON: There's not been any discussion. I saw Luke briefly yesterday. We were crossing paths. No, there hasn't been.

You know, if there was going to be one, I think it would be pretty fun and in a jest in that regard. You know, food. My guess is we could do something like a dinner bet or something like that. But looking forward to it. Luke is tremendous. Edoardo's great. It should be a lot of fun to see us old farts out there.

Q. Zach, I know you were kind of an early adopter of data on TOUR and using that to your game. Obviously Edoardo is big into that. Luke was one of the first ones to dive into that from a PGA TOUR perspective. I just wonder your take on how you think those two guys, with having their backgrounds, will kind of impact their team.

ZACH JOHNSON: Those two guys, meaning Luke and Edoardo?

Q. Yes, kind of with the data focus.

ZACH JOHNSON: Even Steve can attest to this. You can look at a lot of data, chew on a lot of data, and it can be very useful, but also can be very much -- well, just, it's heavy. It can be a lot, cluttered. You've got to know what you're looking at.

I think the individuals that we have within Team USA kind of know what's beneficial and what's probably not that useful.

I don't know Edoardo's specifics, his algorithms and his -- even just his summaries. I don't know where he starts and where he gets to. But evidently it's warranted that Luke feels it can be an asset to the team. My guess is it probably will be.

You know, it's that balance of utilizing those data points and those simulations and those percentages and all that, and then there's you're just trying to combine that and trying to gel it with all the intangibles.

I'm not saying because he's sitting next to me, but Steve did a really good job of that. You do, you chew on it, you kind of let it settle a little bit. At some point, though, you have to go with what the guys are saying, what your vice captains are saying and what your gut says and what

you're witnessing with your eyes.

That's the beauty of the Cup, right? You can have all that information, but at some point you've got to -- you know, it's still just a sport in golf.

Q. Steve, I put together a piece about you and the Year of Review for the Champions Tour for the last year, and it seems like the last year or two has given you a lot of perspective about life and about golf. With all that in mind, all these opportunities, however few and far between they may be, what these opportunities mean to you, especially having the chance to play with a longtime friend?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, after the Ryder Cup, you go from this high, right, of being a part of that team, and then two months later I'm in the hospital kind of fighting for -- I don't want to say my life, but fighting for something. I didn't know what was going on, to be quite honest with you.

So you gain this perspective and this respect for what you're doing on a weekly basis. Coming out last year, I was in a very good mindset; felt fortunate to be playing the game again. I went through a period of probably five or six months of just trying to get back, and I still -- I feel great. I still haven't put on my weight or my muscle probably as much as I want to.

But, yeah, you just gain that perspective from being in a spot where I was. And then to be out here playing with Zach, like you said, a buddy of mine, teammates and captains together, it's just -- yeah, you feel fortunate and lucky. We're playing on the PGA TOUR. He's playing every week out here, but for me it's been a few years for me to be out on the TOUR.

Very grateful to be here, to be playing with Zach, and to be playing here in New Orleans for sure.

Q. Zach, your thoughts on the venue in Rome. Obviously it's not a course a lot of us are familiar with. Have you been there? Have you played there? Are you going to send anyone to the Italian Open to kind of see what it's like then?

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure, great question. I have been there. I have played it myself. I was there this past fall, a year to go. It's got a lot of everything, up, down, left, right, short, long.

It will be one of the hilliest courses we step foot on. It's hard to compare. It's all of Augusta and more. The greens aren't nearly as big or as undulating, but as far as shot making up and down, it's remarkable how many yards up

and down shots play. It's just kind of built into a hill.

I mean, some of the courses that I've seen out here that we play that may have some similarity may be like Harding Park, or what's the one across the way, Olympic kind of built on the bluff there and kind of sits on a hill. That's kind of what it reminds me of.

It will be good. The course is made for a tournament. There's like natural amphitheaters there, and the finishing holes will be terrific. Drivable par-4, par-5, in there, a really hard par-3, so it will be good. It will be all we need for a Ryder Cup, and it will be in great shape. They do a great job.

What was the second part of your question? I'm sorry.

Q. Just the Italian Open coming up there next month.

ZACH JOHNSON: That's right. The Italian Open. Obviously it's typically in the fall, but they didn't want it to be in the fall with the Cup coming up, so they moved it to two weeks from now.

There was a lot of deliberation on that, actually with the Ryder Cup committee, I think, with Steve and the PGA of America board and Seth Waugh, J.T. and Jordan, because they're on the committee, and myself.

I'm not encouraging guys to necessarily go, but it really boils down to the fact that on the PGA TOUR we have a massive event that week and one that deserves attention and respect, and that's the Wells Fargo in Charlotte. It's an elevated event on the PGA TOUR. It is a venue that most guys enjoy that town, and I think Johnny Harris and the people there deserve a great field. So I didn't want to necessarily step on their toes.

I'm not going to discourage anybody from going. I'm not going to say that, by any means. The more times you can get your feet on the site, great. But I've got some plans in store that will allow the team to get used to a golf course that they're not familiar with.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports