

Zurich Classic of New Orleans

Wednesday, April 23, 2025

Avondale, Louisiana, USA

TPC Louisiana

Luke Donald

Camilo Villegas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Luke Donald and Camilo Villegas here to the Zurich Classic of New Orleans. Luke, this is your fifth start in this event in the team format, your best finish here T23 with Edoardo in 2023. If we can get some comments on being back here in New Orleans.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, it's always fun to come here. We were talking a little bit about it walking down the fairways today. It's just a fun different experience this week. This team atmosphere, playing foursomes, playing four-balls, it's a different feel. I think it has a great place on the TOUR to change up what we do week in, week out, and the hospitality here is always great.

It's always a nice week to be a part of.

THE MODERATOR: Camilo, your third time in the team format. Your best finish, T14 in 2017 with Morgan Hoffmann. If we can get some comments on being back here and playing with Luke.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Yeah, I've got to put up with Luke this week. No, kidding. Luke and I are really good friends. We spend a lot of time back in Jupiter. Our wives spend a lot of time together. It was one of those things, hitting balls on the range at Bear's Club, and I said, hey, you want to play Zurich together? It was a quick yes.

It'll be a fun week. It'll be a little kind of family-friendly week. Zurich has done a great job over the years. I was very happy to see that they extended until 2030, so thanks to them for supporting our great tour.

Again, it's different. It's a different week. It's a week where you've got to think a little bit. I got Captain Donald here next to me, so he's taking care of all the stats and all the stuff that we should do, which is good.

Hey, I'm really looking forward to having a good energy week, having fun out there, and trying to play some good

golf.

Q. You joke about Captain Donald having all the stats. What is the dynamic of how you guys are playing off each other and what's your dynamic just being out there?

LUKE DONALD: Well, I don't know if I have all the stats. This week is a little different to most weeks because of the format, so ShotLink doesn't have all the stats like you would at a regular event. But certain things over the time you've played here, the even holes are usually the guy who's a bit better driver. There's some good iron holes, par-3s for the odd holes. So it's a nice mixture, this course.

I'm sure most of the players would know all that stuff out there, but yeah, it's just more about having a good time, having a good partner. Our wives are going to be both out here, which is unusual, actually. They don't travel as much as they used to.

Again, it's going to be kind of a fun week, and hopefully we can play some good golf, as well.

Q. Is that the norm here, that this is a week where you notice other players' wives or family might come a bit more because it's a different dynamic?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: I think so a little bit, a little more team. Also people love New Orleans. It's a great place to come visit, have some nice meals. Like I said, Zurich has done a great job with this event, and it's fun for us.

In our case, kind of funny story, we got a good pairing, too. We got Charley Hoffman and Nick Watney, where the four of us are on the older side. I don't think any other group is going to be older than us out there. So I quickly got my tee time, I do a little text message with Luke, Charley and Watney and then like 20 minutes later I find out that the girls did a chat together, too, so the four of them were together; everybody is going to be here, so it'll be fun out there. It'll be good --

LUKE DONALD: We'll share some stories. We go way back with Nick and Charley, as well. Should be a fun



group.

Q. At this point in you guys' careers, how do you balance what you're trying to do inside the ropes for your own games and balancing the responsibilities you have? How do you work those two things potentially at the same time?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, personally I've struggled a little bit. I've decided to play a little bit of a smaller schedule this year, playing one week and having two or three weeks off, then playing one week. It's a difficult dynamic to keep the momentum going through the competitive sort of momentum you get from playing two or three weeks in a row.

But I'm certainly enjoying being Ryder Cup captain again. It's great this week to see so many Europeans here. Obviously a little bit of a dynamic from the alliance we have and the 10 cards. Seems like more and more Europeans are coming and playing.

It'll be interesting to see how they do. I'll certainly be keeping an eye. I had a few conversations earlier in the year about potential partnerships amongst some of these Europeans that I thought might work.

But outside of that, yeah, I'm really -- once Thursday goes off, I'm just here to play and play as good as I can and hopefully make some good swings for my partner.

CAMILO VILLEGAS: In my case, it has been one of my main goals for the year is to be more efficient. Why? Because I've got a lot of stuff on the table. Not only playing but the family stuff, the foundation stuff, and then being involved with the PGA TOUR board. There is quite a lot of stuff.

But it can all be done. I've been having a lot of fun and learning all the new things I'm doing, which is great, but yes, you have to be more aware of your time, your schedule. Just you keep getting better and better with the calendar, the family, this and that, and you've got to juggle it around, but it's part of life. That's what we do.

Q. Luke, I know the qualification system the way the European Ryder Cup team has it set up, guys get points if they're paired with another European player, which obviously is encouraging them to do that. You've got a number of players who are relatively high up on the point list at this point. There's a long way to go, but you sort of mentioned that you had spoken with some players potentially getting together. How much can you encourage guys realistically, given everybody's schedule, to come and compete in an

event like this where there's a long way to go between now and Bethpage, but it can be beneficial to see how people, relationships, things work out at this point?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, it's another opportunity to play some sort of team golf, to play some foursomes, which is a format we don't play very often. Certainly at the team cup earlier in the year in January, there were some chats sort of during that week about possible guys playing with who and whether they would want to play in the Zurich.

Again, I don't like to tell them what to do. That's certainly not my place. Their schedule, they need to do what's best for them individually and where they're going to perform at their best, but certainly I'll send the odd friendly text, are you thinking about playing Zurich, who are you playing with, maybe if you want, play with this guy. There's a little bit of that going on because I think it's another opportunity to sort of find a partner that you might feel very comfortable with and find a little bit of comfort in foursomes, which is a very uncomfortable kind of format.

Q. Luke, now that you're two cycles into this, have you gathered any opinions on your own on the qualifying system and maybe a guy wins a major 18 months before the Ryder Cup and he's getting a ton of points for that? Have you kind of formed any opinions on the points system and do certain things maybe gain too much, too little?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, we always take a look at our points schedule and try and figure out the best way to create the strongest team. Our points system is only a year from -- pretty much a year worth of points. It started at the British Masters I think last year and that's where it finishes.

We look very highly at -- we don't count any majors the year before, so it's all in this year for us, which is important. We want current form. But we want to give more points to those bigger events with the stronger fields.

We think we have it pretty good. I think six and six works well to, again, form the strongest team we can possibly have.

Q. Luke, when Rory and Shane were in here, Rory mentioned how winning at Bethpage would really cap off the year, so they're obviously thinking about that. European players playing a lot more of this kind of golf than American players, foursomes and four-balls, do you think this has been something that has been an edge for the Europeans throughout the years in the Ryder Cup?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

LUKE DONALD: Well, I certainly think it's helped. It's something we grow up with as juniors. We play quite a lot of matches within county matches, within country versus country in that format.

But once the professional -- once you turn professional, you don't really play a lot. It's something you've grown up with as a junior, but some of these guys haven't probably played in that format for many years. So it's nice to get them to have an event like this where they get to refresh some of those memories.

There's little things that you can do in match -- it's not match play, but it's foursomes, so things to think about, encouraging your partner, just little reminders that might remind them from stuff that they did when they were juniors.

I'm not sure how much of a benefit that is in the long run because most of these guys would have gone quite a few years without playing that from junior golf.

Q. Camilo, I'm not sure if this urban legend is true or not, but I've heard that your yardage books were used by the University of Florida team for a few years after you had left because you were so detail oriented and kept such copious notes; is that true?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: It is true, yeah.

Q. With that in mind, how much do you observe your partner in this case? I know you guys have a good relationship. You've been involved with Presidents Cup. Are there things you may want to scribble or file away for yourself for an opportunity to lead a team in the future? What do you see in him that you can learn from?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Trust me, I'm always picking his brain. I'm always asking questions about Ryder Cup. I was supposed to be in Rome last year. Unfortunately I had to cancel the last minute.

I will be there this year just -- both Luke and Keegan are great friends. I think it's a good opportunity to see -- just being involved with Presidents Cup, it's important to go to a Ryder Cup. Ryder Cup is huge. I want to experience being there, watching two of my good friends and then a lot of the other players just battle it out.

Back to your question, I always pick Luke's brain. I always ask him what they're doing. We've discussed our previous two Presidents Cups, being involved as an assistant captain, what we did, what can we do better and stuff like that. I'm hoping to continue to be involved with Presidents

Cup, and yes, hopefully in the future if I can be a captain of one of the teams, it would be an absolute honor for me.

It's a really fun week every two years. When Trevor gave me the call, it was a blessing. When Weirsie gave me a call, it was fun. I'm just trying to keep learning.

Luke has done such a great job. I've watched firsthand how many books he's read, how much time he's spent, how much less golf he's played just because he wants to do what he calls his true job well, which he did back in Rome, and I'm sure he's going to do a great job again.

We keep learning off each other.

Q. Would you call the job being Ryder Cup captain being fun or Ryder Cup week as being fun?

LUKE DONALD: It's fun when you're lifting that trophy, but there's a lot of pressure. There's a lot of anxiety. Most nights you're getting four hours of sleep. It's just a lot. There's so much going on.

That's why for me, and I'm sure Camilo is the same, preparation is key. Making sure before you even get there that week that you have pretty much a good idea of what to do and you have a plan A and a plan B and maybe a plan C if things aren't going the way you want.

That's where the lead-up for this whole 18 months, two years, that's the buildup, to try and get myself in a position where I feel reasonably prepared. You never can be totally prepared, but I feel like I certainly feel more confident and more calm the more prepared I am, and that's why I try and put in the work.

But it's still a very stressful environment. Being in New York playing away will be really stressful. But again, it's a very tough challenge to win an away Ryder Cup. We know that. It's never easy. The U.S. will certainly be looking for revenge from Rome, and they will be a tough team to beat.

Q. Camilo, I was intrigued to see that the PGA TOUR Americas is playing this week in Quito, Ecuador, and the elevation there is 9350 feet. The elevation here is two. I was wondering if you had any stories or anecdotes about playing in South America or elsewhere at some really high elevation and how different is it from playing at sea level?

CAMILO VILLEGAS: Yeah, very different. I grew up in Medellín, Colombia, which is about 2000 meters above sea level, but the highest I've played was in Bolivia in La Paz. We played a South American Championship there, and I forget how high it is, but it is high.



I think technology these days allows us to be a lot more precise when it comes to elevation. I think there's all kinds of different formulas and TrackMans and stuff like that where you can kind of get to the -- get on point with how far the ball goes.

But yeah, you've got to control your trajectory a little bit different there. The low shots don't travel as far. High shots travel forever. It's fun. It's different. Ball goes very straight. But yeah, I've been blessed to play all over the world, including in a lot of tournaments in South America, and Quito is up there. I had a chance to play there.

Yeah, just hoping the PGA TOUR Latinoamerica keeps growing and we keep bringing more players from that region to the Korn Ferry and then following to the PGA TOUR.

Hey, it's nice to see just kind of the Latin flavor out here.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports