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King Abdullah Economic City, Saudi Arabia
Royal Greens Golf and Country Club

Graeme McDowell

Press Conference

STEVE TODD: Pleased to be joined by our defending champion, Graeme McDowell. When I say "defending champion," seems like a lifetime ago, doesn't it.

Coming back to Saudi, start by reflecting on that win. As I say, seems like such a long time ago, but I know you have very fond memories of it.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, it was a nice victory at the time. I felt like I was starting to get a little bit of a head of steam up and starting to create some nice momentum and move into the right direction and obviously that momentum didn't get a chance to last very long unfortunately.

Listen, it was great. First time here last year. Nice, windy track. Good golf course. Great facilities here. It fit my eye pretty well and like I say, it was really important to me at the time. Got me back in the Top-50 in the world and got me in Augusta and opened a lot of doors for me.

But like I said, obviously that three-, four-month break, it broke my momentum a little bit, and I didn't respond well when we came back in the summer. But listen, nice to come back. Always nice to come back to a golf course where you have great memories. And like I say, I would love to get some of that momentum back again this week. That would be really, really awesome.

STEVE TODD: You're a guy who has done well when you've defended titles, Open de France specifically. Are you hoping to convey a catalyst this week?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Listen, like I say, when you come to a place with good memories, it's easy to visualise yourself being successful around a place when you've played well, and I think that's one of the big things missing for me right now is that little bit of confidence and belief in my ability to make enough birdies to score well to compete.

So I'd love to try and find something this week. It's been a



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disappointing Middle East so far. Missed by a few last week in Dubai. Would dearly love to play well this week and get my season kicked off.

I've enjoyed the couple weeks. It's always a great place to come. You're always met with great weather, great facilities, great golf courses. Played nine holes here yesterday.

This course is in fantastic shape. I think it's improved a lot over the last couple years. I wasn't here year one and last year, obviously from what guys said, a huge improvement and I think they have really upped their level again this year. There's plenty of grass out there. The greens are fantastic. They have made some little tweaks to some of the run-off areas. I think the course is potentially the best one of the three we've played so far this year, so I think that's a testament to what they are trying to do here and create such a strong tournament with such a strong field.

Q. When players are struggling -- what do you have to do to get better, and the reverse of that is when you start playing well, what do you do to get better? Obviously you're struggling; what is it that's wrong and what are you going to try to do to fix that?

GRAEME McDOWELL: It's one part technical and it's one part kind of mental. The mental side of it can't come without good technique. So I think I've been doing a little bit of work with a new coach back in the US, just trying to straighten out some feels and some patterns that I'm looking back at some old swing and realising why they were pretty good, and even though I used to look at my swing ten years ago and not really like it, I did a lot of things incredibly well. So kind of trying to understand those and get back to kind of swinging the club the way I used to a little bit more.

Then, you know, you need to build some confidence on top of that technique. You can't think your way into shooting scores if the technique is not there. So you've got to have a reliable, trustworthy kind of ball flight, and then layer on some birdies and some confidence on top of that and that's how you start creating the recipe back to start competing and start winning tournaments again.

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So that's kind of where I'm at. I'm in that little bit of rebuild process. But I'm starting to see some good things happening.

Q. And I apologise, I don't know who you're now working with, what made you -- first of all, who was that and then what made you decide that you needed to make --

GRAEME McDOWELL: Lucas Wald is the coach I've been working with a little bit. Kevin Kirk -- Pete Cowen still consults. Pete is fantastic. I spent the last couple weeks with him and he oversees everything I do, but Kevin Kirk helped me the last 15, 16 months.

I felt I was getting a little over-technical with him and needed to take a step back and Lucas has helped me look at some old stuff and understand what I did well back in those days and start understanding how I get my body into those positions again.

So like I say, I struggled second half of last year and felt like something needed to change. Decided to kind of try out a new coaching method.

Q. Looking at screens, it's very difficult to know what happened in Dubai, but seemed to be that you were maybe struggling a little bit on the green there. Would that have been the case? And was that just that particular week or was there some issue that you're working on?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I think probably the last two weeks, if I looked at it, I was super cold on the greens in Abu Dhabi. I played great round one and only made one birdie. Just was a combination of not quite hitting it close enough. I think I hit 17 greens in the first round and only made one birdie, but a little bit of a proximity issue and also couldn't make a putt, and then I go to Dubai last week and I'm sure, admittedly the Emirates Golf Club would say they are struggling a little bit with their surfaces. I know they are doing a redo this summer. So their surfaces weren't up to par last week, and my short game struggled as a consequence. I really couldn't see my chips responding the way I wanted to, and I just made nothing, as well.

It's definitely been more of a cold putter the last couple weeks than anything else. I actually feel like my long game is trending in the right direction. Definitely just need to get the putter heated up a little bit, and these greens this week look fantastic. Like I said earlier, got some good memories last year making some putts, so hopefully we can get that going again.

Q. I couldn't catch the surname of your new coach, Lucas. I couldn't hear that. And secondly, I was just wondering how far down the priority list is Ryder Cup at this stage, obviously with what you've gone going on with your technique, maybe it's not right up there near the top of your list of priorities at the moment. Is that a factor at all or is there any Ryder Cup-item it's kicking?

GRAEME McDOWELL: W-a-l-d. Lucas Wald is the name of the coach.

Listen, Ryder Cup is a priority, of course it is. Because if I can get myself on the team at Whistling Straits, it means I've achieved the things I want to achieve this year: Playing well, winning tournaments, competing in the big events, winning big events.

I'm in the frame, so I have to believe that I'm good enough to play and I do believe that I'm good enough to play. I don't like using the word rebuild because I'm not really rebuilding. I feel I've hit a lot of balls the last couple months. I'm moving back in the right direction.

Like I say my long game is really not bad at all. It's just a case, I'm really just not making enough birdies right now. It's one part technique and it's one part mental. It's a little bit of a need to get more aggressive, need to just hit the ball a little closer to the flag and obviously get hot with a putter.

Ryder Cup is a massive priority, of course. I'd love to be part of the team. It would be a massive dream to be on the team.

Q. What part about that major-winning swing you didn't like? When you said you looked at it and didn't like it, what was that?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I always thought it looked a little kind of reverse-y, a little kind of underneath. Kind of my arm plane looked always kind of low and short and around my body.

I think, you know, you fall into the trap of, you're always trying to get better in this sport and sometimes you don't appreciate what you've got because you're looking around at some of the most beautiful swings in the world, the Rory McIlroys, Adam Scotts, Tiger Woods.

You're thinking -- you misunderstand kind of how these guys achieve what they are achieving with the golf swing, and something I'm working on with Lucas is what we call mental representations. It's making sure that I understand the mechanics and the body movement patterns that I'm

trying to achieve. Sometimes in golf, what you feel and what's actually happening are completely different things, you know. So understanding kind of the positions that I'm trying to get into and making sure that I know how to get there is something I'm working hard on.

Like I say, looking at old swings, I used to get into my right hip so much better than I get into it right now. I'm kind of swaying off the ball and not loading my right side very well. Looking back at swing footage 2010, 2011, I used to do that, extremely well.

My hand path routing back in 2010, 2011, yes, it was much more inside, but my hand path now is very steep. And I know that I re-route the club a little bit with my hands, and having the club a little deeper on the backswing allows me to re-route it back on path.

Understanding some things and just making sure that I understand the mechanics correctly. Like I say, it's weird, sitting here 11 years, 10.5 years after the fact looking back at a U.S. Open-winning swing, I didn't like at the time and wish I could have it back now. Hopefully, the muscle memory is in there somewhere; that I'm capable of swinging the club like that again.

Q. It sounds like you're hunting for buried treasure. You know it's there; it's just finding the keys -- or finding it, and finding the keys.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I think that's fair to say. I went down this path a couple years ago, actually, with Chris Como. He came to see me in Orlando and he brought some swing footage from 2010 and said, "You know, this guy is pretty good. Let's try and swing it like him again."

I don't think I was ready for this then. I don't think he really helped me understand the whys. Yeah, okay, I was pretty good; I won some tournaments with that swing. I think what Lucas has helped me with is understanding the whys of why the swing was so good and kind of comparing that to what the best in the world do; the way Dustin, his backswing, why his backswing is so good and the way he works hit right hip and the way he works his body, that type of stuff.

I'm definitely a why person. If you tell me to do something, I need to know why I'm out there trying to do it, and then you know, I'll be motivated and understand that I want to do that.

But yeah, I mean, I'm enjoying the process at the minute. I'm definitely understanding my mechanics better than I have in a long time. Like I say, the ball is behaving itself

pretty good, and I'm pretty bullish about having a good year. I don't want to sit here and kind of sound like, you know, my game is all over the place and I'm in this massive building process, rebuilding process. No; I feel like the changes that I'm making are very playable. I don't feel like I'm a million miles away from playing well.

I'm excited. I think I can have a good year. I feel motivated and I feel healthy and like I say, that Ryder Cup carrot is out there dangling. This time last year when I was sitting here, it felt a long, distant kind of dream. I feel like when I won here last year, it became very achievable for me.

Obviously time stood still from a Ryder Cup point of view and kind of we are back there again and I'm in the fringe. So I'm four or five big weeks away from potentially being on the team. It's very achievable and I've got to keep that out there as an achievable goal.

Like I say, I think I'm good enough. So, why not.

Q. Last year's win, you explained why it was so important to you for a number of reasons. I wonder how important it was from the perspective that you won on a golf course that Dustin Johnson had taken apart the year before, and you have two very different games. But it kind of, I would have thought, told you that your game can stand up in an environment where his stands up very well.

GRAEME McDOWELL: For sure. I think Dustin has obviously proved himself as an awfully versatile player. He's won on some different tracks. Yes, he hits it a million miles and he's an incredibly talented athlete but he's proven he can win on various golf courses, winning the U.S. Open and obviously winning at Augusta. Augusta would have been one that you would have chosen as one that you would think you would definitely pick one up at one point. But to win a U.S. Open on a golf course like Oakmont shows how versatile he really is.

There's no doubt, week-to-week, sometimes you do get on a golf course, and you know you're two shots behind these guys every day you tee it up, you know, because power is such a factor on some types of layouts.

But the great thing about scheduling is there are plenty of TPC Sawgrass and Hilton Heads and Valero Texas Opens and there's plenty of golf courses when I look at my schedule, I'm licking my lips thinking, "I can't wait to get there" because I know I can compete on that golf course. You know, the Bay Hills and the PGA Nationals, the Honda Classics.

Like you say, nice to follow a guy like that in this type of tournament. And like I say, I'd dearly love to try and build some momentum up this week to get my season off and running. It's been a slow start the last couple weeks, but like I say, I'm bullish about the year and got to get it started somewhere, so hopefully it's this week.

Q. I can imagine why you want to get to The Ryder Cup because you always seem to be made for The Ryder Cup as a competitor in team battle. But I would also imagine that you will probably be there, anyway, if you weren't playing, as an assistant captain. What is your view on that and what's your view about becoming the captain in the future?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I mean, match play was something I grew up with. I feel in Britain and Ireland, especially, certainly when I was an amateur golfer, there was a heavy weighting of match play, and I felt like I enjoyed match play and I was a good match player.

I think that's one of the reasons why I've enjoyed The Ryder Cups, won a World Match Play. I enjoy the different psyche of kind of the man-against-man in a match play-type format. I wish we maybe played a bit more of it perhaps at the professional level, but certainly The Ryder Cups, greatest experiences of my career, all four of them, for very different reasons, each one of them.

But they are in a special place in my heart and I would love to play another one. I would love to play this year. I think it would great to obviously play under Pádraig but goes without saying if I don't make the team as a player, I would love to help, love to be in the team room, love to be alongside Pádraig and do everything I can to support The European Team.

If I want to be captain one day, which I do, I understand I'll have -- it's not have to, I want to learn the mechanics of what it takes to be a great captain by being vice captains and kind of studying under these guys. I did it in Paris in 2018 under Thomas. I think it's a really interesting job, and it's an interesting undertaking to create 12 guys and create an environment, a winning environment, 12 different personalities, try and put them together, the chemistry. So much goes into it and it's really intriguing to me. And I look forward to the day where perhaps I'll have an opportunity to lead The European Team into a Ryder Cup.

But for the time being, my dreams of still playing are still real and like I say, if I'm there, great. If I'm not, if I'm not playing, I'm 100 per cent ready to do whatever I can for Team Europe.

Q. Seems like the likelihood will be fans at The Ryder

Cup but probably not the level of fan participation in the past because of the way the virus is going. If there's a smaller group of fans at Whistling Straits, do you think that benefits you?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I think so. I mean, there's no doubt the crowds play a part in your home Ryder Cup. I mean, it goes without saying that when you hole a putt in Europe, it sounds a bit different than when you hole one in America. That's what makes The Ryder Cup so special.

The home advantage goes away a little bit without the level of fans that we've seen in Ryder Cups gone by for sure. Yeah, I think it's definitely advantageous to Team Europe to have fewer fans there at Whistling Straits. As we sit here today, Team USA looks unbelievably strong. We've got a lot of work to do, and our team is shaping up to be very different.

Speaking of rebuilding; it definitely looks like a potential changing of the guard happening on The European Team at the minute, but I'm sure there will be the Westwoods and the Garcias and the Poulterers and hopefully myself slipping in there on to the team to kind of keep some of the old faces around.

But obviously the effect of the crowd is real. It will be interesting to see what happens at Whistling Straits and what level of fans we'll have there. Hopefully we'll have as many as possible because that's what makes it so special.

Q. Sorry to ask you this, but just curious, looking at Xander Schauffele's comments from the United States the other day about the Patrick Reed incident, saying "the talk amongst the boys wasn't great," just wondering what your take is and is there talk amongst the boys in Saudi Arabia about what transpired there?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I mean, obviously difficult to comment. I wasn't there and I wasn't playing with him. I saw a little bit of footage. I felt like -- I felt like he -- I felt like he did things okay. I felt like he pretty much went about the procedure the way you're supposed to. You know, unfortunately, he's created a -- he's created a name for himself which attracts a huge amount of attention when he does things.

I like Patrick. I think he's a good kid. I think he's a great player. I feel bad that he has created the label for himself that he has because I think he's such a talented player, you know. So I hope we can move on from it and see him for the player he is.

Of course we need to protect the fields. Cheating does -- there is no place in the game of golf for cheating. I hate

the word. Did Patrick Reed cheat last week? No, I don't think he did. I don't think he knowingly did something that brought the field -- that didn't protect the rest of the field.

Like I say, I haven't really -- we've spoken a little bit about it. People have their -- people have their opinions. I'm in the camp that I didn't see a whole lot wrong with what he did last week at all. It's a tough one. I hope we can continue to talk about his golf rather than the other stuff that he's unfortunately being talked about for.

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