

The Ryder Cup

Monday, 13 September, 2021

Padraig Harrington

Media Conference



Q. Shane was talking about the sheer delight of having his father present when he got called into the headmasters office as he said and was told the news by you. How pleasing was that for you to give Shane that vote of approval?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: It really is one of the better parts of the job. I've been around Shane the last 2 1/2 years and it's the elephant in the world, no doubt about it. Everybody says, you're going to pick Shane, you're going to pick Shane, and if anything that pushed it away from me. I'm terrible like that. I was making sure I kept on doing this; it actually made it harder for Shane to get in the team.

Thrilled with the way he handled the pressure throughout this year. His consistency, his form has been tremendous. He really pushed on during the latter half of the season. You know, it was great sitting down with the vice captains, and it was one of those picks, as well, I had to keep checking with the vice captains. You know, I'm not biased here. I'm not like, you know, this is what -- this is right. Don't let me be distracted here because Shane is my friend.

You know, it was with the support of the vice captains, I was able to give him the nod and I was thrilled with that. From one of the -- there's down sides to this job as I said, having to tell the guys that weren't getting the picks but having to tell Shane that he got the pick was a big thrill of mine that he is a friend of mine and knowing that it was the right thing to do, it wasn't me being unconsciously biased; gave me all the confidence in the world that this was the right thing for me to do and it was a big thrill for me to bring Shane in.

Look, I believe he's going to do a good job. He brings great passion. He fits very well into the team and it's great to have a few rookies in the team.

Q. And just on the back of that question, given all the excitement and announcements tonight, there must have been some difficult decisions and phone calls to make as well.

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Absolutely. You know,

obviously most people will think of J.R., and it was difficult to have to ring him. He played well enough to be on the team. He pushed hard at the end but there wasn't a spot ultimately.

Alex Noren played great. Stats-wise, Alex Noren was right there. Fantastically suited to the golf course. So I don't know if Alex knows how close he was to making the team. Really quality player. But it was tough ringing Justin, because that was the one right in the bubble. Clearly he's good enough to be in The Ryder Cup. Clearly he's a great player, showing some form right now. That eagle on the last, what a way to finish; the drama of it.

Thus, yeah, could we have a couple more weeks -- it's tough. I certainly had my heart set on Ian and Sergio being the hearts of the team, the soul of a Ryder Cup Team. They have shown it and proved it in the past. Both of them in great form. We see the stats. I think Ian is having the best ball-striking of his whole career and he's in great form. Sergio, again, statistically, very good. Loves The Ryder Cup, the passion of it, great in match play. I couldn't have done without those two guys.

That ultimately means that you know, you're skiing down to the last spot. Bernd Weisberger, he delivered. He turned out. He played his way into the team under pressure this week. Again, fabulous ball-striker but delivering under the pressure that he must have been under this week was fantastic. Exactly what a captain wants to see, and it just left -- it ultimately left no spot.

That's the way it is. If you don't play your way in, it's a tough position to be in, and while J.R. and Alex certainly were very strong on the radar, both very capable of being members of this Ryder Cup Team, it just didn't fall in their favour this time around.

Q. Can you tell me how many people you were looking at coming into this week and it sounds like if J.R. would have won this week, he would have been on your team; is that true?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: If J.R. won this week, he would have qualified. There wouldn't have been a picking or



selection criteria.

Yeah, you know, look, ultimately, there was other scenarios that definitely opened up spots. Clearly if Bernd Weisberger didn't deliver -- and Bernd went out and delivered under that pressure, the stress, he went out and played golf, that would have opened up another spot ultimately.

But you can't -- you've got to back the player, and this is why we have a qualification system. You've got to back the player who plays his way in and Bernd did a great job of doing that. Fair play to him. He would have been under the pressure and stress to go out and do that; that's what you want to see.

So very happy with that. We're delighted, and especially as Bernd is a really good player, experienced player, and his style of golf suits for Whistling Straits. He played his way in.

I talked to Justin a few weeks ago and you know, he was very keen that he was going to work on his game, get his game ready, and look, he did. But ultimately, Bernd went in and stole his thunder and got in there and got that automatic position, which you know, in the end of the day, just there wasn't enough room.

That's the tough thing with the picks. There is a point where -- there's not a huge deal of difference, either. It's not like the three picks, while I'm happy with them and very comfortable with them, clearly people could have argued all the way for Justin, and as I said, Alex had exceptional stats coming into this.

So yeah, there was other options on the table that we would have been happy with but you've got to go with something that you know and we stuck with the current form, a little bit longer form I suppose with the three picks that we've gone with.

Q. I know this process began for you almost three years ago now. I'm sure you're absolutely delighted to have that certainty and knowing the composition of the team, the real work begins in earnest and the next few days will be full on.

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: It is. But we've done a lot of the work, the administration behind the scenes, that's all been done.

As regards the team, we know a lot. We've had a lot of sort of partnerships put together who would play with who, who wants to play with who, would doesn't want to play with somebody else, who doesn't fit their eye, where they

want a big, dramatic, high-profile match or low-key match. We are in position and now at least it's only 12 players so we can narrow down that focus and make it a much tighter criteria so that we are clearer on where we're going.

So that does make it a bit more comfortable but there is a lot of stuff going on. Plenty of work going on with my vice captains and just to make sure we're getting the right message out to the players and obviously building up, getting the right attitude that we need for the week ahead of us, and it is only a week away now.

Q. If you look at the two teams, the U.S. has six rookies compared to the two you have. Can you talk about the importance of experience, particularly when they are away and in the US?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Balance is important. So you know, I'm really not going to second-guess the U.S. strategy. Just going to focus on the European strategy.

Definitely rookies are a good thing in a team. It gives purpose to the experienced players. I know on my team, Sergio just loves the fact that he'll be mentoring rookies, at least one of the rookies, and he loves that job. And there's others on the team that are leaders that will enjoy that experience.

So it's very important to have your rookies. It's very important, the enthusiasm, the passion that they bring. Yeah, you wouldn't want to be there without them.

Experience, as long as they are playing great golf, and my guys are great ball-strikers. You can't just bring in experience for the sake of it. As much as Shane and Sergio in particular as my picks, you'd be going, oh, well, they are at the heart of a team, they have got great performance in the past, they have delivered, all that sort of stuff. Well, that's no use unless they are playing well, and I can see very comfortably when you look at the stats, and you've got to use the stats at some stage, there at the top, they were one and two in performance stats.

So it's not an issue. They are backed up by how well they are playing, so experience is no use unless they are obviously in good form, too.

Q. Was there ever a point you were envious that Stricker got twice the amount of picks you did? And while this was a different set of circumstances with the postponement and whatnot, do you think it would be good if down the road, if both teams while keeping their same qualifying had the same numbers of picks?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: No, we couldn't have the same

number of picks. We have our European points list. We have to deal with players who -- even you just look at COVID, who struggle to travel across the continent and can't play all the events they want to play.

Europe is in a distinctly different position. We are picking off different orders. In years gone by we have been waiting for U.S. Tour events to finish picking our team. It's a very complicated system in Europe that needs to be considered by each individual captain how he wants to do it, depending on the closing date of the event. Lots of little reasons.

As I said at one stage during COVID, I was offered eight picks, and with eight picks, because it was very broad in COVID we were thinking no golf for six months into The Ryder Cup, you know, you might have 20 people, 20-plus people who might have a thought of making the team. That's 730,000 combinations of teams you can make up out of that. More picks -- it was tough making a pick. I had three picks and it was tough leaving Justin Rose out. There's always going to be somebody on the bubble.

More picks, and clearly, like I said, I wouldn't have skipped past Bernd Weisberger. He played great and he delivered under pressure. If I had four picks, Bernd would have been a pick, anyway. And I knew that. The ninth man, you always pick him. You never skip over them. Why would you not just include them? It's a lot more stressful when you are a pick.

Yeah, I'm very comfortable with the decision. I'm sure SKY Sports are delighted with the decision this week because it created a bit of drama on the TV and amazing how many scenarios they came up with when you consider that they all couldn't happen at once.

So that was fun to watch. As the vice captains behind the scenes, we knew no matter which scenario came up with, it came down to one or the other sort of choice. So yeah, look, very comfortable with it. I'm sure Steve was happy with his six picks, but again, not focused on what he's doing. Much more focused on trying to build the best team I can for Europe.

Q. Do you think a team is better off with fewer picks?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I chose to have three picks instead of eight picks and six picks.

Q. It's the first time you're not going to elaborate; okay.

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, is that not the answer? I chose it. I wasn't told it. I chose to have three picks and

I'm very comfortable that that was the right decision.

There's always going to be somebody on the bubble. I feel for J.R. and I feel for Alex Noren. The fact of the matter is Bernd Weisberger played his way into that fourth spot which was technically sort of -- I know it's not the ninth spot when you consider the World Ranking but he played his way in and I'm delighted that he did it.

Clearly if it was coming down to picks, you just don't skip that ninth guy. That's why I didn't want the fourth pick. And would I skip two more down? No. I'm sure when Steve chose his six picks, I suppose no more so than myself, there was a lot of -- with COVID, there was a lot of doubt about what's going to happen.

But I'm very keen, as well, that The Ryder Cup in Europe represents The European Tour as much as Europe itself. It's very important that the players in Europe have that opportunity to play their way into the team.

Bernd Weisberger, again, the guy who pushed in this week, No. 4 in the points, is a European-based player, that means that anybody playing in Europe has a chance to make the team and that's the way it should be because without the ground support in Europe, without the players -- and I'm not just talking the European-born players; the South Africans, the Australians, the Asians, all come up to me who play on The European Tour wishing Europe well because they know how important it is to The European Tour; and part of that is the fact that we give a reasonable chance to a European-based player to make the team; that it's not all about, you know, playing in the -- we don't want to do the ranking off the PGA TOUR rankings. We want to do it off our European system.

