

# The Ryder Cup

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Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

## Luke Donald

### Media Conference



MARCO SIMONE  
ROME, ITALY

BRIONY CARLYON: Luke, you've just announced 12 wonderful golfers on your side that's heading to Marco Simone in Rome. Give us a sense of how you're feeling personally and it's obviously a day that's been marked in your calendar for quite some time.

CAPTAIN LUKE DONALD: Yeah, indeed. You know, it's great to have 12 names now. I think 12 very strong names, 12 names I'm very confident now going into Rome and regaining the Cup and I'm excited about the mix of some experience and rookies. It's time for us now to all come together and make sure I and our vice captains and all the backroom team give the guys a great opportunity for success in Rome.

**Q. You mentioned a few times today already that you wanted players in good form, good recent form obviously ahead of The Ryder Cup. Do you have any concerns about Shane Lowry's lack of form this year?**

CAPTAIN LUKE DONALD: I don't have any worries to be honest. You know, I feel like as I said, he's a big-time player. He steps up in the moments. We saw that two years ago even at Whistling Straits, just the passion he has for it.

I think it was great to see his commitment to go try to Prague and play. I know he didn't play his best. The course condition, the greens were a little bit slow that woke and he struggled on them.

Again, he's a big-time player and we have two obviously important weeks for him. He's going to be playing Ireland and Wentworth, two places that I think he will feel very comfortable and it wouldn't surprise me that he's out there having a good chance in those events.

**Q. I don't know if you're prepared to tell us exactly which players you called that were close to making it but from the outside looking in, it feels like Adrian Meronk has been somewhat unfortunate not to make it, would that be fair to say?**

LUKE DONALD: Well, I made a lot of calls, about 25 in general, six, obviously to the captain's picks, two to the guys that got in, Bob and Fitz yesterday and 16 or 17 others.

I think there was a lot of people throughout the year that I was considering. Obviously by the time Sunday came around, that was narrowed down to a few; obviously Adrian being one of those for sure. He absolutely did a lot of great stuff throughout the year and was very much on my mind.

But there were other players, too, that legitimately could have been there but in the end, I'm very happy with Nicolai, very happy with Ludvig, very happy with all the six picks to be honest that make up this 12.

Yeah, those are tough decisions, and that comes with every Ryder Cup. There's always going to be some people that miss out that really feel like they had a good chance and yeah, it just wasn't to be for some of those.

**Q. In our reporting the last few weeks, the probably most relieved players has been Bob MacIntyre, and you played with him a couple weeks ago. I guess my question; how pleased are you for him that he did make the team and how much of a relief is it that he can go to Rome knowing that he did qualify automatically?**

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, he earned his spot there. It's not easy to earn, especially with the criteria that I set. Those six picks; there's only six automatic qualifiers, and he was one of those. Full props to Bob for playing well.

Again, he showed a lot of commitment. He played in Northern Ireland and then he went to Czech, and had a very solid week. He stretched his lead over Yannik Paul and Adrian that week and gave himself a little bit more breathing room.

I know Crans isn't a place where he felt very comfortable in the past, and he grinded out and making the cut and still making a few points. We all saw his grittiness and his ability to play great golf at the Scottish Open and other events as well.

So I'm very, very excited to have him on the team.

**Q. In terms of Ludvig, it's obviously a very exciting pick for a very exciting talent but I'm just curious to know, when would it have been the first time you heard the name Ludvig Aberg, and when did you know in your mind that he was going to be on your team? Did it predate his win in Switzerland, or was it still an open conversation until then?**

LUKE DONALD: Well, I heard of him probably in January. I know he played in Dubai and maybe even just before that. He played in Dubai with Edoardo. Edoardo obviously let me know that he was very impressed with this guy.

A lot had been talked about him. He was obviously the No. 1 amateur in the world. Edoardo could see, he could see that immediately. I think even through the first two rounds, he was maybe in the top 5 or ten through two rounds and he maybe didn't finish that well.

But you know, again, it's my job as captain to keep my options open for anyone that was available. We knew that he was going to turn professional after college in June.

But going to your second question, no, I mean, really, I needed to see him perform these last two weeks. It certainly wasn't a guarantee before that. And you know, his commitment to come over, finishing fifth at cheque and then obviously what he did yesterday and throughout the whole week in Crans, birdieing his last four, just kind of solidified my mind, really.

There was all to play for these last couple weeks; it really wasn't decided firmly in my mind.

**Q. How much when you look at his technical quality and driving ability seems to match up very well for Marco Simone, but how important would have been the temperament that you've seen, because clearly it was probably the main story line around the tournament, especially in The Ryder Cup situation coming up and chasing down Matt Fitzpatrick?**

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, his temperament is obviously part of the reason yes is so successful. He's obviously an amazing driver of the golf ball. I'm sure you've already seen the stat through how many rounds he's played in professional events. He would rank No. 1 ahead of Rory, No. 3 would be Scottie Scheffler. So that's pretty high-caliber players. And obviously driving around Marco Simone is important.

I was so impressed when I played with him in Detroit. He

was a cool 9-under through 16 holes like it was nothing. He just went about his business. He was calm, collected. He made everything look very simple. He plays with good speed. Doesn't overcomplicate it. Him and his caddie, Jax, seem to have a good thing going and he hits a lot of quality shots.

I could tell straightaway that good things were going to happen to this kid.

**Q. Just as a final one from me, when you are up close like you were in Detroit, how does that ball-striking compare to other players you've seen burst on the scene over the years, Rory McIlroy, for instance?**

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, texted with Rory yesterday. I haven't played a lot with Jon Rahm to be honest. Viktor, I got to watch Viktor Hovland for three matches I think at Whistling Straits. Just really impressed with his ball-striking.

Rory obviously back in 2006, 2007, whenever I played with him in Dunhill and he was breaking out, I thought, man, this kid is special, and you know, Ludvig fits in that.

Again, straightaway, first tee shot, I mean, it's a tricky par 4 with a dogleg left that just hits it absolutely on a string at the right line.

You know, it just kept on going from there, that whole round. It's not easy. I've played with a lot of contenders over the last six to twelve months, and some haven't played that well with me looking at them, but he didn't have any problem.

**Q. Rory referenced a new chapter to European Ryder Cup golf with the talent coming through; is that how it feels for yourself?**

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, I mean, we have four rookies, and eight people who have played Ryder Cups before. So I don't think it's an inexperienced team by any means. If you look at number of Ryder Cups, we would be at 21; US would be 17.

We have plenty of experience where we have some great youth as well, and building for the future. I think these kids, these young kids are ready. They are fearless, and they are excited to get to grips with experiencing what a Ryder Cup is.

But at the same time, I see them as the future, as well. I'm happy to have four rookies. In my first Ryder Cup, I was one of five, and we did just fine in 2004.

So these guys are young. They are hungry, and I'm excited to see what they have.

**Q. Just to get back to the Ludvig thing, in Detroit, when you were paired with him, did you have any thoughts that you might be looking at him as a potential Ryder Cupper, and when he left Detroit, had your mind changed?**

LUKE DONALD: Well, that's a good question, obviously the first two rounds, he was super impressive with me. I think he was 12- or 13-under in the top three. I know he didn't perform very well on the weekend, which is surprising, because I didn't see any weaknesses in his game. At certain times, he's had good results, but you know, there's been round where you know, I would have -- the golf that I saw the first two rounds, expected him to do better.

But he's also been amazing in certain tournaments. I think the ability to commit himself to come over these last two weeks, he knew what he had to do. He knew that he had to perform at a very high level. He couldn't have slips like he did in Detroit and he did that. He had a chance in Czech, and he obviously did what he did yesterday.

So again, I think everyone who has played with Ludvig sees a very bright future for the kid.

**Q. And then one other thing. Justin seemed to indicate that this is a numbers, basically, type of team. You've broken down a lot of numbers obviously with Edoardo and looked at the analytics and spent a lot more time on the Nixon this team than maybe any other European Team or any other European Ryder Cup Team. Do you feel that way or not?**

LUKE DONALD: Well, I think I approached this captaincy like I approach my own individual game. I use technology and analytics when I feel like I need to but I also use a lot of feel and gut instincts and -- yeah, instinct, as well.

I think it's got to be a balance. Certainly not going a hundred percent on doing my pairings through statistics. I think personality matchups are really important. But when it comes to the golf course and what the demands are and what we've learnt over the last three years of Italian Opens -- and yes, I'm using statistics, some of that was certainly evident in terms of some of my picks.

**Q. You were keen obviously to see The Hero Cup, and see the players on that team now on the team for Rome. How important was that for somebody like Nicolai who grabbed that opportunity. I think he produced the best stats that week. How important is**

**that in the journey to this point?**

LUKE DONALD: It was important. It certainly had a real significance in my thinking behind Nicolai particularly and some of the others.

First of all, I love the fact that someone like a Sepp Straka would commit to flying from Maui all the way to Abu Dhabi, making that effort, 1 1/2 day travel. It wasn't easy to do. He certainly didn't have to do it. That was great.

And obviously with Nicolai, he had to step in at the last minute for his brother, Rasmus, also is a great future star and is a star right now and will be a star for many Ryder Cups, I believe. Unfortunately he got injured.

He had to come in. It was an awkward situation, and he just took to it like a duck to water. He stepped in. He was the most impressive player of the week. His statistics were the most impressive. You got to look and see what he had inside of him in a match play and a team environment. Certainly that went towards some of those decisions with getting him being a pick.

**Q. I know Bernie asked about Bob but you played with Bob when he took a lake on in Prague. You were concentrating on your own game, and how impressive and what does it tell you about him, how he bounced back from that over the weekend?**

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, he's obviously a very cool, calm and in control; and obviously had one bad swing, his second, or third shot, I guess, from the drop zone. It wasn't a bad shot. Just through ten yard shorter than he thought it would and he ended up making a quad, and suddenly he's kind of near the cut line, but he rebounded. He came back strong, I think 12-under on the weekend to finish top five. I think that shows the grittiness and the determination that he had.

It wasn't an easy situation for him. He knew he was the one being chased. So that's a tough place to be. But he extended his lead after that week in the points rather than let people come close to him because of that great weekend golf.

**Q. If you can talk to each of the Italian fans, what would you ask to them for the week?**

LUKE DONALD: I want them to be loud. I want them to cheer for our players. I want them to be our 13th man. I think playing at home in Rome is very special. We understand the amazing history in Rome, and we as a team are attempting to create our own history. We are very excited to be in Italy with a home crowd. Be



supportive, be respectful, but be loud for our team.

**Q. Just wanted your thoughts on the U.S. picks, and do you agree with the ongoing assessment that they are still probably favourites?**

LUKE DONALD: I do think they are favourites. Certainly judging on the result from last year's Ryder Cup, it was not close. It was one of the biggest, if not the biggest margin of defeat that we've had as a European side.

They have a lot of those guys coming back. They are strong. They have great partnerships that have been tried and tested. But at the same time, well, we are underdogs and we will be betting underdogs, I have full faith in my team and I feel like we have a great opportunity to win.

I'm confident we have 12 really fearless golfers that are on a mission to write their own history in the game and their legacy.

Certainly I couldn't be happier with the 12 I have, but yeah, just to obviously disregard the Americans would be foolish. They are going to be very, very strong.

**Q. Did you have any sense of surprise at all about the six, who Zach went with? Justin Thomas was the one who got a lot of attention?**

LUKE DONALD: Again, I'm not really super surprised. I haven't paid too much attention to it. I watched the pick show, but to be honest, I've been really concentrating on my 12 guys, and getting that certainly didn't change my thoughts. I wanted the 12 strongest that could compete against theirs, and we will be ready.

**Q. Given his lack of top-level experience, is it a risk, this pick? Is it also a bit of a gamble on his future potential?**

LUKE DONALD: Well, I obviously don't think so. You just have to look back in history, even in the last 20 years in college golf. He is on the same level as a Jon Rahm. He's on the same level as a Viktor Hovland.

Yeah, he's going to be the only one outside of Sergio to play a Ryder Cup the same year he turned pro. Yeah, those are high standards to live up to. But everyone that's played with him, everyone that's been around him, is super impressed with his game, what he brings, and we saw that.

We saw that last week. He was committed to come over here. He knew he had to perform well if he had any chance. I made it evident that I was thinking about him but I certainly didn't give him any assurances. But he knew

what was at stake, as well as many other players did, and he was the one who performed. So he warranted that pick.

BRIONY CARLYON: Thanks, Luke, for your time today. I'm sure it's been a busy day. We look forward to seeing you when you arrive in Ireland in next few days. Safe travels and thanks again.

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