

The Ryder Cup

Tuesday, 26 September, 2023

Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

Team Europe

Luke Donald

Press Conference

MATTHEW JOULE: Luke, the official photos took place this morning and your team are now out on the golf course. Do you feel like Ryder Cup week is truly underway?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, it's finally here. Yeah, always great tradition of having the team photos. It's certainly always special, any team I've been involved with in the Ryder Cup in the past, get together and have those teams, you finally are officially in your first days of uniform.

Yeah, it's a very special morning, and what a great setting on the front tees of the first tee.

Q. Two entirely unrelated questions. Firstly, what do we read into the pairings this morning, and secondly, will you be following in Thomas Björn's footsteps and getting a tattoo if you win?

LUKE DONALD: I'll start with the second question. No guarantees on the tattoo. I certainly don't have any on my body, just to let you in. But I'm sure we can find a suitable way to celebrate if it goes our way on Sunday.

In terms of the pairings, some of that is determined on media rotations. Six of the guys today will be doing media, so you send those off in the early groups. So I wouldn't read too much into it. Obviously you know, we do have a plan in place, and that plan can be adjusted throughout the next few days. We'll obviously -- the vice captains are out there watching the players and seeing how they look and how they feel and all that goes into it. But yeah, there's certainly a plan that is in place.

Q. Just to follow up, the team haven't asked to you get a tattoo, just officially?

LUKE DONALD: No.

Q. You're a specialist in golf, and for people who are not specialists, can you explain playing four-balls and foursomes -- what is the reason why The European



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**Team is better or could win some matches before?
And do the players already know the teams?**

LUKE DONALD: Well, why have we chosen foursomes first, it's really just a deep dive into statistics of the team. Within our team, we feel like we have some very strong foursomes pairings, potential pairings. We feel like we are just slightly stronger statistically in foursomes to four-balls.

You know, in Ryder Cups, you want to get off to a fast start. You want to get off to an early lead. It was decided amongst myself and the vice captains that that was the best way to go, to open with foursomes, and simple as that, really. I think we have an opportunity to send out four very strong pairings and hopefully grab an early lead.

Q. (No mic)?

LUKE DONALD: I've had multiple conversations with everyone about potential pairings, but nothing is set in stone yet.

Q. Can you just talk about how Sepp has mixed in with the group, and has he had any ribbing about his American links and background?

LUKE DONALD: No, no ribbing. We are one of 12 -- everyone is one of 12 this week. There is no hierarchy, certainly, and Sepp is enjoying the team atmosphere. We saw how well he enjoyed it and really mixed in very well with the guys even in January at The Hero Cup. Again, that showed a lot of commitment flying all the way from Maui to Abu Dhabi.

He might have an American accent and lives in Georgia, but there's a few of us that live in America and a few of us that are married to American girls. It's just the way it is. We are all Team Europe this week.

Q. Two unrelated questions, one of which is regarding the first tee, the jitters and nerves, you see how large the grandstands are, and they seem to get bigger every year. What do you tell your first timers about their first go-around on that first tee? Because you've obviously been through it yourself.



LUKE DONALD: Yeah, I think we all know that it's a big moment. Certainly was for me. I didn't hit a very good tee shot my first go around in 2004, and it was a wide right. It is hard to prepare, but I think we talk about it enough that the guys actually spend more time preparing for it.

So I think they will be ready. They will be ready to get off to a good start. We know that that is important in Ryder Cups, and certainly that will be the messaging to the rookies and the whole team.

Q. Can you describe the jitters, what it was like for you in 2004?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, walking to the tee, I felt pretty calm, confident. Five minutes before, it felt pretty normal, like a big event, like a major, but nothing out of the ordinary.

And then once your name is called, you start to forget things. Your mind goes a little blank. But it's important to try and have enough clarity about what you want to do on that first tee.

These are all professionals. They have all been in big moments and I'm sure they will deal with the moment very well.

But yeah, again, it's a lot. It's a lot of pressure. But again, I keep telling my guys, you've got to embrace it, embrace these moments, embrace these times, because these are the best moments; you get to live with your teammates, and enjoy them as much as possible. And then look up into the crowd. They want to see you hit a good shot.

Q. Unrelated to that, when Zach was getting ready to make his captain's pick, do you and your vice captains have a decent idea who he is going to take? Are you anticipating at all? Where I'm driving this toward, did you expect them to take Justin Thomas? His form has not been great, but he's been great in Ryder Cups.

LUKE DONALD: Certainly Zach knows what he's doing, and I wasn't really paying too much attention. No, that's again a situation that's out of my control.

We certainly, between myself and Edoardo and the vice captains, we kept track of all their stats, including the U.S., and they certainly could have gone a different way in terms of statistics. But Justin Thomas has played two Ryder Cups, and obviously they feel like, despite some inconsistent play, which he would say he had, that he brings a lot to the team room.

Again, Zach obviously knows what he's doing. To be honest, I was more concentrated on my team rather than what they were doing.

Q. Curious about the statistical approach you guys are taking. I know Edoardo has kind of taken over that and you're no longer with the group that you're with before. But I wanted to ask you about the extent of his operation, between one man in a room pouring over numbers by himself versus team of thousands, and what is the reality of what your Team Europe's statistical "nerd herd" as the Americans would call it?

LUKE DONALD: Edoardo has been doing this for a number of years now. He's worked with and still working with a number of players both on the DP World Tour and the PGA TOUR. He works with a few guys specifically on the stats that are playing this week.

You know, he is very smart, very switched on. He understands from a player standpoint, too, having played a Ryder Cup himself, the pressure and everything that goes towards it.

And he knows that numbers can make a difference. Certainly we are relying on Edoardo and his numbers. We certainly are not relying on 100 per cent to make all our decisions. All our decisions come from instinct and gut as well as statistics.

All of the stuff we've gathered over the last three years, having played three Italian Opens, we've been able to gather quite a lot of stats on what works and what doesn't work around this golf course, and you know, again, he's a big part of hopefully of a successful campaign to win back the Cup.

Q. If somebody handed you the four U.S. pairings for Friday morning, let's say it's not in order but these are the four pairings, would it be at all helpful or would it be essentially useless?

LUKE DONALD: Again, I think we have to really go back to controlling what we are trying to control, our pairings and what we are trying to do. Part of the Ryder Cup, part of the fun, different from The Presidents Cup where you get to pair up the groups a little bit. This is a blind draw. Again, I'm not going to read too much into what their pairings are. We can have a pretty good idea and a guess, but that's a guess. You don't want to establish too much priority on that; that they could be changing.

Control what you can control. Get our best pairings out in the order that we think is best and let the chips fall where they fall.

Q. What does Tommy Fleetwood add, and can you see him as a future Ryder Cup Captain, and what does he add to the guys in the team room?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, absolutely he could be a future captain. I was impressed with the way he handled the situation at The Hero Cup.

Tommy has a great way about him. He's very relaxed. He has a smile on his face. He loves being in a team room. He loves the atmosphere. I think his game elevates having that support group around him.

He's very much a team player and one of the best ball-strikers in the world as well. I think I expect him to have a great week. He obviously played extremely well. You could see when he was paired with Francesco, somebody he was very comfortable with, and he was very successful on the golf course.

Again, he's a team player all in all, and he lives for those moments in those team spaces.

Q. A lot of interest in Ludvig Åberg for obvious reasons. Can you tell us, in the short time you've been together, how has he been? Has he been feeling his way? Is he a big personality? And what will you be doing to ensure he performs as best he can? Do you have anyone in particular to look after him or keep an eye on him? What's your strategy on that?

LUKE DONALD: Well, Ludvig, he is as he appears. He seems very unfazed. He's quite quiet. He's a listener. He's certainly not someone three months or four months into his professional career going to be talking up and being a leader like that. That's just not his style. He seems very unfazed. Every time he's sort of asked a question of trying to perform, he's able to step up, and I'm excited to have him on the team.

Obviously we pair up vice captains with certain players, and certainly no different to this week. There are guys that -- well, there will be one of our vice captains with him pretty much all week, but again, he seems to be fitting in just well, just as well as you could imagine. He seems relaxed. He seems excited.

But you never get too much high or low from Ludvig. He's just very even-keeled, and again, I think he's just going to let his clubs do the talking this week.

Q. Can you say which of the vice captains?

LUKE DONALD: Nicolas (Colsaerts) is with him.

Q. First thing is, 12 guys, are you going to play all 12 before the singles?

LUKE DONALD: That is the plan.

Q. And then secondly, do you have a plan on if you want to play five, somebody five matches or not?

LUKE DONALD: Well, we have to see over the next few days the energy levels. It's obviously a demanding course. There are some hills.

Again, I answered this question yesterday. It's not out of the possibility that someone will play five.

Q. On the foursomes, you were talking earlier, obviously the Solheim Cup, that theory didn't work well for the Europeans, because they went down 6-2. Did you glean anything from what happened there in regards to how that might apply in this situation?

LUKE DONALD: Can you explain that a little bit more.

Q. The U.S. won six points out of eight. You had just mentioned earlier that you thought you generally had a better team in the foursomes and that's why you're leading off with foursomes and that's why you wanted to go after it. Certainly you don't want to start how Suzann started, 0-4. Wondered if you gleaned anything out of that whole situation?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, wasn't the ideal start for them, but they did come back roaring to a 14-14 tie.

So I think for me it's just about getting the guys ready on that first tee, making sure that they are settled, that they are ready to get off to a good start. That's all you can do.

Again, I don't think there's anything we can learn other than just being there for your teammate when you go play foursomes. I think foursomes, especially, is a format where you want to be there for your teammate and certainly be getting that message across to the guys.

Q. Considering some of the names and the personalities that are no longer part of this team, guys with large personalities and presence no longer with the team, are you seeing this group take on any different personality than what you're used to because there's different people with larger voices? If so, how?

LUKE DONALD: Well, I don't think you necessarily need large voices within the team room. You just need pretty good clarity on why you're here and what the reason is and

how you're going to accomplish your goal. You know, these guys are very motivated, and then they seem very unified. To me, they seem like a great group of guys that are really getting along with each other and already creating that sort of unbreakable bond between the 12 of them.

So again, I don't think -- sometimes words don't need to be said. There's certain things we'll be doing throughout this week just to make sure that we are working on being a team, but yeah, again, I think every team is different. This is a team that has obviously some new faces and some guys that have been part of Ryder Cup that aren't here.

They understand that it's their opportunity now to write kind of their story and write their history next week and create -- start writing and creating that history for themselves. They are very excited to be here and very ready.

Q. I am from Poland, my question is about the last winner around this golf course a month ago, and three times winner here, and fourth in Race to Dubai, Adrian Meronk, is not here. What is the reason for this decision?

LUKE DONALD: I think it would be unfair to talk about just one person.

Again, we are 12 this week, and that's my -- very happy with the 12 we have. I've obviously talked to Adrian and some of the other guys that didn't make it this week, and I'm sure they are good enough players that they will make future Ryder Cups. I really believe that.

But right now, I'm just concentrating on the six that I picked and the 12 that are here and that's my only goal.

Q. We have see environmental groups target a number of events in the U.K. this summer. I just wonder what levels of briefings you've had and whether the players have been told not to intervene?

LUKE DONALD: I have no idea how likely it is but there's a plan in place for everything. The guys will be told not to interact with the guys, let security deal with that and then we'll carry on.

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