

The Ryder Cup

Thursday, 28 September, 2023

Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

U.S. Team

Zach Johnson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the media centre at Marco Simone. You made your statements at the Opening Ceremony. Could you sum up for us how are you feeling before the opening foursomes matches?

ZACH JOHNSON: Feel great. Really at peace with where things are. Extremely confident in our 12 guys.

Q. Hey, Zach. A lot of guys would have thought that Justin and Jordan would have been probably in the first match, or if not in the first match, in the second match. They're not in any match. Just was sort of wondering how you're thinking about that.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, the gist of it is we've got 12 guys. Unfortunately, I can't play all 12 each session. So at some point, somebody's got to sit. There is -- it's a golf course that demands a lot out of you physically.

I mean, I think it's an ideal situation where you don't necessarily want to play everybody all five sessions. I'm not saying that's what we're going to do, but you're taking everything into account. Not only that, but the eight guys I have down on paper are the ones that we feel best put us in the position to get off to a great start obviously.

Then trying to fill in the holes for the next three -- technically three tandems, but four sessions.

Q. Hi, Zach. I was wondering what your thought process is not to start them tomorrow morning. Is it a thing of form on either side of the players?

ZACH JOHNSON: Is it what? I'm sorry.

Q. Is it a form thing, a recent form thing for either of the players? And at what stage did you decide they wouldn't go out tomorrow morning?

ZACH JOHNSON: There's a lot of things that I'd like to keep internal there. At the same time, I have the utmost



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confidence in these eight and the utmost confidence in Jordan and Justin. I know we're talking about a great tandem, but it's a situation where it's not about their form. They're playing great.

So it's really just a matter of trying to dissect all five sessions.

Q. You sent out the World Number One in your opening group. Why have you done that if it's not the obvious? And how do you think your opening pair, Scottie and Sam, it's a very fiery pair in Jon and Tyrrell, how do you think the match will go?

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm very confident in my eight. All these guys I have on my side, I know they're up against a very bona fide opponent, all eight of ours versus all eight of theirs.

Obviously we're very confident in putting Scottie and Sam out. You've got some experience in there, and you've got some chemistry in there as well. Those guys want to get after it, and I'm confident that they can do that.

Q. Coming back to that, how have they found the hills and the ups-and-downs and the weather and the heat, which you know has been very testing and will be for the next couple of days? How do you see that?

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm sorry. I cannot hear you.

Q. I'm coming back to your question, because resting some people, with the hills and how has the team adapted not having played here before, like the Europeans have, to the heat, the weather, et cetera?

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure. We, from the very, very beginning of this process, we have explained what's probably going to transpire. We knew it was going to be a warm week, certainly the warmest Ryder Cup that I've ever been associated with. You compound that with the hills, it's going to be a difficult task physically.

More than that, the preparation that we did two weeks ago when we came here as a team is helping us for this week.



We were familiar with the golf course, with the exception of a couple, before we got here this week. So I think that practice round trip allowed us to really take it slow in our preparation Monday through Thursday.

Q. The second group out, two rookies obviously in Max playing the Presidents Cup, two Ryder Cup rookies (indiscernible). What's your philosophy with that? I guess coming into this, would you have imagined putting two rookies out there? Because you would think rookie with (indiscernible).

ZACH JOHNSON: History will show, and you can look it up, that being a rookie is almost irrelevant. One of them, the way we look at it, is not. Yeah, he hasn't played in a Ryder Cup, but he knows team matches. He understands the elements of what's going on, and those two guys bond and mesh so well together on and off the golf course that it's a very natural fit, both as a tandem and for the golf course.

So zero hesitation. Again, the stats will show that being a Ryder Cup rookie in some regards is actually -- well, I don't know. I'm not going to get in the weeds, but it's not a bad thing.

Q. Victory obviously at the 2007 Masters, 2015 Open Championship, probably the two greatest venues in golf, they've defined your career. A team victory here at the Ryder Cup in Rome, how do you think that would stack up against them? How would that embellish, enhance your legacy?

ZACH JOHNSON: I'd be lying to you if I said -- this is an absolute distinct honour for me to represent my country, to represent this team and all the many people with the PGA of America and down the list.

If what you said does come to fruition, I hope that the win goes on those 12 guys. I'm here to help them play their best. That's the way I see it. That's the way I've approached it. That's the way my mentality is. I try to take all the noise and periphery and everything else outside the ropes, take whatever could be difficult off their shoulders onto mine so they can go do what they do.

Hopefully Sunday those 12 do exactly what you just said.

Q. Zach, as you announced the names of your players one by one, you announced Brooks' name --

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm sorry. Can you say that again?

Q. Sorry. I have a Scottish accent. There seemed to be an adverse reaction when Brooks' name was read. I

think people gave him a bad stick, I think. I don't know if you heard that. If you did and if that did happen, is that the type of thing that would fire him up?

ZACH JOHNSON: I didn't hear anything. It's hard to hear from the stage. You could hear, but as far as something specific like that, I did not hear anything. I know Brooks well enough to know that he's very secure in himself, and I know that his 11 teammates are very secure in him.

So the way we approach it; that's all that's important. I didn't hear anything other than applause for the guys I mentioned.

Q. Zach, I'm curious with the Homa-Harman pairing and the Fowler-Morikawa pairing, just the origin of the idea. Is this something you thought would be a good idea? Or is it a statistical model that spit out and said you might want to look at this? What was the seed of all of that?

ZACH JOHNSON: All of that. It was all of us collaboratively working together to try to put four tandems out that get us off to a good start in foursomes. More than that, you're talking to your 12, you're talking to everybody, and it's not just -- you're trying to fill in not just these eight blanks, you're trying to fill in 32 blanks plus the 12 singles matches.

It's a matter of strategically looking at it all the way down the list, if that makes sense.

Q. But I guess to put it more simply, the models, the analytical models did like those pairings?

ZACH JOHNSON: That's a part of the consideration. That's a part of why we do what we do. I don't think that's any secret. We utilize -- we try to leave no stone unturned when it comes to everything we do. There is a lot of collaboration. There's a lot of discussion.

Yes, you're data crunching. You're dealing -- again, you're dealing in the objective, and you're dealing in the subjective, and you're trying to mould that into one.

Q. Zach, just curious, in the last couple of days leading up to this, was there any personal angst for you in either writing and/or delivering the Opening Ceremony speech? How does it maybe compare with any golf nervousness that you might have ever had?

ZACH JOHNSON: Obviously I'm very -- well, I'm human, number one. But number two, I think I'm probably more comfortable inside the ropes at what I do more times than anything. I mean, it's my job.

Yeah, I say that, but I still get nervous on the golf course. Yes, I had nerves going on the podium up there, but I'm very much at peace with where things are. I was very prepared. Just like I do -- I'm very prepared -- I try to be very prepared in everything I do. I don't know if you call that calculated, but the nerves are there, but the confidence is also there because I've put in the work, and we've done that together.

Whether it's standing up there and delivering a speech that I'll never forget or putting these tandems together or going to play golf myself, ideally there's a lot of calculation and work that goes in that breeds confidence.

Q. Zach, 20-plus years playing this game, there's a lot of negativity, a lot of negative thoughts over shots over anything, except Webb Simpson, I think. As a captain in quiet moments, have you battled any type of such negative thoughts?

ZACH JOHNSON: Can you elaborate on that? I guess I don't understand.

Q. Nervousness, thinking what could go wrong, worried about things like that as you get ready for a tournament, for a round, or whatever, any type of negativity that you battle as a golfer?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, again, I'm human. It's natural to have negative thoughts. Certainly I've had them. At the same time, I think I've got the mentality of being able to understand those things in a pretty quick and efficient manner, and I can flip a negative thought, negative premise, notion into a positive pretty quick.

The way I -- dumb example is you play golf, and man, you shot 71. Could have been 68. Why wasn't it 68? Well, it's because of this. Well, now I know what I've got to work on, and that's a positive. I've figured out what allowed me to shoot that number.

When it comes to things like this, I've learned so much in my vice captainships, from my current vice captains who were captains before me, and I know -- I mean, I'm at peace with whatever comes my way.

Again, I can't stress that enough. I've learned a lot. I know I'm going to make mistakes, but when it comes down to it, just like the previous question, everything is very thorough.

We know it's not a perfect science. There comes a point when you've just got to let your thoroughbreds run, and I think we're at that point, but I'm confident in the approach we've had up to this point.

Q. Zach, lighthearted question, but Fred Couples famously said that Cameron Newman would definitely be on your team, and he said this week that J.T. and Jordan would play all four sessions. Are you just using him to spread disinformation?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, maybe you shouldn't believe everything Fred says (laughter).

Q. Just on the idea of navigating the analytical models, when you come to a situation where the Twenty First Group put out some of their data today and they said that J.T. and Thomas wouldn't rank in the top 100 most optimal partnerships, in terms of navigating the objective and subjective, would that be a non-negotiable for you, or how much of a factor would that be?

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm sorry. Can you slow that one down? I'm not trying to be rude.

Q. The Twenty First Group --

ZACH JOHNSON: The Twenty First Group?

Q. Yeah. It's a statistical -- it's a data company. They used to do data for Team Europe previously.

ZACH JOHNSON: The Twenty First Group, what does that mean?

Q. It's a company with data.

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, it's an entity. Now I'm with you. The Twenty First Group.

Q. One of the pieces of information they put out together is that J.T. and Justin, when Spieth and Thomas play together, they wouldn't rank in the top 100 of most optimal partnerships. I was wondering how much of that would have been an inference in your decision?

ZACH JOHNSON: They're not part of my consulting equation, so I don't have a comment other than more power to the Twenty First Group (laughter) because I don't have any idea how they go about figuring out their work. I'm sure they're highly qualified and a lot smarter than me and probably listen a lot better than me because that's evident too. I don't know.

Q. A lot of time to think about these potential pairings. How close do you feel like you guessed and were able to match up who you wanted your guys to play

against?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yes, we have looked at what they've done in the past, but this team's a little more unique, I would say, on their side over the years. If it got down to it, we can really hash this out in 50,000 different ways, and you just get so caught in the weeds with that.

It's like we're so confident in what we have, let's arrange it in a manner in which we feel is most comfortable for these guys and for our team going forward, and for the next session, and for the next session, and for the next session.

If you start getting solely caught in those weeds of what they're going to try to do, you lose sight of what you should be doing. I've learned that over so many vice captainships. You control what you can control. I cannot control what they're going to do.

Again, I'm at peace with that obviously because it's none of my business, but what is my business is the confidence and, again, the peace of what we have on paper and certainly going forward.

Q. Are all four players you're sitting, will they get out there in the afternoon?

ZACH JOHNSON: They are going to be playing Marco Simone this week.

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