

The Ryder Cup

Thursday, 28 September, 2023

Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

Team Europe

Luke Donald

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Let me, first of all, just quickly recap the pairings for the opening session of the 2023 Ryder Cup, starting with the European pairings.

Match One will be Jon Rahm and Tyrrell Hatton facing Scottie Scheffler and Sam Burns; Match Two, Viktor Hovland and Ludvig Åberg versus Max Homa and Brian Harman; and Match Three, Shane Lowry and Sepp Straka versus Rickie Fowler and Collin Morikawa; and in Match Four, Rory McIlroy and Tommy Fleetwood versus Xander Schauffele and Patrick Cantlay.

Luke, with the formalities out of the way, how are you feeling now that the first session is upon us?

LUKE DONALD: Speech went well, so that was good. Italian seemed to come off quite well and appreciative by the crowd.

I'm happy to know that Friday morning is almost upon us. As I said, it's been a long buildup, 14 months for me, and we're finally here. Excited about my pairings and ready to get to see some fantastic golf.

Q. You've obviously selected a couple of rookies in Ludvig and Sepp, quite a lot of faith, some might say, in a foursome. It's a difficult format. Can you tell us what you've seen this week that made you go with these -- all four pairings really.

LUKE DONALD: It's not just this week. It's what I've seen over the last year really, maybe a little less with Ludvig. I'm very impressed with both of these players. They're very steady players.

Obviously Ludvig's driving, the few tournaments he played on the PGA TOUR, he was the number one driver in all of golf, ahead of Rory McIlroy, ahead of Scottie Scheffler in the rankings. We know driving is important this week and in foursomes, if you're in the short stuff, it's going to make life a lot easier.



MARCO SIMONE
ROME, ITALY

Sepp, again, very consistent ball striker, very steady. He doesn't do a lot wrong. Again, he feels like his game is in great shape not only this week, but leading up to these matches.

Q. First of all, how close to these opening pairings were you thinking last week? Was this what you had in mind? Were there any surprises from the American team in terms of what Zach's putting out there?

LUKE DONALD: This was very similar. It's very close to my plan. I'm not quite sure. I mean, it's -- the last few weeks has been many iterations of pairings and stuff. I think probably last week this would have been what I had in mind, and I've seen great play from these guys and from the other four and the whole 12 over these last few days, nothing that would have changed my plans, to be honest.

Again, we had a pretty good plan in place. It was always going to be a plan that could change, but I didn't really need to because the guys are playing fantastic golf.

The U.S. -- again, I haven't really given their pairings much thought, to be honest. Nothing really surprises me. They're 12 very strong players. We know our work is cut out. They're going to be very strong, as they always are.

As I said, we're coming off a very difficult defeat two years ago, and the U.S. are definitely confident, and we're going to have to play some good golf. But I'm excited to see it get started.

Q. Sorry to hit you with this on the eve of the tournament, but following exhaustive investigations, it's come to our attention you've got an American wife. And the phrase sleeping with the enemy comes to mind. So I just wonder how tricky is it going to be this week for you? I wonder if you talk in your sleep.

LUKE DONALD: Not tricky at all. My wife's parents were born in Greece. She has a lot of strong European roots, and my number one fan. There's quite a few guys on our team that have U.S. wives. It's really not a problem. They are 100 percent behind us.



Q. She wants Europe to win?

LUKE DONALD: Of course.

Q. Luke, you've gone with Rahm and Hatton now first. Quite a lot about fire and ice, you've gone with fire and fire. Can you explain the thinking a little bit about it and how that might be a response to the occasion.

LUKE DONALD: They're both world-class players, to start. Both fantastic ball strikers. They are very passionate. I think Jon feeds off a playing partner with similar kind of fire and passion. He wants to feel like he's out there with a teammate that's really engaged with him. Tyrrell really fits that bill.

The Ryder Cup means a lot to both of those, I found that out over the last couple of weeks. Jon was really inspired by the Ryder Cup back in '97. It was the first time he really came to golf is going to Ryder Cup at Valderrama. It's not just about winning majors, it's about coming to Ryder Cup and contributing to European wins.

Q. Will you be using all 12 players on the first day, do you think?

LUKE DONALD: That's my plan right now, but plans can change.

Q. Luke, are your 12 players your gladiators, and are they ready for the fight?

LUKE DONALD: I would say they're very fearless. They're extremely good golfers. We've had a great few days together. The atmosphere in the team room is fantastic. Everyone is in good spirits. They're motivated. There's a lot of good energy. Everyone feels like they're playing well. So I'm very excited.

Q. When Zach in his opening speech had drawn the connection between the U.S. and Italy and said he hoped in some small way America could give something back to Italy, anything cross your mind?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, a little gold trophy perhaps would be nice on Sunday evening.

Q. Secondly, when you think about your hopes for tomorrow, for the end of tomorrow, is it satisfaction based only on a score, on numbers?

LUKE DONALD: In the end, I think it is. We're trying to get to 14 1/2 as a minimum. We'll know that it's a lot easier if you can get off to a good start.

Q. Looking at the bookmakers odds, they have you as slight favourites. It's flipped in the last 24 hours. Are you comfortable with that mantel? Do you think you are favourites given your incredible home record going back obviously maybe 30 years?

LUKE DONALD: I have a lot of faith in my team, but at the same time, I certainly don't underestimate the U.S. side. There's some strong players. There's a lot of players that played two years ago in Whistling Straits. They have some pairings that have astronomical win percentages that have had a lot of success.

They'll probably be using -- obviously Xander and Patrick is one. And they're going to be a tough, tough opponent. As I said, I'm very happy with the progress of my team. They seem to have come into a lot of form the last few months, and they've continued that in big tournaments.

The preparation the last few days has been fantastic. They've given a lot over the last three days. They're very engaged, and they are ready to compete tomorrow.

Q. Just to follow up on the previous point, will Jon be hitting the first tee shot? People talk about that being the hardest shot in golf, and you're confident he'll be able to get off to a good start early?

LUKE DONALD: You'll have to wait until 7:35 to see who hits the first tee shot, but one of them will be.

Q. I have a question about the pairings and practice groups. Every time at the Ryder Cup, it seems like the U.S. kind of does its standard. You see exactly what their pairs are going to be, while Europe mixes it up. Rahm and Hatton only played together three days. From the sideline, you think if you want to pair people, you want to play them together as often as possible. What is the philosophy for you only doing it one out of three times or mixing it up so much?

LUKE DONALD: That's not necessarily what's going to happen this week. We'll have to see. This year we have a little bit of a new team, some rookies. That means that you have to kind of find that correct combination of players.

But in terms of Jon and Tyrrell, as I said, those are fiery characters. I think their personalities match up, the statistics point towards a very strong partnership.

And those are the two things that I certainly look at when I'm looking at partnerships. So it's a mixture of do they match up? Are they suited to that format of golf the best? And how are their personalities? Do they get along well?

Q. So it's not as important that they play every single day leading up to it?

LUKE DONALD: If they go out and win 6&5 tomorrow, you're probably going to see them play again.

Q. Yesterday Wyndham Clark was claiming that recent lack of action for the American players would give them more energy, and Europe could well be dying on the hill Sunday because your players have played a lot more recently. Does he have a point that you could well be fatigued come the last day, or just how much energy and how pumped are you and your team?

LUKE DONALD: We've talked about this for months about this being a tiring week, a big week on a golf course that's quite hilly. The weather, perfect every day, but it's warm, and that saps your energy as well. That's certainly things I'll be thinking about.

Am I going to play a lot of people five times? Probably not. We'll have to see how the few sessions go on early, but certainly the thinking and the preparation and the planning for making sure that on Sunday hopefully you have 12 guys that are ready to go because there is 12 points on Sunday. We know that.

The first two sessions are important, but you still have a lot of points to play on Sunday, and you want people fresh enough.

I would say my guys are sharp and ready. They've been in competition quite a lot, and sometimes that can be a big benefit as well.

Q. Congratulations on the Italian. The duo lingo definitely paid off that you and Diane were doing together. I'd just like to say for you personally all roads have led to this moment. This has been on your mind forever. What is going through your mind right now?

LUKE DONALD: I just want to get to that first tee and watch my guys get started. It's been an amazing buildup. It's been an amazing journey. Couldn't be more excited and happy for these 12 guys to go out and enjoy this week because I remember I had so many fond memories as playing and being a vice captain.

As a captain, it's a little bit more of a stressful job, but I'm excited. I'm excited for the guys just to take this all in, enjoy it, and try and write their own history this week.

Q. Hi, Luke, obviously you take on so many

responsibilities. I'm sure you leave a lot up to your players. After your reconnaissance here at Marco Simone, do you lead any discussions about potentially how to play certain holes? For example, 16 would be pivotal, 300-yard par four. Any discussions -- obviously it would be also situational, but any discussions about whether or not you want your guys going for the green, holding back? Is that something you also do as a team captain?

LUKE DONALD: Certainly these 12 guys that individually know how to best prepare and play themselves and get themselves in the right frame of mind, we try and embrace the team when we're together and enjoy times together, but when they're on the golf course obviously, they know how to play an individual level.

As a team captain and with Edoardo, we've given them a whole packet of stats from the last three Italian Opens, what was necessary for success around here. It's up to them how much they take that in. Some guys will like to look at that and use it, some guys will like to rely on their own feel and their caddies and do it themselves.

So it's really up to them. I'm not trying to change that. But the information is there for them.

Q. That being said, would you like to see some of your boys taking a shot at hitting the green there on 16?

LUKE DONALD: I don't think you'll see a single player laying up on 16 this week from both teams.

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