

The Ryder Cup

Friday, 29 September, 2023

Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

U.S. Team

Zach Johnson

Press Conference

TOM CARLISLE: We are joined by United States Captain Zach Johnson in the interview area here at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club. We'll go straight to questions.

Q. On the positive side, maybe you can talk a little bit about that first match, and of course, the play of Justin Thomas?

ZACH JOHNSON: Are you talking about the first match?

Q. After.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, proud of those boys. I mean, the way they came out. Yeah, I mean, Jordan didn't have his best possible, but that's why we're in tandems, and Justin -- those two guys know what they are doing in this arena.

Q. Is there a bit of relief just to see something on the board, even a half-point?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I don't know about a relief. I would say encouragement for sure. Not surprise by any means. But not surprised on both ends. I mean, they are up against formidable opponents, and they are very competent players themselves.

Q. Zach, were the afternoon pairings scripted ahead of time, or were they something you adjusted after what you saw in the morning?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, we have contingencies and things of that nature based on a lot of things. You know, I would say that we'd love to have everything drawn out way, way ahead of time, but there's certain things you cannot control, and we are trying to control the controlables in our team room, and I'll leave it at that.

Q. So you don't want to answer?

ZACH JOHNSON: No, not particularly -- the bottom line is



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there's been some unforeseen things that we've had to navigate around, which is really unfortunate, in the sense of health. It's not an excuse, because we have depth, but I'll just say, I'm grateful we have a team doctor.

Q. Can you talk about the mood of the team room at this point and how challenging it must be for you to come up with the right things to say?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I've got guys I can lean on when it comes to what I articulate and what I say.

I think they have every right to be frustrated, number one. Number two, what I've seen so far, I mean, granted, I've been doing some other work, but I've seen some guys, and basically what we've come up with is, once we leave here, it's done. And they are essentially leaving right now, so it's done.

Today's done, and there's more opportunity out there. 28 per cent-ish of a tournament is done, so we've got 72 per cent left. That is a lot of opportunity, which makes for, you know, I would say just an ability to go out and show off and show the true character of this team, which I've been very proud of since the very beginning.

Q. Okay. I'm sorry, the health thing, can you delve into it a little deeper and give us a better understanding?

ZACH JOHNSON: We're just fighting things, I mean, internally. It's kind of passed around a little bit, caddies, players. It is what it is. But it's nothing more than that. Guys are fighting and playing regardless. I mean, it's not anything that's kind of weighed us down because of the depth we have and because of the many options we think we have.

Q. You're quoted as saying, "Extremely proud of what they have done." When we look at the scoreboard, 6 1/2, 1 1/2, we are trying to understand what part of that you're proud about.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, from my vantage point, it's extremely easy. I'm extremely proud of their fight and their



character. I think when you have adversity and when you have challenge, you can kind of go one of two ways, and they decided to do it with class and character.

I think in time that positive, I think it can breed momentum. I think it's just a matter of time. I believe in these guys. It's not like I -- this is just the start. I am proud of the way they have gone about their business. Tip my cap to the European Team for playing great golf. Our time's coming.

Q. When your team left here this evening, do they feel the same way you do right now?

ZACH JOHNSON: Based on the rhetoric I've heard and the text messages I've received, yes, completely. I've got leaders on the team, obviously vice captains, but I've got leaders on this team that are stepping forward, and these guys are ready. They are leaving it here. They are frustrated, certainly. But they are leaving it all here.

Q. And one last thing. Who would you say the leaders are this week?

ZACH JOHNSON: Those are the kind of things I'd like to keep within the team, thanks.

Q. Is Rickie Fowler sitting in the morning session because of illness?

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm not going to get specific on individual guys. I don't think that's fair. I think it's irresponsible to say who is playing for what reason and who is not for what reason.

I mean, I'm not -- to say that all -- you know, I'm not going to get into that.

Q. What's your biggest regret of the first day?

ZACH JOHNSON: What's my biggest regret? I don't know if I have any regrets. That's sport. This is golf. I mean, this happens. I mean, it's -- these guys are athletes on both sides. Anybody can beat anybody at any given moment.

So to say I have a regret, I've trusted in my process. I feel like it still works. It did not go in our favour today. It does not mean it can't tomorrow, and certainly on Sunday.

Regrets, I mean, you know, I'm of the mindset that there's still ample opportunity out there, and that's the way I look at it. I don't like delving into the negativity because there's still so much positivity -- positivity around the team and in their mentality, and certainly in mine.

Q. I take it you obviously didn't see this coming. But are you able to say what exactly has happened or why it's happened?

ZACH JOHNSON: I think it's pretty simple. From my vantage, granted, I can't see every shot, no one can, right, but from my vantage, it looks like The European Team executed golf shots a little bit better than we did today, and that's golf.

So you tip the cap to Luke and his team.

Q. I imagine you guys are going to fight to the end. What gives you confidence that a comeback is possible?

ZACH JOHNSON: Because of the 12 guys in my team room. Every one of them is feisty. Every one of them is hungry. Every one of them plays golf for the right reasons in the Ryder Cup.

Q. Just wanted to read a quote to you, if I may, from Brooks Koepka from earlier, referring to Jon Rahm and the second eagle put that he pulled off today when Koepka said, "I mean, I want to hit a board and pout just like Jon Rahm did. But you know, it is what it is. Act like a child. But we're adults. We move on." It sounds like Brooks is upset about something with that shot. I wonder if you could shed any light on that for us, please.

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't know what that's referring to.

Q. I think it's the way that --

ZACH JOHNSON: Jon hit a wall.

Q. I think, I had it explained to me, it's the way the ball was struck so hard, it hit the back of the hole and went in, it was kind of like a lucky shot.

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh.

Q. But Brooks seems to have taken it very hard.

ZACH JOHNSON: I'm sure Brooks is frustrated, like all 12 of us, 18 of us are, frustrated, with today and the result.

The way I see it is Jon -- were they 1-down going into that hole; is that right?

Q. To tie the match.

ZACH JOHNSON: And the only thing you probably can't do in that situation, because we had two birdie putts, was

to leave it short. So he executed his shot, played the percentages properly; meaning, you've got to get it to the hole, and the ball went in. Tip of the cap. Great putt.

Q. Sorry, may I just follow up. I know you've been talking about the health thing. Going to take a bit of a punt here, but is it like a head cold thing? I noticed quite a few of your players have been sniffing a lot in their press conferences this week.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yes, we have got some congestion and some just signs of things that are unfortunate. It's one of those where sometimes the energy is probably a little low, but the ability and desire to go out and play is still there. That's what we are weighing. Every one of them still wants to play every match, which is encouraging.

Q. But it's spreading through your team?

ZACH JOHNSON: It kind of has, yeah, I'm being honest, yes, it has. It has spread through my team.

Q. We all know about the mental and physical strains of playing in the Ryder Cup, and a lot of your players haven't competed in some time, since the FedEx. Do you feel that had anything at all to do with the rustiness this morning?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, we did look at some of that, those notions. It's one of those, you can hash it out a number of different ways. We've seen success when you do play into big tournaments, whether it's a major or a Ryder Cup or whatever, we've seen success.

We've also looked at and found success with a lot of rest off. There's something to be said about rest and recovery and preparation, too. I don't know if it's fair to, you know, go one way or the other on that. It's too subjective and too -- well, it's just impossible to really predict that.

Q. None of the players have actually said they weren't feeling a hundred per cent? None of the players who went out said they weren't feeling a hundred per cent?

ZACH JOHNSON: Physically?

Q. Yeah. Or mentally?

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, no, you mean before the week started?

Q. Yeah.

ZACH JOHNSON: No, they were all hungry and ready. Still are.

Q. Luke was in here earlier and said obviously being the home -- having the home-field advantage, one of the things you do is try to set up the course to your strengths. Curious what you thought about the setup today, being the opposing team, the away team.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, the setup is basically what we saw two weeks -- two and a half weeks? Two and a half weeks ago. And when we left two and a half weeks ago, our guys loved it.

And when we got here this week, the setup was extremely similar. If the greens have been fluctuated in speed, it's been by a minuscule amount, either way, I don't know. You'd have to ask the greens crew. What I'm saying is the consistency of what we saw two weeks ago and this week has been tremendous.

So again, hats off to the greenskeepers. I think they have done an amazing job. I think the course is beyond worthy of a championship of this magnitude.

I think whatever Luke or his team or the greenskeepers did, I mean, we can all tell that there's -- a test of a good golf course is one that requires all shots to be fired and your whole arsenal to be on, and I think Marco Simone does that very, very well.

And then you compound that with the fans who are absolutely tremendous. I mean, this place is spectacular right now.

TOM CARLISLE: Thank you, everyone. Zach, thank you for your time.

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