

Dubai Duty Free Irish Open

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Thomastown, County Kilkenny, Ireland

Mount Juliet Estate

Padraig Harrington

Press Conference

CLARE BODEL: Obviously we are approaching what is going to be an exceptionally busy time for you. You've got The Ryder Cup hurtling towards you, but you're still very, very focused on playing and here you are back at the Irish Open. Tell us how much you are looking forward to competing this week.

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I am actually enjoying the week so far. I'm looking forward to it. I've been quite relaxed. I've been very relaxed, actually, up until I've been asked all these questions now in the interviews; I'm starting to think about it. Up till now I've been enjoying it. I appreciate that we're at Mount Juliet. This venue always lends itself to being a very nice host. Everybody enjoys it here. The weather obviously helps. I think all of the players that have come in, the European players are loving it. What often happens, we Irish players take it to heart if our event isn't special, and we do feel like it's special this week. So that's a good thing.

As regards me, yeah, I see some nice form. I'm always working away at things and trying to get my game in shape. At the moment I'm working more on my mental game. That's a good sign. That's normally when you get the better results. Somewhat focused on The Open in two weeks' time, but that kind of helps because this week, it's all about getting things right. You can't just turn up and it's not like a light switch where you just turn it on and off. It takes a bit of time.

But I saw some good green shots last week, and it's following on this week so far and hopefully I'll keep doing it and play my game, do my stuff and hopefully Sunday with a few holes to go, I have a chance and enjoy those feelings of being stressed out under pressure for the last couple of holes.

Q. In your role as Ryder Cup Captain, are you a little bit disappointed that the lads didn't make the effort to come here this week?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: No. No, not at all. I fully understand this is an incredibly busy schedule. You know,



just because I'm The Ryder Cup captain and I'm Irish doesn't mean that, you know, that they should be taking any notice of the Irishness in my Ryder Cup Captain. I'm the European Ryder Cup Captain. I want to see players play wherever they play, I want to see them play well, and as I keep telling my team, the best thing they can do to make it into The Ryder Cup is look after their own games. Go out there, like Jon Rahm, and win a major. Go out and win tournaments. That is the best possible way of impressing me is playing good golf.

So whether they play extra events, I think players will -- come closer to the date when it gets tight, some players will add in events. But at the moment, I'm comfortable that everybody has to do what's in their own best interests to play good golf and that will suit me the best when it comes around to September.

Q. What do you remember of the course?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: It's always been a golf course the players have liked playing. Essentially, there's maybe six, eight, really tough shots, not necessarily -- half a hole where you've got to hit -- obviously it's a tough shot into 3. Tee shot on 2 is a good tee shot. Tough shot into 3, the par 3. 4 is a perfect example. It's a tough tee shot and a really tough second shot but if you hit two good ones you're going to make birdie. So the scoring tends to be low because it kind of forces you into hitting good shots at times. If you play those holes well, there's plenty of opportunities. The par 5s can be reached.

So, yeah, there's going to be birdies made, some eagles made. If you can avoid any sort of disasters or anything that really hits you hard this week, I think you're going to end up shooting a good score. The greens have always been good to hold putts on. They have always been a great surface here. It is interesting when I think back to the course, I remember the bunkers being a lot deeper. There's slopes there, but the golf course has changed a little bit. Those bunkers were deep. They are not as intimidating as they were back in the day.

But in general, it looks like it's going to be not as good of scoring as those World events but the fairways are narrower and there's more rough around the place. But in general, this golf course, people like it and enjoy it and will

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shoot good scores object on it.

Q. You said not too long ago that Ian Poulter and Sergio would have to break a leg not to be on your Ryder Cup Team. Why did you say that publically and not privately? Does that put you under pressure to pick them?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, it's evidence of somebody getting picked, you would get picked now. Come September, the thing will be picked and it will be based on what I see at that stage in my vice captains.

Poulter and Sergio are two guys that have a Ryder Cup record that deserve more consideration than anybody when it comes to playing, as does Martin Kaymer, too. They are players who have done a lot in The Ryder Cup and that means a lot, adds a lot to it. I'm a strong proponent of the two guys you mentioned., you know, I'd like them to play their way into the team, I'd be a strong pro postseason tent, they have an expansive advantage on others.

Q. We spoke to Graeme McDowell earlier and he said the last 18 months have been tough, but he's not ready to walk away. He's going to reset and try to get back to where he was. He's a Ryder Cup vice captain of yours. Can he get back to where he was ten years ago or five years ago, contending for majors? The Graeme McDowell now is not the Graeme McDowell you'll know five or ten years ago.

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah but you can't be that person. You can't go back to who -- I'd be in that same boat. I can't be the guy who was out there in -- I'm a different person now. So I have to find a new motivation, new me.

Q. What do you think about Shane Lowry --

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: -- play your best golf, do your thing and Shane is doing that nicely at the moment. He's in nice form, no doubt about it.

Q. We spoke to Graeme McDowell earlier and he said that the last sort of 18 months have been very tough, but he's not ready to walk away. He wants to reset and try to get back to where he was. He's a Ryder Cup vice captain of yours. What advice did you give to him and do you feel he's someone -- he's 42, they can get back to where he was five or ten years ago contending for majors? He's dipped off a little bit. The Graeme McDowell is not the Graeme McDowell you'll know from five or ten years ago?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, but you can't be that person. You can't go back to somebody you were. You have to reinvent yourself and find out who you are now. I'd be in that same boat. I can't be the guy that was out there in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010. I'm a different person now.

So I have to find a new motivation and a new me, and I've had that chat with Graeme. It's not a question of -- we're talking about Ryder Cup, but we do talk about our individual selves. I think Graeme knows -- well, he'll have to find it out for himself but he has an idea what he wants to do. You never try and go back. You just find new motivations, a new way of going about what you did. Clearly you have experience, but it's your perception of what you did and who you were back then is different, anyway, but you just can't be that person. You were a different person. So find a new version of yourself.

Q. You've been playing very good golf over the last 18 months or, and you doing what Phil did recently and you're only a few months off from a big birthday. Where do you think you'll be in the next few years? Will you try to stay on the main tour or start dipping your toe on the seniors tours?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, speaking about this, there's no doubt that, not a regret, but a mistake, was trying to stretch myself too thin on two tours as it is playing The European Tour and the PGA TOUR over the last number of years. I think a third tour, the Champions Tour, could even make it worse. It's just hard to compete when you're not playing as many events as the other guys, and I'm maybe stretching it out too much in each tour. Yeah, so I have to think about where I am at. I really don't know if -- I just don't know. I know if you don't go to the Champions Tour quickly, you can lose -- miss a real window of opportunity. But if I was still competitive on the main tours, you know, I kind of also feel that you're not coming -- if you go to the Champions Tour, you're not coming back. It's a different competition. I don't think you're going to come back to the younger guys after being out there.

So you either go, give it 100 percent, but if I'm still competitive on the main tours, trying to win a tournament on The European Tour or the PGA TOUR, trying to be the oldest guy to win a tournament and the possibility, I'd still dream about winning a major. The possibility of winning a major, I know if I want to win another major, I have to stick with the young guys and put myself under that pressure and stress and familiarity week-in, week-out.

It's a lot of things are up in the air. That's all I can say. Just see how the summer goes and how I feel about my game.

Q. You mentioned majors, your finish in the PGA TOUR, are you into The Open now?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Absolutely, I would be, anyway for The Open. Maybe after the PGA, because it was the style of golf course that we played, windy golf course, kind of played like a links golf course, gave me a little bit of extra confidence that given the right conditions and the right golf course, I can be very competitive with the game I have. I think over the last number of years, you feel a little bit on edge that you just need nearly an out-of-body performance in order to win a major tournament. But given the right golf course, I actually feel quite comfortable that I can do it within myself, and that's a nice place to be. You never want to feel like you need to have an extra special week. You just need to have your own good week.

Q. What do you think about coming back to Mount Juliet, will that help the confidence?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I do actually think we will have a great week. I know it's a limited number of fans, but the atmosphere of this golf course, Mount Juliet, lends itself really well to hosting a golf tournament. It has a nice atmosphere and there's always a nice buzz around the golf course. There's a couple of nice areas. It seems to be a very warm place. It's hot here today. But there's lots of little areas where the crowds can gather and create that sort of buzz and atmosphere.

So I do think Mount Juliet is a great venue and I think we will appreciate this week. I think all of the players will appreciate the limited fans and everything that's put on here.

Q. Shane Lowry earlier suggested that the schedule of the Irish Open, the week after The Open it might have more players. Do you agree with that?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I know they have tried that. It's a difficult, difficult task these days to get the perfect -- the sweet spot when it comes to a tournament date. Yeah, they definitely tried the week after The Open. I'm pretty sure they have.

I personally liked the two links tournaments into The Open. That seemed to be a very good, made good sense, that sort of links run. Yeah, you know, it swings in roundabouts. A lot of people take the week off after The Open, a lot of people. So it's hard to know where the perfect date is. And that really is something for the tournament promotor and the European Tour to figure out where they can get the best date, the best players, and what will attract them. You know, individually players, I

know Shane -- I think this is a good week for Shane. I know it's probably before his time but didn't we used to play The Irish Open after -- as a kid, before Shane's time, maybe ten years ago (laughs).

Yeah, look, it's up for the tournament to figure out the best dates and talk to the players about what works. I certainly like it in the date it's in, two weeks beforehand. It would suit it on a links golf course. That would give it a nice three-week run but the attraction of coming to a nice venue like Mount Juliet, I think for the main European Tour players, they would prefer to be here.

Q. You've been making the point for the past number of weeks, you wanted to be a competitive golfer as well as a Ryder Cup Captain. Is St. George's going to be a cutoff for that?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I think I've already had that cutoff in my head. Everything, as much as I'm here playing golf and trying to do a little bit of this and that, the first priority is The Ryder Cup and what goes with that. If something comes up for The Ryder Cup, that goes into the schedule first and everything fits around it. Maybe up till a month or two ago, I'd still be looking 50/50 at my own golf. Now, no, absolutely Ryder Cup first and my golf second.

I can still play golf and I can still go out there and who knows I might even play better with the distraction. But when it comes to a list of my priorities, The Ryder Cup is first and foremost and everything else comes after.

Q. Viktor Hovland, did you see similarities with him and young Sergio when he first came on the team?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I hope so, yeah. You know, absolutely, Europe could do with another Sergio García for the future. That's a big deal for Europe to have somebody to drive The Ryder Cup over the next 20 years. Jon Rahm clearly looks like he could be that man and -- sorry, Viktor could also follow in his footsteps, two players that are exciting and very positive players, full of enthusiasm and full of energy. They really could be stalwarts of The Ryder Cup. We do need a changing of the guard in that sense. I would be strongly thinking, I would see what Sergio has done and what Ian Poulter has done for The Ryder Cup over the years and I would strongly favour them when it comes to the picks at the end of the year.

But you know, both of them know that time is running out for them and the future has to be the younger guys so that the likes of Viktor and Jon Rahm who were going to be driving that at the younger end of it, like even Rory is now -- he's middle-age Ryder Cup player at this stage. So it is nice to see Viktor Hovland coming along and there could

be ten Ryder Cups in him.

Q. You touched on it earlier but do you think there is still a major in you?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Oh, I dream of it. Who cares about reality? Somebody sitting at home -- but what gets me up in the morning is another major. What gets me out practising, the reason I work so hard at this game is another major. Sometimes, maybe I should be considering the steppingstones to another major and just competing well and finishing Top-10s and making cuts even and progressing that way. But that really doesn't do it for me. The chance of winning a major is everything. You know, that's what gives me a buzz, and to be honest, there's not many things that would change my resumé when it comes to golf. There's not something that would really change what I've done. Even winning another major isn't that big a deal, from three to four. But it's something I dream about. Maybe winning a Ryder Cup would be something that I can put on and add to my resumé there.

But outside of that, there are very few things that get you excited in golf when you've had success, and I do think Jack Nicklaus was the best one, when things started to tail off for him, he said he didn't feel the butterflies on the Thursday. You need that excitement and pressure and enthusiasm, and majors kind of still do that for me. I dream about it, whether it's a reality or not, who cares? It's what I focus on and that's all that I need for my motivation.

Q. If you had a choice between winning The Ryder Cup as captain and winning a major, which would you choose?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I would choose The Ryder Cup as captain right now. Going from three to four majors, it's nice. But adding a winning Ryder Cup Captain, that's something big in my career and would add to it, no doubt about it. I would right -- right now, I would definitely take The Ryder Cup captain. And after September, I'll say, I'll take two more majors after that.

CLARE BODEL: Thank you very much.

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