

# Horizon Irish Open

Tuesday, 5 September, 2023

*Straffan, County Kildare, Ireland*

*The K Club, Ryder Course*

## Padraig Harrington

### Press Conference



**Q. Delighted to welcome Padraig Harrington here to the Horizon Irish Open. Padraig, we're back at the K Club this year, and obviously back in Ireland. Just how nice is it to be home and playing in front of home fans this week?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: It's brilliant. Obviously this is very close to my home. I spent most of my summer practice down here, so very familiar. This is very close to my home. This is where I do my practice when I'm at home.

Love the fact that we'll have the Irish fans out as I expect -- not because of the weather, but because we haven't had a got in this area for a while. The crowds are going to be big, enormous. The support is going to be brilliant. The weather is going to be great.

All we really have to do as the Irish golfers is play a bit of good golf.

**Q. You obviously have the Make-a-Wish Ireland logo on your shoulder there and do a lot of work with kids from Ireland and obviously around the world, but they're the official charity partner of the tournament this week. How important is it for you to have that relationship and to stay involved in the community?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, I've been an ambassador for Make-a-Wish here in Ireland for a good while. We do -- I think all the golfers -- I think golfers are pretty good -- we're in position to do incredibly well at the golf course. I think a lot of players have their own foundations and do a lot of support.

Some of the reason is we give back because we're in such a great position. Make-a-Wish, like a couple of the charities I work with, when you actually do something, it can be quite dramatic. You have a child who is terminally ill or very ill, and that can be difficult, but when you do it, you just gain so much yourself from being there and helping out and helping a family -- usually it's the brothers and sisters and parents there, as well, and you just realise

how privileged you are, but like a lot of times when you do stuff -- I'm going to do this clinic now. It's Tuesday of the Irish Open, and we're busy and it's a stressful week, I come down here, yeah, I'm going to do this. I will get so much back from doing this, and anybody who ever gets a chance to work with Make-a-Wish, the value you get back from doing it, it's incredible. It's one of the best things you can do in life is help out like that.

As I said, it helps us feel good about ourselves, considering how privileged a life we lead and how financially well we do at golf, it's nice that we can give back.

**Q. On that, you're donating 500 for birdies and a thousand for eagles, so that's yourself and Shane, and obviously Seamus Power is unfortunately not here, but I think he might be making a contribution, too, so just a nice way to give back.**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, it's obviously -- I suppose an event where it gets a little bit of attention, and any attention we can bring to Make-a-Wish is I'm sure much appreciated.

Hopefully, gee, I'd love to pay a little out. I really would. It would be a very nice week at that.

**Q. I don't know how much you watched the Ryder Cup picks yesterday. Was it a relief you weren't in that position again, or did you enjoy it? What were your thoughts on the selections?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, I did get a very polite phone call from Luke telling me I wasn't getting picked. I think that was polite rather than necessary.

I think we all were very aware of what the picks were going to be looking from the outside. I didn't have an inside track or anything.

I think Europe is very strong this year. I think we're back -- I believe we're back to the '80s, the '70s where our top players are actually the best players in the world. So I think the team is very strong. I think they're very much in



form.

I feel for Adrian Meronk. I think he's a class player and is going to be a great player for the future, but unfortunately a lot of times at the Ryder Cup, when you're sitting in the hot seat the last month or two, the guys who are challenging -- it's like being a leader on the leaderboard; the guys coming behind free up a little bit, and Nicolai obviously did great over the last couple of tournaments in order to steal the limelight.

It's tough for Adrian. There always seems to be one spot at the end that's -- I really feel for him. Lovely player, lovely kid, and he will play Ryder Cups in the future and do well anyway. But it's tough when you miss out.

I know I missed out in '97 ultimately by about 13,000 Euros.

As I said, it's interesting, I played with Seve all that summer. All summer I remember playing with him here and all the time, and I seemed to be drawing him, and at the end of it, he didn't really want me on his team, but at the end of it he was very nice and said, you know what, you will have your time.

I think Adrian will have his time, as well.

**Q. Just on the subject of Ludvig Aberg, if there were a similar player doing similar things when you were about to pick your team, could you see yourself doing the same as Luke and picking him on obviously not just potential but current ability?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Oh, I think Ludvig was a simple pick at the end. Like I don't think it was in any question at the very end.

I think two weeks prior, it would have been a big pick. It would have been a pick based on stats rather than necessary results, but his results have been fantastic the last two weeks, and that's actually why you have a closing date. You're trying to get current form into your team, and Ludvig has proved it.

He's hit the ground running. The way he delivered the last two weeks, I'm sure he went over -- it would be hard to believe that there was a European player that wouldn't have supported the pick in the end, whereas two weeks previously, they would have all been, whoa, (indiscernible) but he played great. So fully deserved it.

Looking forward to seeing him in the Ryder Cup, too. Again, I think we've got a good strong team. One of the most important things with that team is you never want to

play anybody -- relying on guys to play four times, the chance of winning your singles is greatly diminished, and you're the best player, obviously, if you've played four times.

We need a strong pool of players so that some of the very top players can be rested for the singles. I think that's the most important thing is that all the players play well. We have the best players at the top for sure, but we need all of them to play well so the best players can sit out at least one match.

**Q. When you got the call from Luke, was it asking to be vice captain? Would you like to be in that team room?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: No, no. I've been talking to Luke all year. He's been a very good captain to have passed the baton on to. He's rang me several times looking for little bits of information, kept me informed, kept me included, and I made it very much aware to him all the time that it was his tournament now and I had passed on the baton. He didn't need me in there as vice captain for sure. He's got to do his own thing now.

He was a great vice captain for me. We were both vice captains in 2018, as well. He was very good on the job, and I know he's going to be an excellent captain.

As I said, all through the last year, he's been great, as I said, so I'm very comfortable that I've passed on the baton, and he can go and do his job without me looking over his shoulder.

**Q. You were saying you've been down here practising, obviously with an eye on this tournament. It seems a long time since 2007 when you made that breakthrough for an Irishman last winning an Irish Open.**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, strangely enough, as it's turned out, it's been great preparation for this tournament. I'm not stressed today that I need to go out and play the golf course. I'm going to play 18 holes in the pro-am tomorrow because I've played quite a bit here during the summer.

But the reason I come here is because it's really as good a golf course as I've seen around the world for tournament practice. You can come here any stage, if you're hitting that shot into -- what are we calling the course this week? Is it the championship 18 or the Ryder Cup 18? Because I play it a different way.

But if you're hitting into the -- hitting the tee shot on the old

16th in the middle of the winter and the second shot into there, they're tournament golf shots. This course has a lot of tournament golf shots that you can come down here and really have to be into it. It's a great golf course.

For a tournament, there's so many exciting shots on the course. You can remember Rory's second into what we call the 16th of the championship course and the 18th, but the 16th is that one that was an incredible golf shot. There's so many risk-reward, do-or-die shots out here. It's a fabulous golf course to come and play, and I've got to say, the Smurfits were very good to me, and Michael Fetherston has carried that on. It's unbelievable how welcome he makes the pros and the young players when they come down here and lets us have the run of the place.

From what I hear from other pros, it's not like that any other place in the world. We genuinely -- I could go out there and put a bag of balls down on the fairway and he'd probably close the hole if I asked him. Just fantastic.

**Q. You just touched on the 16th hole there. Rory actually got shot of the year for his shot into the 18th.**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: The 16th is probably one of the greatest golf shots ever hit. If I was Russell Knox standing on that fairway, I would have clapped, because if you have to hit a wedge to the back pin on that hole, it's incredibly difficult. It's probably the hardest golf shot, a wedge in there, let alone hitting a wood in there, and if he misses the shot, the tournament is over. Russell Knox has it won.

Like as good a shot as it was, if you're on the receiving end, that must be one of the hardest shots to be on the receiving end of because the difficulty level on pulling it off at that moment -- I know your back is to the wall and you have to hit the shot, but the shot at 18, I'm sure -- not even close to the shot into 16. I would have fallen into the Liffey I think.

**Q. Padraig, Thomas Björn was on the range yesterday and he was just saying he was glad Shane was in the team; he's a guy that makes people better in the team room. Did you see that?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: There's no doubt that Shane is -- he's a big-time player who likes the big occasions, the majors, and at the Ryder Cup he was very, very comfortable. Wasn't like a rookie at all in the sense he just knows the bigger, pressure-filled occasions.

It's strange seeing some of the part-time people who aren't in the know saying maybe somebody else should have gotten picked, and they might have named Shane. I'm going, it's not even close. Shane is, when it comes to -- if

we were playing a small tournament in the middle of nowhere, maybe Shane wouldn't be the right pick, but when it comes to the Ryder Cup, I definitely can trust in him.

He is very good with the rest of the team. There's no doubt about it. He can partner up. He can play foursomes and four-ball. In order to play foursomes and four-ball, you need to be a good ball striker, and that's what Shane is.

That versatility is very important for Luke, to have somebody who can play 12 sets. Sometimes you get stuck with a player -- sometimes players can be one-dimensional, but Shane is going to fit in very nicely and be able to play whatever is required.

**Q. Thomas said he was an easy player to motivate and that you guys know how to push his buttons.**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I'd say he was actually holding back when it came to motivating. Yeah, I think there's no doubt he's going to be up for it, loving it, excited..

But I'd say he's experienced enough, as well. It's very important the week of the Ryder Cup that you do have a level of balance and chill because to play five matches, it's a lot of stress. If you get a player who's ball of nerves and stress, again, he's going to burn himself out before you gets to the singles.

Shane is not like that. He's very comfortable. He'll be motivated. He'll be there. Good person to be around. You want to have that sort of relaxed people around, as well. You don't need to have the stress balls in the team room because obviously that brings a dead weight.

**Q. You're playing with Tom McKibbin. Just wondering what you make of him.**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Beautiful ball striker. I think obviously his game is -- it's class the way he finished off the tournament, playing to his own strengths. I think Dave McNeilly did a great job. I've got to say I was so impressed with Dave McNeilly. It was great that he let Tom play his game. So many caddies would have gone, hit an iron off the last and start getting in his head.

Even if he'd won the tournament, he's still getting in his head for the next time when he comes to the 18th: Should I be hitting driver, should I be hitting an iron. Dave let him play to his strengths. I think it was the par-5, 15th, he hit a driver down there toward the back of the hole where Marcel had hit a 3-wood into the hazard.

That sort of thing, if a caddie steps in and he can take the

confidence away from a player if he says, oh, I think you should start hitting iron now, that's a big deal. So Tom was -- Dave was fantastic. Tom is a great ball striker, and I think the future is very bright for him.

I've played a few practice rounds with him. I look forward to playing with him during the week.

Looking from the outside, if there's anything Tom has to deal with himself, it's going to be expectations. We all say he's great. We all love the way he hits it. But unfortunately as good a player as you can be in golf, there's a lot of things that go into every week winning, and you need the right breaks.

I think sometimes you just have to understand and be patient and wait for your good weeks, and it just doesn't happen all the time.

I think there's a lot of -- we put pressure on Tom by telling him how good he is, and that can be hard to manage and deal with. He doesn't need to go to the range and find anything at all. He just needs to realise he's going to play golf the next 30 years, and he's going to have lots of good weeks and be patient and wait for it.

**Q. You were very complimentary about Rory's shot into 16. How did it compare to your 3-wood out of a bunker at Hazeltine that Tiger Woods said was worth of price of admission on its own?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: It comes down to -- it doesn't compare. It doesn't even come close.

It's great to hit a great golf shot, which it was at Hazeltine. But hitting a good shot when you're under pressure, that feels good.

It goes back to the old Bob Burns quote: It's easy to hit a great shot when you're feeling good. It's difficult to hit a good shot when you're feeling bad.

I don't know what state Rory was in that day, if he was in a pretty good state of mind, but he hit a shot when he had to. Those are the most important things in golf. Hitting great shots -- you can go up to the range and just stand on the range watching other people hit golf balls, you'd never be able to play yourself. But when you get on the golf course and the pressure is on, that's when you can -- that's when we actually play for, or at least I have always -- you play for the situation where your back is to the wall and you're under pressure and you're stressed and you have to hit a golf shot.

Easily, as I said, it would have to be -- it's amazing that it

didn't win shot -- it would have to be one of the greatest shots ever hit. I know that hole. It's hard to hit a good shot, get it up on that back tier, as I said, if I'm going in there with a wedge or a 9-iron or a sand wedge, whatever it is. Like it's just an incredibly difficult shot.

My hit doesn't compare. I know it's nice that Tiger said it was worth the price of admission. But it's like I always say, if somebody asks me the best shot I ever hit, they always expect I'm going to say the 5-wood into the 71st hole at Birkdale, but I'll always say it was the chip shot on the 72nd hole at Carnoustie because I was in such a bad spot, a low end. When things are at their worst and you can pull something out, that's the most satisfying feeling in golf.

But yeah, poor Russell Knox.

**Q. Except for the result, why is Whistling Straits such a point of pride for those players that were on the team two years ago?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think it's only the result. I think it was a good team, great attitude. Everybody did everything that I could have asked them.

I think we just caught it on our turndown, their upturn. That one extra year of COVID, our team went from peaking to slightly off and never could come back, and I said at the end of that Ryder Cup, I said in numerous interviews, many of these players are going to go on to play their best golf going forward, and they have. You look at Tommy Fleetwood's playing, you look at Matt Fitz won a major, you look at Tyrrell Hatton playing great, Viktor Hovland.

The U.S. Team were peaking. That extra year got them into a great place. Many of the players were probably at their very peak in the U.S. at that stage. If you start looking at the names now with two years of hindsight, they were at the top of their game and the Europeans are only coming into that now.

Europe has gotten a lot stronger in those two years, and the U.S. -- I don't want to say that they're weakening in any shape or form, but certainly there's a number of players that were at their peak at that moment.

It's just ebbs and flows in the game of golf. I think the flow was with Europe then.

**Q. You mentioned earlier, you said that Luke has got to do his own thing. Do you think this team has got Luke's fingerprint on it?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You can be sure of it. I think people underestimated Luke all his life, and he knows that,

too. You don't get to World No. 1, you don't do what he has done in the game of golf without being a hard nut underneath. Just because he's quiet, people don't understand. He has that team well motivated.

As I said, I saw him as vice captain, and I was very -- he was a great vice captain, very impressed, very comfortable as a vice captain, and I believe he will be a great captain, and I believe he is a great captain. I believe he's doing a great job from what I hear and see, and he is, as I said, just because he's quiet doesn't make him -- he's not quiet in the team room. He will have those guys ready to go.

**Q. You talked about trying to make history as the oldest player to win on the DP World Tour. Is that one of your main motivations, and are you using your age as a positive motivation?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, there's not a lot I could do in golf that would change my ceiling. At this stage what I've done in golf, it starts with the majors, obviously, and things like that, that actually would get on to the page.

Like if I turned up in a major and finished fifth, wouldn't even register. It's great, but in the scheme of what I've done, it's irrelevant. So what can I do that's a little bit different, that can motivate me.

Obviously if I can win a regular tour event, a European Tour event and become the oldest, from Miguel -- Phil obviously, and then Miguel -- but it doesn't matter, I'd beat both of them. If I win, I'm the oldest.

It would be something different. You're always trying to find a goal, and this is very much a part -- I've come and played one-off events in Europe, and I've done okay at times. But I feel like I'm playing fine at the moment.

Form, just going to Dunhill, because I wanted to get more of a flow at the tournaments. You need to be playing regularly in tournaments in order to -- you can't just pitch up and play in one event. So I've sacrificed playing probably six Champions Tour events in order to play these five European Tour events hoping that I'll get comfortable in the environment, comfortable -- you might ask comfortable; comfortable means meeting people every week in this -- it becomes normal rather than having to stop, have a chat, do this.

As I've told the Tour staff today, you have me in training at this stage that I've logged in to DP and registered myself. The first two weeks I'm like, how do I use this, what am I doing. Now I just do it.

You just can't get the flow by playing more and more

tournaments, so I'm hoping I get a bit more comfortable, and as I said, that I can finish out the 72-hole event in fine form, and who knows, it could be -- it's a goal to win, and it would be something different.

**Q. Regarding your conversations with Luke, has he asked you anything very specific that you've given him advice on? If not, what would you?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think Luke asks the questions. He's very, very straight and asked direct questions during the year. Whenever he's talked to me, it's been pretty, what's happened in this situation, what's the program -- before he took the captaincy, just little details you've got to find out from previous captains. As I said, he's been -- I'd even say he's been -- from what I've seen, he's asked the right questions. He's been -- the fact that he's asked, he's been exceptionally respectful to me as a former captain, and that's been great. You've got to appreciate that.

As I said, I thought he was a great vice captain, and I'm pretty sure he's going to be -- I'm sure he's an excellent captain. He has been so far.

**Q. What's the best piece of advice you've given him?**

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: He's asked me specific questions. I'm not going to give you the answers.

Obviously if they're direct questions they're between me and him. I can't say there was anything -- like it wasn't anything mind-blowing or controversial. He didn't ask me who to pick or anything like that. Nothing like that. So he's been his own man, but I've liked what I've seen.

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