

Amgen Irish Open

Wednesday, 3 September, 2025

Straffan, County Kildare, Ireland

The K Club

Luke Donald

Press Conference

AMGEN
IRISH OPEN

 **DP WORLD TOUR**

THE MODERATOR: Your team is set. You're ready to go. How nice is it to have another milestone ticked off?

LUKE DONALD: It is. I think for a captain, the last few weeks are always the toughest for a captain in terms of the decision making, the stress of telling people they're not playing. Yeah, there's always that push by lots of players. But it's always nice once the team is formed. You can really nail down the sort of things that you really want to get across.

But yeah, excited about where we are. I think we have 12 very, very strong players that have a lot of continuity from two years ago. Very exciting the next few weeks, and yeah, can't wait for it to get going.

Q. Of course on the golf course you've got two good events starting this week with the Amgen Irish Open. How much are you looking forward to this week as an event itself?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, it's nice to have a little bit of time just on the golf course where I'm not thinking about the job at hand so much, just concentrating a little bit on my own game, which has been way back in the priorities the last few weeks. Any good golf this week will be a bonus, but this week is obviously a great week in terms of just the reaction we get from the crowds and the welcome and just even this morning, nine holes, just hearing all the "good lucks" and "go win in Bethpage." It's a good feel factor.

Wentworth is obviously our best event on the European Tour, on the DP World Tour, and I think it's a fun time for me to get with some of the players as well and just start that building process.

Q. When you were leaving Rome two years ago, could you have envisaged you would have 11 players of those 12 from the team and another Højgaard as well?

LUKE DONALD: No, absolutely not. I think history would be against that. There's no time in the past where you even come close to that, maybe nine out of the 12 players

might have played consecutive Ryder Cups. Very unusual.

I think there's a lot of benefits to it, obviously, the continuity, some of the -- I think the players understand how I work. I feel like I've gained enough of their trust over this last two- or three-year period.

We'll certainly draw from some of those experiences that we were able to be so good for what we experienced in Rome, but as I said Monday with the pick show, this is a different Ryder Cup. It's a different challenge. It's certainly a little bit of a goal of mine not knowing that there was going to be 11 of 12 but to create something unique again.

I don't want to just bring everything that I brought to Rome and do the same things. Obviously there are lots of things that I felt like worked very well, and those will be implemented again, but there are new things to look at and new challenges and new strategies. Again, hopefully it's still a Ryder Cup with different themes, different motivations for the players, and yeah, different strategies for success.

Q. How important was it for you to get those 12 players on the reconnaissance two-day trip to Bethpage?

LUKE DONALD: Well, it's one thing that I think worked very well for us in Rome. We had never really had an organised practice trip before. Yeah, sort of the building of a unified team really started again on that -- I think it was a Monday between Irish and Wentworth, so the Monday of Wentworth we went over and we sort of started to form as a team then.

I think, again, Ryder Cups, sometimes at the beginning of the week, you feel like you sort of are trying to find your place and figure out what the plan is, and I think a lot of those decisions and team building was sort of done the week before or two weeks before. Very important, and it'll be important again this time around.

Q. Sergio was supposed to be here this week. He made a late withdrawal. Are you surprised he did that, because he did cite the fact that he did not make the

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Ryder Cup team as one of his, I suppose, excuses?

LUKE DONALD: Well, I think Sergio is disappointed like all the others that felt like they might have had a chance to make the team. Again, I don't tell people what to do with their schedules unless it's really close.

He fully understood that the Irish was after the qualification, after the team was picked. Unfortunately with Sergio I felt like his form wasn't quite good enough to make a team that was full of so many people playing well.

Q. When is the last time you went home, and will you get a chance to go home between now and the Ryder Cup?

LUKE DONALD: I was home last week. I had an interesting 48 hours before the pick show actually, a cancelled flight and some delays. Managed to get there on time but just barely. But I will be home after the practice trip for three or four days before the Ryder Cup.

Q. When it comes to picking the pairings, obviously the foursomes, how much does the ball come into factor? Is that one of the most important parts of it?

LUKE DONALD: It can be. I think certain players are very particular about what ball they play. Some people are quite good at adjusting. But certainly you can get to a stage where you feel like you have a great personality match, you have a great statistical match. They fit the golf course in the odds and evens, and then suddenly the golf ball doesn't work. It's certainly one of the factors we have to look at, and it can make a difference.

Q. Have you already worked all that out or are you still going through that?

LUKE DONALD: Pretty much. We're still going through it. Edoardo is here this week. Having a lot of dinners over the next coming days. Sat down last night. We'll sit down the next couple days as well just to sort of make sure we have a good plan in place.

Q. Obviously Bethpage is a notoriously difficult golf course. How are you going to prepare the players psychologically for some of the spots they might end up in or some of the adversity they might face, and how is it different preparing for a course like that during a match play event like the Ryder Cup compared to preparing to play Bethpage during a U.S. Open?

LUKE DONALD: Well, I expect the golf course to not be set up like a U.S. Open. Obviously these are 12

world-class players that understand how to prepare themselves in the right way, to get themselves primed for a big event like majors, like the Ryder Cup. I don't get involved with that. They have their team. They understand the best way to practise. Obviously we'll give them a pretty detailed statistical roadmap of what we think the course demands, what's happened in the past, what are things to maybe look at, and we give that to them, and they can use that however they want.

But again, individually it's really up to them and their teams to figure out exactly how they want to be primed for that week.

Q. Rory McIlroy talked about Novak Djokovic as a lesson in how to deal with a partisan crowd. You're obviously friendly with him. Have you bounced ideas off him or will you talk to him about that ahead of Bethpage?

LUKE DONALD: I've talked to lots of people. Novak was very gracious to come to our team room two years ago in Rome. I think someone that's been the best in a sport, the most majors won as a men's professional tennis player, not always the crowd favourite probably. He spoke to us in Rome about some of the ways he deals with that, and I think a lot of the players obviously would have heard that and taken that on board.

It's just great to have people who have excelled in their sport, that are the best of the best, telling you ways to think about things. You definitely get a different perspective because of that.

It's just very gracious of him to give us that information and his time.

Q. Obviously 11 of the 12 faces from before, but how have their roles maybe changed compared to what they were asked to do in 2023? You could argue that they're all stronger players, more accomplished players perhaps than they were a couple of years ago.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, I think you could definitely argue that. Definitely the profiles of some of the players have changed. You would have had some rookies that certainly have more experience now. You just look at someone like Bob, who had a great Ryder Cup in Rome but was a little bit wet behind the ears in terms of what to expect.

I think just someone like that, he's grown so much as a player. You can see it just from a statistical standpoint. Certainly whereas in Rome, someone like that, a rookie playing for the first time, you're probably not going to risk him in foursomes.



But he's got two years of experience under his belt now. He's improved as a player. His characteristics of what he's doing well in different parts of the game have changed. Again, we have to look at -- that's just one example. That's the same example for all 12. You have to look at how the players have changed over the last two years and then form your pairings. That's why I talk about it's not going to be exactly the same. I think it would be foolish of me to put exactly the same pairings out that I did in Rome, because these players are different and they have different strengths and different strategies.

Again, this is all things that we've been looking at and will be talking about over the coming days.

Q. Shane Lowry 2.0, how does that differ to the last time, and what will you be expecting from him? Rory is Rory.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, much more experience, again. Shane is someone who has experienced an away Ryder Cup, which is helpful. Again, one of the best iron players in the world. His game is a lot from his approach play, can be pretty solid off the tee. If anything his putting is the stuff that goes a little bit back and forward. It can be really, really good. He can have periods where it's a little bit down.

Again, you look at all these things and you try and, again, find out the best way to use them in the most effective way.

Q. Sepp Straka is not playing I don't believe next week. Is everything okay there? Obviously you picked him so can't be too much wrong.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, everything is okay. I don't think an official announcement has been made, but him and his wife welcomed their baby a few weeks ago prematurely. Everything is going extremely well with their baby. He just doesn't want to be so far away. I think that's only fair.

Had many conversations with Sepp. He's very motivated. He's going to be continuing to work on his game hard. He'll join us for the practice trip. But that's the reason why he won't be in Wentworth.

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