

Alfred Dunhill Links Championship

Wednesday, October 4, 2023

St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland

Tommy Fleetwood

Press Conference

TOM CARLISLE: We are pleased to be joined by Tommy Fleetwood here in the media centre at the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship.

I think first thing to ask is: Have you come down from Sunday yet.

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Not really. I think it still feels a bit surreal, really, and I think everybody, like the team, has still been messaging a lot and everybody is still very much enjoying watching the highlights back. Yeah, it's a strange feeling when you think about it, I can't believe the week's over. Just so happy that it finished the way it did and we achieved what we went there to do all together.

TOM CARLISLE: Coming to a week like this, obviously you've got a great history here winning a few years ago. How much are you looking forward to what this week brings?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, I'm excited. It's always an event that I've enjoyed. My dad actually said -- my dad is here this week. He has always been here to watch and I think this might be my 13th Dunhill Links Championship, so I think it's the event I've probably played the most on The European Tour.

It's an event that I've genuinely always really, really wanted to win and I always, still, I always kind of picture myself with the trophy on the Swilken Bridge and it's just not happened yet. I'm looking forward to playing today, practicing and then getting started, and I'll absolutely be giving it my all this week for sure.

Q. (On staying late on Sunday night in Rome.)

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I did beat it but not by far. The Sunday night of the Ryder Cup is such a cool and special night. I think when you get to celebrate with your teammates, and your family and the ones that have been there to support you, it's just a very special night. The Ryder Cup is there in the middle of the party and you know it's something that you've all achieved together. You're

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having pictures with it and you celebrate, but from the moment we finished, it's just such a high. I mean, I like that you assumed that I would be 1.30 and beat Fitzy but it wasn't that far off.

It's definitely the highlight right now. I was relieved, I'm still relieved right now that we managed to do it. I think me -- myself and Shane and Bob, we were having some physio in the morning at the golf club and all three of us said, we were joking, but we said we want no part of having to play a role in today's singles. And it sort of became apparent that it might come down to one of us, and there was a lot -- there was just a lot of red in the middle of the board but the games were still relatively close.

It's a strange one, I had asked Francesco in the morning about some advice because I remember Medinah he went out No. 12, very famously. I said, it's kind of unexpected it would come down to us but I want to be ready for us, and he gave me some great advice. I was trying to focus on my game. I had never won a singles in a Ryder Cup and I was very determined to do that from an individual basis. But still expect, somebody I thought -- we needed a half-point for like an hour and a half. It was quite a long time that needed a half-point. Just very nerve-wracking but I did stand on that 16th tee and I was looking down, like I was looking down the hole at the green and no matter how nervous you are, what an amazing opportunity to do something memorable in your career. I was happy to see my drive set off where it did and go straight.

Q. You just mentioned Francesco. How nice was it to have some Mollywood support last week?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, I said it a few times, Francesco has very much been a huge part of my Ryder Cup life, if you like. He was my partner in my rookie Ryder Cup, and this week, again, he was mine and Rory's vice captain when I was playing in the foursomes and my vice captain again in the afternoon when I played with Nicolai. So he's very much been by my side throughout my Ryder Cup lifetime, if you like.

So he did an amazing job as a vice. He was an amazing player, and he might still play again. I'm pretty confident that he can do that. But as a vice captain, because he has an amazing attitude to him and an amazing way of putting things across, I just thought it was great having him

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around.

I think all the vice captains and the captain, they were just an amazing mix of people and they did such a great job. And again, from a personal standpoint, having somebody as close as Francesco around, it helps and means a lot.

Q. Talking about Francesco -- what's it going to be like now with this team --

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I mean, any Ryder Cup, you have a bond for life with every single person that you shared that team room with, and it is very, very special, and you definitely understand that after you've played one, what it means, and you've stood alongside each other and you remember that forever.

I think there was a lot of press and there was a lot made of this being kind of a new team and a potentially new era of the European Ryder Cup Team. I think everybody that was there really enjoyed it. I thought the connection that everybody made, the atmosphere that was in that team room, and just the general -- you know, nobody had to particularly state anything or make anything about it but there was clearly some new roles that were put on people, having to step up.

The rookies were phenomenal from the role that they played in the team room to being out on the golf course, the way that they played and the way that they acted, I thought they did an absolutely amazing job.

I think when you look at -- things change a lot. We see it a lot. Things change a lot in two years. Two years, it goes by quick but it's a very long time and things happen. You look at the makeup of what this team was and how everybody was, I think if you threw the same 12 players in in two years' time everybody would be very happy that was there. Of course you would; you want to play every Ryder Cup that you can. I just think the future of the European Ryder Cup looks very bright when you look at this team.

Q. Just a follow-up question. How much do you think the players should be involved in selecting the captain for New York in two years' time?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: It's not the players job. We don't choose the captain. I think the way that the system has always been I think has worked very well, and yeah there might be a point where that changes, just with things that have happened in recent times. I know that there's been plenty of talk of Luke doing it again.

But I don't think -- the players, we are always involved in a debrief. We always go through that process of what was

really good, what we think -- what small changes we think we can constantly make to improve The European Team. But as far as the captaincy goes, that's nothing to do with us as players.

Of course, if we get asked about it, we'll say what we liked and that and I think you do get asked on your opinion of what can happen in the future but at the end of the day, there's a process that goes into that captaincy. You know, we're very happy to play for whoever the captain is that gets selected and Luke has done a phenomenal job and I can't speak highly enough about him.

Q. Playing on a winning Ryder Cup Team in France and Italy, what would it mean for you to play in England at Hulton Park close to home, can you talk about that?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, of course. I think the bidding process is something that's going on all the time. I've had the opportunity to be a bit closer to a project that's going on at Hulton Park in greater Manchester in the northwest, which is always going to be something that's very close to my heart, and the possibility of having a Ryder Cup venue there was clearly something I was very interested in and what that can bring to the area.

It would be a dream. I've played three Ryder Cups now and hopefully I'm going to play a lot more. And honestly, there's nothing quite like playing a Ryder Cup at home in Europe. It's very, very cool. I've never had the experience to play one in England, let alone the opportunity to play one from where I'm from in the northwest. Being involved in a project like that is very cool for me and what it can -- the opportunities that it will bring not just for golf but anyone. Jobs, housing around the area, I think it's much, much needed, and along with that, growing the game and introducing more people to the game that are from my area will be great. We'll see how it goes.

Q. What did you think of the drive on 16 on Sunday?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: There was two options to be honest. So I was thinking there was a minute -- I spoke to Fino about the mini-driver, which I knew would draw so I knew I was never going to hit it right with the mini driver by it was going to go short left. In my mind, Rickie was still going to make par and it was just an opportunity to step up and one good shot was going to win the Ryder Cup, which still gives me goosebumps now when I think about it. For me, I just keep the driver down a little bit and put a swing on it. That was all that I was thinking.

At the time, just what an amazing opportunity it was. You practise your whole life and all of a sudden, me, Tommy

Fleetwood from Southport is stood with one good shot to win the Ryder Cup. I still can't believe it went straight to be honest. But I was very happy I have to say when I looked up and saw where the ball was heading, I was very pleased and then you can't really see where the ball lands. The sun kind of shines at you and all you have to do is wait for what the noise is going to be in the crowd and it was on the green and I was like, yeah, that will do.

Q. (On the home-crowd advantage.)

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: I think crowds are a huge part of the Ryder Cup. I've never been a part of -- whether it's been a home or at way Ryder Cup I played at Whistling Straits, I've never been part of like a Ryder Cup where it's been a bad experience. The away one was tough.

Don't get me wrong, I think it was exactly the way it should be. The home crowd does play a huge part. If you look at a lot of the talks that Luke gave, he knew the importance of using the home crowd and make being sure -- that our golf can bring some noise but use their energy where we need to to carry us and get it over the line.

The home crowd of course plays a huge role. So far there's not been anything that's hugely disrespectful for anything like that on either side. Of course you're looking forward to a New York crowd and we know what they are like in sport. At the moment, very, very excited of the prospect of trying to qualify for that team and playing in a Ryder Cup in New York, I think is an amazing opportunity for us.

All of us, again, last time we played the Ryder Cup and all of us stood on the 18th green and we wanted -- everybody was motivated for qualifying because we wanted to play a home Ryder Cup and we wanted to get the Ryder Cup back. This time, it will be we're motivated because we just had the most amazing experience and we want to defend the Ryder Cup now and we want to get ourselves to Bethpage.

A long road ahead of us for all of us to try and make that team, and we'll wait and see what a New York crowd will bring.

Q. (About being underdogs against a young American team.)

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, absolutely. You know, I think Europe as a team, as a unit, we're very happy going in as underdogs to the rest of the people but I don't think anybody in that team room actually feels that we're underdogs. I think we're very confident of what we're capable of.

Yeah, there was a lot of talk about a period of American dominance coming up and there is no question about it, they are all phenomenal golfers, they really, really are. And it an absolute pleasure to go up against a team of that standard and that calibre.

But for us, we totally know what we're capable of, and we believe in our strengths as a team. We have three of the top four players in the world, so it's kind of hard to believe that when you've got the players that we have, that people sort of just assume that there's going to be a dominance from the other side. I don't think any of us ever felt like that or thought like that. We were very motivated to win it and get the Cup back. Whatever happens over the next two years, we'll go into the next one with full faith in ourselves and the utmost respect for how good that American side is and every one of those players, how good they are at golf. But as a team we'll always believe in ourselves a hundred percent.

Q. How cool would it be to be a captain yourself one day?

TOMMY FLEETWOOD: Yeah, absolutely a dream of mine would be to captain a Ryder Cup Team. You know, with this current bit that we've just mentioned at home park, there's two things. It's a long way away to play in a Ryder Cup in the northwest. I mean, amazing to captain a Ryder Cup in the northwest, would be amazing, so just any role that I can play in that, like I say, looking down the line, feeling like, you know, just being a part of that bit, supporting the area, being a boy from the northwest of England and everything that we believe that it can bring, it's very, very special to me, and on top of that, the opportunity to play a role as a player or a captain or a vice captain or any way of me being in that Ryder Cup would be just the icing on the cake and unbelievably special.

Looking at the captains that I've played under and the figures that they are, the inspiration that they brought to us all as players, yeah, if I could live up to half as much as they managed to accomplish in their careers but also as captains, you know, I'll be very proud of myself to think that I can do that.

TOM CARLISLE: Thanks, Tommy, have a great week.