

The Walker Cup

Press Conference

Friday, 1 September 2023

Stuart Wilson

Mark Power

John Gough



THE WALKER CUP
ST ANDREWS 2023

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the 49th Walker Cup match. I'm delighted to be joined by some of the GB&I team. We've got John Gough, Stuart Wilson and Mark Power.

We'll start with you, Mark. This is your second Walker Cup. Are you bringing some experience and knowledge to the team and sharing that with the rest of your players?

MARK POWER: Yeah, I'd like to think I am, obviously being only one of two to have played the last one. I'm trying to help some of the younger guys out and even some of the guys who haven't played here before. I suppose it's a different feeling than last night. Circumstances were a little bit different with COVID and everything.

I feel like this week has been a lot longer, and I feel like our preparations have been great. I feel like everyone is confident we've done the right things. It's just about getting into the matches now, and I suppose just locking into your own process, not trying to do anything too different. That's a big thing I would say.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: John, for you, of course your first week, but your brother has also played. Is it different being inside the team rather than looking in from the outside?

JOHN GOUGH: Yeah, of course. It's a great privilege to be selected as one of the top 10 GB&I players to represent ourselves this week. A huge honour.

Obviously my brother doesn't hold it against me now, so that's kind of a nice thing. Hopefully for the Walker Cup's sake he stays amateur for the next couple of years, but if he turned pro, I wouldn't be too upset about it.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Stuart, your final practice session done this morning. Can you give us your thoughts on the team heading into the match tomorrow?

STUART WILSON: Yeah, absolutely. The team has done a fantastic job this week of preparing. It's been a long week. I don't think there's many weeks like this in the golfing calendar when there's so much preparation, but we had our two practice rounds early in the week and then we had a little break over to Kingsbarns, which was a bit more of a social kind of relaxed day, and then rounding them up Thursday and Friday here for the official practice days.

Preparations have gone well, and the guys are all playing well, which is great to see. Playing well and practising creates a nice situation but a difficult situation, as well, given us a little bit of a headache as to pairings, and obviously we've got to leave two players out each of the first three sessions, so the guys have made my job difficult by deciding who to leave out.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: From the boys, can you explain to us a little bit about the camaraderie that's in the team room.

JOHN GOUGH: Yeah, I think highly competitive team room. We have great team spirit. We've been lucky enough to have been given a table tennis table and a PlayStation 5. Apart from golf, there's a very competitive spirit that's quite high. I think I have the edge over Mark at the minute. He's running in second.

But no, the team, we range from such a young age to such an old age -- well, Matt might hate me saying that. But we get on like we're all brothers.

Like Stuart said, it must be so difficult to pick because we almost can throw the balls up and play with each other. We know each other that well. We trust each other that well. I think that's what it is; it's trust. We know we're the top 10, this week, GB&I players to come here, so we're just looking forward to going and competing and getting some points on the board.

Q. Mark, this is obviously your second time playing in the Walker Cup. Given how well you played two years ago, do you feel an extra responsibility this week?

MARK POWER: I wouldn't say so, no. I was exactly in the same position as a lot of the guys first time around last

time, and I didn't really try and do anything special. I just went out and tried to play as good as I can. Thankfully it resulted in three points for me, but somebody else could easily come and have three, three and a half, hopefully four points this week for us.

I'm not going to try and do anything differently. I'll obviously try and help guys if they have any questions on how I approach different aspects, but I'm not going to try and do anything differently. I'll obviously try and go better than three points this week and hopefully bring four for the team.

Q. John, kind of a similar question. You're the highest ranked player for GB&I. Do you feel an extra onus to go out and perform?

JOHN GOUGH: No. Obviously a nice accolade having that, but as I just said before, I have complete trust in all the boys, and I know that no matter what happens points-wise, we're going to put all our cards on the table.

Obviously it's an individual accolade, but this week is all about the team.

Q. Stuart, how many guys have decided to take on local caddies this week, and if so, how important is the local knowledge and tapping into that from a GB&I perspective?

STUART WILSON: So in terms of competition, all the caddies are local, so the U.S. Team are also carrying local caddies.

We've maybe got a slight advantage in that during the squad sessions we were up twice through the year and we brought in the local caddies again, supported by the R&A obviously for doing our squad sessions. That was a couple additional bits of extra preparation we've done for this year.

So the caddies all went into a pool and it was drawn by lot. That was the first job of the week on Sunday morning that me and Mike did, and the caddies were evenly distributed across both teams to make it nice and fair.

Q. John and Mark, how much are you looking forward to the big crowd that's going to be here this weekend and the atmosphere that's going to be here around St Andrews?

MARK POWER: Yeah, definitely. Last time around when I played, there was a restricted crowd, so it wasn't quite the full experience. It was still probably the best week of my golfing career so far.

I'd imagine this week will top it. We'll definitely be leaning on the home crowd to give us a little extra support, but we're all really going to embrace it, and it's going to be amazing. At the Home of Golf it's extra special, so really looking forward to it.

JOHN GOUGH: Yeah, this is St Andrews and it's literally everything when you go in there is just golf. I'm expecting quite a good few people to turn up, and then obviously family and friends, too. But just as Mark said, I think it's going to be pretty nice to rely on the home crowd. I think they're going to have a massive factor in it.

It even feels -- when we were out on the golf course by ourselves, it felt electric.

I'm looking forward to playing in front of all the people.

Q. Stuart, the pairing of players in matches like this has become a bit of a science over the last few years. What's your philosophy on this? Are you a stats guy or do you go with your gut feeling, long, short, guys that have similar games?

STUART WILSON: Yeah, we've kind of obviously tried to look at it in a bit of depth, but the way the Old Course is set up, it's with a par-3 on the front that's even and a par-3 on the back that's odd, and vice versa with the par-5s.

So if they're playing regulation golf, everybody is going to be doing the same amount of putting, and it's the same coming in or going out. If you're a strong wedge player, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 is your holes, and then on the back it's 10, 12, 14, 16, 18.

Q. It's impossible, is it?

STUART WILSON: Hopefully like the match will be, it's just going to be a fair contest. It's even across the board.

We do a bit of matching with personalities, but I think you can see we've probably got 10 personalities here that, as John said, we've looked at the pairings, we've done a lot of the numbers and stats and things, but I don't think we could have done any better of a job than actually putting 10 balls in a hat and pulling them out. The team is that close-knit. So it's great.

Q. Stuart, what are you seeing watching your players play the golf course versus how you remember playing the course this week, and are you seeing significant differences from almost 20 years ago in how it's playing?

STUART WILSON: Yeah, I mean, there's a few extra tees

out there. Obviously they've gone outside the bounds of what we used to know as the Old Course. But the guys can handle that no problem.

I think the way the course is playing this week maybe isn't typical of how we would normally find the Old Course at this time of year just given the weather we've had this summer. Probably like to see a little bit more bounce in it, but I think it will be drying up over the next few days.

The guys have kind of got the default position with the chipping around the green, whereas back in the day I would have maybe favoured a little bit more of a bump-and-run approach. But I'd say with how receptive the greens are in relation to being a links course, the guys can still nip a few pitches around the greens and still get a little bit of action on the ball to control it.

Q. For John and Mark, the weather has been dry this week. It's about to get better over the weekend. Has the course changed slightly from even Monday given how dry it's been?

JOHN GOUGH: Yeah, when we got here at first, I was quite shocked after playing the Links Trophy with how fiery it was playing. Obviously haven't been here for most of July and August, and it must have been quite wet because it looked great being green. It looks fabulous. But just from what we're used to, we're used to it being a bit bouncier and stuff.

But since Monday, it's definitely started jumping a bit more. I think the rough, if you go into the rough, it might not be as long but you can get jumpers, fliers.

Yeah, it's definitely changed. I would expect it to keep going and just getting firmer and firmer, and hopefully with a bit of wind, as well, helps that.

But either way, I feel like now we're quite vetted on soft or firm conditions after it.

MARK POWER: Yeah, I'd agree. Definitely from the start of the week to the 10 holes I played this morning, the course has definitely dried out a lot. I suppose a bit of wind and sun the last couple days has helped with that, and given the forecast, I think the next couple days it's going to keep drying out.

They're the conditions everyone wants to see, so hopefully the weather plays ball and we can get some fiery conditions come Sunday afternoon.

Q. How important can that Links Trophy experience be over the next couple days?

JOHN GOUGH: Of course it's always going to help. I've been lucky enough to play it a good few times, and I could probably safely say every time I played it, it was different conditions in some sort, and with links golf in general, I think that's a massive advantage because you never know what you're going to get until you tee it up on that first tee.

MARK POWER: Just going off of that, I think the beauty of St Andrews is the more times you play it, the more trouble or the more you learn about the course. You see a different bit of undulations you probably haven't seen the last time, and the first time you play it you might think, this isn't too bad, you can hit it fairly wide off the tee, but when you look at where you want to position the ball for your second shot, it's actually a lot more strategic.

I think that's helped playing it before, and every time, as I say, I've played it, I've learned different bits and pieces. It's definitely helped.

Q. Mark, it's been a couple years since Seminole; how would you characterise the ebb and flow of your golf game and what's next for you over the next few months to few years?

MARK POWER: I will say I love team golf, so I think that's going to definitely help for me. I feel like I excel a lot in team golf. Individually I'm obviously a competitor, but there's something about team golf that just lifts me to a different level.

I found that the last time around at Seminole, even St Andrews Trophy last year with John and Stuart against Europe, I felt like it just elevated my game to another level.

Trying to find a way to bring that every single week would be nice, but this will be my last amateur event, so trying to take a lot from this week and hopefully finish on a high before turning pro. But all focus will be on this week the next couple days.

Q. Stuart, a couple things. Why is it that the caddies were selected, that you couldn't bring your own caddie? Why was that?

STUART WILSON: That's just part of the terms of competition for the Walker Cup, that it's local caddies that will be employed for the duration of the match.

Q. When did that change? Are you familiar with that?

STUART WILSON: It was the same at Seminole, and I think that certainly when I played 20 years ago, the club supplied the caddies.



Q. Do you see this, because you participated it and now you're captaining it, do you see this as a competition or an exhibition?

STUART WILSON: It's very much a competition as far as the players are concerned, absolutely. It's a great exhibition for golf and amateur golf, but as far as the players are concerned, it's competition at its fiercest, I think.

Q. To what extent have the two of you learnt new things about St Andrews this week?

MARK POWER: Well, for me I'll say that I'm learning more about the bunkers that you just do not want to go into. There's a couple bunkers where you go in and you just literally come out sideways, so every time you go into one, you nearly cross it off the list.

I would say that, as well as just different undulations, understanding a pin might not look too bad, but realistically if you go at it, it can hop and go 30 feet away. You need to work different slopes around. There's generally not going to be a pin as straightforward as it looks. There's always going to be a little bit of danger around it.

I'd say a lot of it's into second shots, as well, kind of positioning yourself in different shots.

Q. Of the town itself, have you learnt something this week?

MARK POWER: About St Andrews? There's so much history about St Andrews.

Q. Did you know before or is it new to you this week?

MARK POWER: I obviously know a lot about St Andrews. Everyone in the golfing community knows how special this place is. There's so much great history. I think we're focusing a lot on the golf this week, but it's obviously nice to learn different bits and pieces, also.

JOHN GOUGH: About the golf course, for me it's been the greens. No matter how much you play this fabulous golf course, you're going to find something new on the greens. For instance, the 9th green is probably the flattest looking green out there, but you just never seem to be able to hole a putt on it because it has the most subtle breaks.

Then about St Andrews in general, I think it's been nice learning the history of the Walker Cup. Obviously it's something we've all aimed for, but knowing a lot more about it, we had some past players from the last time it was

at St Andrews in what year?

STUART WILSON: 1975.

JOHN GOUGH: '75, at dinner last night, and it's been great knowing that they played the same course as us and the same trophy. It's just the history of the whole Walker Cup has kind of opened my eyes a bit into how big it is. Obviously it's a massive event, but it's even way larger than I thought.

OLIVIA McMILLAN: Gentlemen, thank you very much for joining us today, and we wish you the best of luck this weekend.

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