

LIV Golf Las Vegas

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Las Vegas Country Club

Cleeks GC

Martin Kaymer

Richard Bland

Kalle Samooja

Adrian Meronk

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Let's welcome Cleeks GC to LIV Golf Las Vegas. We have a lot of new faces up here today. Let's welcome Kalle Samooja, our captain Martin Kaymer, Blandemonium and Adrian Meronk.

The Cleeks have a completely new team, a new look. Martin, tell us about this off-season and what your hopes are for the Cleeks this year.

MARTIN KAYMER: Yeah, it was definitely a little bit of an up-and-down winter I would say because we really had no idea who was joining the team. Obviously we knew Richard and me are going to be on the team for 2024. It was fairly quickly -- I think the decision was fairly quickly made by LIV that Bernd and G-Mac are not going to be on my team anymore, and then it was just a matter of trying to see what kind of personalities, what kind of player could fit Richard and me.

I think the personality is the big thing, the team spirit, what kind of players that we know could be beneficial for us and for the league.

Then when Kalle qualified in Abu Dhabi in December, I gave him a call. I think the other guys were still playing when he qualified because I met Kalle only a couple times before, but our background is very similar, with the European Tour. We have the same management. It really made sense for us.

Besides his playing ability, for me who has been out on Tour for many years, Richard has been out for many years, it's nice to be inspired by younger guys, by guys who play a different kind of golf, what we learned, and that's why when Adrian -- when that was a possibility that he joins the league and joins maybe even our team, I was very excited



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about that person, that player, that kind of personality that he brings to the team.

He was quite unfortunate not to be picked for the Ryder Cup last year. In my eyes, he would have deserved to be on the team. He did everything right. But obviously there are only 12 spots at the end of the day, and I'm very glad that he's part of the team and that we can do something special this year and hopefully 2025, too.

Q. Two new really strong players on your team; do you have high hopes for the Cleeks this year?

MARTIN KAYMER: Yeah, I think we started already last week with great team spirit. I think it takes some time, especially for Adrian. As you know, he just signed last week the contract, so he was just thrown into the LIV world. You've got to give the guy some time to get used to the new format, the new people, the new faces, new kind of golf. Obviously you still play 18 holes, but it's still a different way of playing, and it takes a couple tournaments to get used to for Kalle and for Adrian.

We definitely have high hopes. We have big expectations because we know what kind of golf we can play, and I definitely think we can compete.

Q. Kalle, Adrian, last week was your first week on LIV. I'd like to hear about this whirlwind experience, particularly for you, since I think you joined on Tuesday and showed up Wednesday. Start with you, Adrian.

ADRIAN MERONK: Yeah, to be honest, the last couple of weeks were quite stressful for me. I wasn't planning on -- I didn't know what's going to happen. I was actually stuck in San Diego preparing for my first PGA TOUR event, and then suddenly I'm going to Mexico playing my first LIV event. A lot of things were happening at the same time.

But at the end of the day, I really enjoyed my first week. We had some issues with food poisoning, as well, so it wasn't an ideal week for me in terms of feeling well on the golf course, but the last couple of days finally I can feel like myself, and hopefully I can play my best golf this week, and I'm just excited to be with those guys on one team

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competing every week.

As I said, last week was a completely new experience for me, but I really enjoyed it.

Q. Kalle, you had a really cool story to get here, winning the LIV Golf Promotions event. Tell us a little bit about what your journey was like getting here and what your first week on LIV was like last week.

KALLE SAMOOJA: Yeah, the Abu Dhabi tournament was kind of a dream come true to get a spot here, and then Martin called me and it was a bit of a long wait to see if I really end up in the Cleeks. But really happy to be part of the team, and last week I was really looking forward for the season opener, and it was great to get the season started there.

It fulfilled, I think, all the expectations and maybe even beyond so. It was a super week last week. Didn't really play my best, but I think as a team we had good spirit and got a decent start for the team. Really looking forward to a new week, and let's get the Cleeks running and going fast forward.

Q. Richard, you continue to be a standout. You play such amazing consistent golf. You had an incredible hole-in-one last week. What is the secret sauce?

RICHARD BLAND: I think just Father Time, I think, for me.

Last week it was a great start for me personally on that level. But more so for the team, I know we had a good first day on Friday. I think on Saturday, we just didn't perform individually, and obviously that hurt us as a team.

I'm just glad to be still playing on LIV. It's the best decision I ever made at 49, two and a half years ago when I first joined. I love being on the Cleeks. I've been pretty much a Cleek now for most of my time on LIV. I don't want to be anywhere else. This is where I belong.

I think this year we've got a great setup with Kalle coming on board and then Adrian. We all know what Adrian can do. He's world class. I think he's going to have a great year, and we've got this guy to my right here. You can't say enough about Martin. His CV speaks for itself.

I'm just the old man of the group --

Q. Always at the top of the leaderboard, though.

RICHARD BLAND: I'm just trying to sweep up and make the coffee. That's my job this year.

I'm just excited. I think the Cleeks could be the dark horses this year. I really do. I don't think it's going to be very long before we're in there down the stretch.

Q. Can you walk us through your hole-in-one last week? It was pretty incredible.

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah. Obviously you don't expect it. Obviously you're just trying to hit good shots. Obviously there is that element of luck involved, and it just happened to go in.

I think my caddie kind of threw me under the bus a little bit, and he said, you've won a car, as well, and we all kind of looked around for the car, and we were like, oh, right, thanks for that.

Obviously you've got to hit a good shot, but there's also that element of luck. Nice to have it. It was just an excited moment, so glad to do it.

Q. How many hole-in-ones do you have?

RICHARD BLAND: That is my 11th now. But probably all the rounds of golf I've played, I probably should have that many.

Q. We're in Las Vegas this week during Super Bowl week. Do you have any experience playing in Las Vegas or at this golf course, and what are your off-site plans this week on the Strip?

KALLE SAMOOJA: Well, it's my first trip to Vegas, so really excited to be here. A lot of bright lights and screens all over the city. We went to a hockey match yesterday, saw the Knights win. There's a lot of activities here, so don't actually know what else we can do this week. A lot of plans for the other guys, also.

It's great to be here. My friend is going to join me later this week, and he's going to also enjoy the new vibe of the LIV Tour. Really excited for the week.

Q. Have you had a chance to check out the golf course?

KALLE SAMOOJA: Obviously nine holes. Going to see the other nine this afternoon. Yeah, it's an old traditional tree-lined course, which I like, mint condition. Can't be any better.

Q. Martin, do you have any experience playing in Vegas at this golf course?

MARTIN KAYMER: Oh, yeah, I've been to Vegas a few

times. We have a yearly trip with my friends every time around Christmastime, six or seven of my friends. We came here because we used to live in Scottsdale, which was a five-hour drive.

ADRIAN MERONK: What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

MARTIN KAYMER: We went to many shows. We'd gamble a little bit, but I'm not a huge gambler, but I like the shows. I like to go to a couple concerts. The vibe in Vegas for two or three days is good, but after that it's a bit much, especially for a German. We are more of a calmer side.

When we played the golf course yesterday, that kind of golf I really like. It's a very old-school golf course. It's in great shape. But I think the scoring will be very low this week because it's fairly short, greens are perfect, not much rough.

I think it's a golf course where there's a green light pretty much on every hole. I haven't seen 18 holes yet, but I've seen the back nine and we're going to play the front nine later. It's definitely a golf course where you should not hold back. You can really go at a lot of flags. Chipping around the greens is not very tricky. I would expect a very low winning score this week.

Q. Richard, any experience here, and what do you think of Vegas?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I've been here before but many moons ago now. The golf course, it's the kind of course I feel like I can do well. There are some holes where if you do hit it long, it's advantageous, but I think just keeping the ball in play, as well, is going to be key, too. It gives you a lot of -- even for me, gives me a lot of chances with the short irons, which is hopefully one of my strengths.

But as Martin has just said, yeah, I expect the scoring to be very low.

We're loving Vegas. It's my wife's first time here, so we're going to go see a couple of shows. We're going tonight to see O at the Bellagio and then we're going to go see the Cirque du Soleil Michael Jackson at Mandalay Bay on Friday.

She was on the slot machine last night, the big high roller, two-cent slot machine, but she won \$120 in one spin. It was my \$20 that was in the machine, so I took the money, which kind of didn't go down too well. She did say hello to me this morning, so we are talking again.

Like Martin just said, we're sort of quite a quiet couple. We like our own company in that respect sometimes. But Vegas is great just to see. It's not somewhere that I would -- it's my kind of town, but it's fun, too. There's a lot to do. We're just excited to be here.

Q. Adrian, I saw you cutting it loose at the Chainsmokers last week, so I have a feeling Vegas is your type of town. Had you ever Vegas before? Any plans, and any experience with this golf course?

ADRIAN MERONK: I have been to Vegas once during Thanksgiving in college. It's my first time playing golf in Vegas. I love the golf course. It's a great setup, great conditions. I'm excited for the week.

In terms of the town, yeah, I enjoyed being here, to be honest. It's like a huge playground for everyone. Yesterday we went to David Copperfield's show. On Friday we're going to see Adele. A lot of things to do.

I'm really enjoying my time here, so very exciting times.

Q. Adrian, can you talk us through how you developed a golf career growing up in Poland and maybe some of the challenges you faced?

ADRIAN MERONK: Yeah, it's not easy. You have to go abroad. There's no competition. There's very little golf knowledge. Not many golf courses. We have only 25 golf courses in the entire country. Since an early age, I had to go traveling around Europe competing with guys from the UK, Germany, France, Italy, all of these countries. Played the national events, and then I had to make a decision to go to college when I finished my high school in Poland. That was the main thing that helped my golf career to get better.

When I got to college, obviously my first year was quite tough getting used to stuff and the language and culture and everything. Then after that it was just much easier, and my golf game got much better competing with better guys than me, trying to beat them every single week. That's what helped me the most.

That's when I realized I want to go pro.

Q. Were you at East Tennessee?

ADRIAN MERONK: East Tennessee, yeah.

Q. How did that school come about?

ADRIAN MERONK: I got a couple offers when I was 18, and I picked this college because I knew a couple of guys

on the team. It was quite a European team. We knew each other, and I think that helped me decision.

Q. Kalle, a similar question. Obviously there have been a few Finnish pros, but were there challenges growing up in terms of developing your career in Finland?

KALLE SAMOOJA: Well, kind of a bit similar situation as Adrian had in Poland. We're maybe a bit more ahead of them, so we have more courses and a little more players and maybe a little better knowledge. Mikko Ilonen was the guy that first got to the Tour, so he opened up the door and the way for us, so he kind of showed us the way.

Then after that, there's been more and more pros that have been able to make their way to the European Tour. One guy we have now on the PGA Tour and me on LIV, so I think we've done pretty well for a small golfing nation.

We have challenges with the weather, courses, everything, so you've got to travel a lot. You've got to go somewhere warm, play and practice. There's a lot of challenges, but I think it's also an advantage. Like once you go home during the winter, you have to take some time off. You have to recharge. You have to do your physical work, so you're not on the course all the time, and I think it's also one of the advantages, or at least you have to think that that's good for you and your game.

Every time you come out, you're feeling fresh, and you've got to get ready to play and eager to play. I think you have the hunger every time you go out, and I think that's one of the benefits I got from -- I'm still based in Finland and living there.

It's been fun to see how Mikko opened up the door and now we have more and more pros out there.

Q. What do you do during the winters? How do you keep your game sharp?

KALLE SAMOOJA: The TrackMan simulators have helped a lot nowadays. Back in the days, it wasn't that easy. You just had some indoor holes and some dodgy putting greens. You don't really get your game forward. It doesn't grow much there.

You have to travel a lot. We spent a lot of time in Spain, and now when I got to European Tour we spent more time in Dubai and better places, a little bit in America, also. You have to just travel. You can't grow your game back in Finland during the winter.

RICHARD BLAND: Can I just say that I think someone in

their 30s, you're not allowed to say "back in the days." You're not allowed. I'm the only one on this team that can say that.

KALLE SAMOOJA: It's 20 years ago. It's more than half my life ago, so yeah.

Q. I think you're playing with Teemu in the pro-am. Is he a guy that you -- I don't know how much of a hockey fan you were, but did you know him? Did you grow up watching him?

KALLE SAMOOJA: Like I said, we're a small golfing nation but also a small sport nation, so all the athletes pretty much know each other, at least on some level, and Teemu is a big golf fan, golf guy. I know him well through golf. We've played a little bit back in Finland, and it's great to have him here.

He lives in LA, so it was a short drive for him to come over here. It's good to play some golf with him today.

Q. Martin, just in terms of the new lineup, you talked about it. Richard said you guys are the dark horses. Did you feel like after the first two years, it's almost nice to have a reset and kind of start a little bit with a change of pace with the new faces and all that and kind of get a new start for the season? How excited are you to have that new start?

MARTIN KAYMER: The first year it was obviously very difficult for a lot of players, for a lot of -- everybody who came out here because you never know where this is going. Obviously you had hopes and you had -- there was a plan behind it. But there were so many obstacles that LIV and we had to take, and there was so much movement, especially on my team. There were so many different players every week, especially the first year. Then last year it was more consistent.

But we have not really performed as a team last year.

I was happy for G-Mac, that he found a place in the league in Brooks' team, but we have to hit the reset button. We don't really look back. I don't see the last two years as a failure. Not at all. Because those are all little steps to success, I guess.

Now with the new lineup that we have, we all get along as people. We all play good golf. We know what we can do on the golf course.

Again, for Kalle and Adrian, it's a new scenario. There's a team element involved.

It took me also probably all 22 seasons here to get used to that team environment that you play practice rounds with guys pretty much every week. I was more like a lonely rider back in the day. I did my own thing. 7:30 in the morning I played my practice rounds. Now it has changed a little bit.

But definitely also in a very positive way that you can feed off each other. Especially last week we played a practice round together, and Kalle played many years on the Asian Tour, and we were around the greens chipping, and I had my technique how to chip from that Bermudagrass, but I was never really happy the way it came out. Then he showed me one of the technique that he used back on the Asian Tour because they used to play on that grass all the time, and that helped me quite a lot in the tournament.

Those little things I would have never experienced back in the day when I played on my own.

That is a nice team element that is helping me and also inspiring me being out here for 15, 17, 18 years, whatever it is, to learn still different ways of playing golf and seeing the game in a different way.

Q. Martin, where are you with your fitness now? But not only with your game. Could we see 100 percent Martin Kaymer this year do you think?

MARTIN KAYMER: Maybe not 100 percent, but I do have my issues. I think we all have --

KALLE SAMOOJA: I think we all have, yeah.

MARTIN KAYMER: Obviously coming back from the surgery, I didn't realize how difficult it is to put everything into place again. I was searching for my grip for probably six, seven, eight months, just to feel comfortable standing over the ball and believing the way it feels and the way it looks, everything, that I can produce a good shot.

My body got affected quite a lot from the wrist injury. I have shoulder issues, lower back left side issues, so the whole left side is obviously affected by it.

But I'm doing quite a lot, everything I can, to be in top form, but you also see the fact. After surgery, especially after talking to the doctor, there are only 10 percent of people who are coming back from that kind of surgery playing proper golf again. The percentage is so small.

I think I'm part of the 10 percent. The doctor has done a good job. I've done a good job over the winter last winter to get the mobility and strength. But of course it's very frustrating that I feel like the tournaments that I've played

so far, I've not been 70 percent. I'm still around that 65, 70 percent mark.

It's frustrating that you can't put everything into it, but I feel good enough. I'm moving forward. It's just a matter of time that the body knows what it has to do, and everything will adjust accordingly.

I still feel like I have five, six, seven good years ahead of me, but it's also a lot of mental. You just need to let go of the negativity that happened to me the last two years and focus on what's in front of you. That is something that I look forward to, to have that kind of mindset, instead of looking back over things that didn't work out for me.

Q. Is that a difficult thing to do, because your CV is so incredible, your achievements and everything. Is it tough to believe that your best years might be ahead of yourself? You're still a young man, relatively well compared to Richard --

MARTIN KAYMER: Compared to Richard I'm young, but my expectations are high. I think this is something I need to work on. Obviously I don't really know how to approach it. I have my ways. But that's obviously fairly intimate and fairly personal how you get along with or how you get about the way of playing golf.

My expectations is to win every single tournament because I've done it before. I've won two, three, four tournaments in a row back in the day. I won majors. We played Ryder Cups. I have all the capabilities. That's not a question. It's just trying to let go of the past and knowing what you have done in the past but see the bright future that is still ahead of me because I still have so much to achieve.

I wouldn't have signed up for LIV if I wouldn't be passionate about the game of golf, and I wouldn't put in the time or the effort and the hours and sacrifices if I wouldn't believe that I can win the golf tournaments. I still believe that I can play on the top level.

But it takes a little bit of time, and I'm fine with that. I'm working on the things that I need to work on, and I'm very happy the way it goes.

Q. Adrian, can you talk about outside of the financial aspects of joining LIV what you thought in the process? What are the things that pushed you over the top to come to LIV?

ADRIAN MERONK: I think the most important thing for me was the schedule. The last two years I had really great years in my career, but to be honest, I wasn't enjoying it as much. I was just constantly on the road. We didn't have a

proper home, just packing from hotel to hotel, airport to airport. I was sitting with my parents and my girlfriend during Christmas, and I was just saying, yeah, I had a great year, but I didn't really enjoy it.

I remember times when I won in Italy, waking up on Monday, and I said, okay, great, I won the tournament. But then I have to start all over again, go to a new course, get my routine going again, and where is the joy.

I think one of the most important things was the schedule and having more time to enjoy life with my family and friends.

Q. Where are you based now?

ADRIAN MERONK: I'll be based in Dubai. I have been the last two years, if I can say that, maybe like two months a year. But now I'm planning to spend more time there.

Q. Martin, the whole idea of in the final round going to all four scores count, what's your feeling on that?

MARTIN KAYMER: I think that is what the team aspect should be. That is what the team is about.

I also think that it has to be more team orientated. In my opinion, it's still more on the individual side. When we talk about prize money and things like that, I think it would be more exciting for fans if we go more team. Even maybe have the last two rounds count all four scores. But it's a good way -- I think we are heading into the right direction.

There's a lot of movement going on on Sundays, and as I said, this is what a team is about. When you play for Real Madrid or Bayern Munich you cannot say seven players were good and four were shit. It doesn't work like that. When it comes down to that, all players should count, and I like that way of playing.

Q. You're going to be back at Pinehurst this year, the last part of your exemption. Can you talk about going back there? It doesn't seem like it's 10 years ago, but it is 10 years ago.

MARTIN KAYMER: I looked at some footage last night. I like to see me playing that way. I need to remind myself sometimes how I played golf back then, the way I played golf, the way I swung the golf club. I know you can't really -- that's why I said earlier you shouldn't look back, but sometimes looking back to those moments is quite beneficial.

It will be definitely a very strange feeling going back again. I haven't been back since I won, with everything that's

happened the last 10 years. I heard the golf course has changed a little bit. The surface of the greens have changed. That was obviously my key to success in 2014, that I enjoyed the greens a lot and I putted really well.

I will use that week as pure enjoyment, also kind of celebrating my win again in a different way because I didn't really have time -- what Adrian said, we never really have time to celebrate properly because when I won the U.S. Open, the next week we had the tournament in Germany, and it was in my hometown, and it was so overwhelming that you didn't even have time to enjoy what you have achieved.

Going back there, there were a lot of good memories. I will hopefully stay in the same hotel, in the same room, go to the same Starbucks every morning, do my same whole routine.

Q. Adrian, obviously you didn't make the Ryder Cup last year, but Rory has talked about the fact that he'd like to see certain players be able to play even though they're on LIV like Jon Rahm, and I'm sure at the time he didn't know about Tyrrell, but I'm sure Tyrrell would be in that group, as well. Do you feel like you should be able to play on the Ryder Cup if you're playing well enough?

ADRIAN MERONK: Yeah, I think so. It always has been my goal. Obviously I didn't like how I was treated last time, but if it's possible in the future to play in the Ryder Cup and if I'm good enough, I would love to be on the team.

I will just work hard on my game, play my best, and see what can happen.

Q. Richard and Martin, you've both been out here for a while doing the LIV thing. The fans here in Las Vegas have never experienced LIV Golf before. What's in it for them when they come out? What's different if they've been to a PGA Tour event?

RICHARD BLAND: Certainly for the fans, they're going to see -- like they do wherever they go play, they're going to see some of the best players in the world play. I think they can probably get a little bit closer to us, a little bit more sort of player-to-fan interaction for them this week, and just everything that comes with a tournament that LIV put on. The entertainment afterwards, I'm not too sure who we've got playing this week.

But we're at a great spot. They're just going to see some of the best golfers in the world playing at the highest level, and for me, they're going to love it. If you're a golf fan, what's not to love about LIV.

MARTIN KAYMER: Yeah, I think the biggest benefit for fans is they don't need to spend all day on the golf course to see their favorite player. If they want to follow Brooks, Phil, whoever it is, they're going to see them within that four-and-a-half-hour time frame. They just need to sit on one hole and you know you're going to see all 54 players.

I think that is cool for fans that come out here at 10:00 and they can be back at the casino table at 3:00. I think that's a huge benefit that LIV has, that you don't need to spend 12 hours on the golf course to see your player play.

Q. Do you find that they're understanding the team format even though the team doesn't play together, that you're scattered all over the course? Are you developing fan bases?

MARTIN KAYMER: I think it still takes a little bit of time, and that is something we all need to work on to make it more understandable for fans, what the whole team aspect it all about. But people also underestimate all the work that has been made over the last four or five years to make that happen.

It's so hard to cover all the bases, and it's still a startup, LIV, and we all need to work together to make it more understandable for fans around the world, not only in the United States, also in Europe and in Asia, to make them understand that this is a team format, and that's what I was talking about earlier. In my opinion it has to be even more about the team, that people understand who's on the team, how does it work properly, that we are very different than all the other tours around the world.

Q. As the newcomers last week, was there anything that surprised you? Jon was saying yesterday that he was surprised that everyone was on the range together, and two minutes later it was empty. Are there things like that that you've experienced?

KALLE SAMOOJA: I think the relaxed vibe is the biggest difference. Once I started my week getting ready for the tournament, everyone comes and says hi and congratulated me for being on the Tour here.

Then the music on the course and also during the tournaments. There's some Finns around following me. It didn't really feel like a tournament round to me, which I think is also a good thing, but it could be also a bad thing. You've got to be focused well enough to play some good golf.

I really enjoy the relaxing vibe, and when I spoke to the Finns that followed me, they also enjoyed the atmosphere

and the engagement with the players and the pavilions and everything. I enjoyed my first week, and hopefully all the tournaments are similar to that.

These guys know more about it, but I think from a player's perspective, it can't get much better in my opinion.

ADRIAN MERONK: Yeah, it's definitely a more chilled vibe, as you can say. But it also reminds me of college days a little bit. We had a lot of tournaments where we played a shotgun start or 36 holes in one day starting from different holes. I think it's like an elevated college feeling a little bit, as well, which is nice. You have the team environment.

But what I was surprised by the most is how everyone is so friendly. It just feels like you're one big family, regardless of what team you're from, what nationality. I was amazed by that. It's just great to be part of it.

Q. Are you guys going to the Super Bowl, and who is your pick for the week?

ADRIAN MERONK: I'm not going to watch the Super Bowl live. Probably I'll just watch it on TV somewhere. I'm going to go for the Chiefs.

RICHARD BLAND: No, I'm not going. I heard the 49ers are favorites, but I hear this Patrick Mahomes is pretty good, and I think they've been the team for the last four or five years. I'll go the Chiefs.

MARTIN KAYMER: I have zero idea about football. Absolutely nothing. I know it's very disrespectful to the Super Bowl, but unfortunately I don't know any of the players. But I go with San Francisco.

KALLE SAMOOJA: I'll also go with the Chiefs. I don't have my tickets yet, but hopefully you can help me out with those.

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