

LIV Golf United Kingdom

Wednesday, 24 July, 2024

Rocester, England, UK

JCB Golf and Country Club

Majesticks GC

Ian Poulter

Lee Westwood

Sam Horsfield

Little Sticks Head of Community Impact

Jordan Stephenson

Press Conference



BY



THE MODERATOR: This year we're at a new venue, JCB. Can you tell us your experience with the course and what the players and fans can expect this week?

SAM HORSFIELD: I'm a member. I live like five minutes from here. My girlfriend and I, we have a house like five minutes from here, so when I'm over in the UK, this is where I practice and play. Obviously looking forward to it.

Got a lot of friends and family coming out. Like Ian was just saying, playing in front of the UK fans is always a good time. They seem to really get the game of golf, and yeah, looking forward to it. Should be a great week. I think this golf course will provide a lot of challenges for us. But yeah, should be a lot of fun. Looking forward to it.

Q. What kind of scores do you think we can expect this week?

IAN POULTER: You'll see a few eagles, birdies, bogeys, doubles.

SAM HORSFIELD: Others.

Q. What do you think the winning score will be?

LEE WESTWOOD: It's very difficult to tell. I've only played the front nine so far. You've only played the back nine. Sam has played all of it a lot.

SAM HORSFIELD: I'm going somewhere between 15 -- 15-under is what I'm going.

LEE WESTWOOD: 9-under and 15-under or 15-under and above? It looks pretty tricky to me. There's a lot of undulations out there. The fairways feel quite tight. The rough is certainly penal if you stray off the fairways. Greens have a lot of undulations in them.

Unless you've got control of your ball, it's going to be difficult to get close to the flags, I think. A little bit of breeze forecast, not too much. As we know, England conditions can change within about half an hour.

I mean, I went around the front nine yesterday and I

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to LIV Golf UK. We are joined by our home team, Majesticks GC. We are joined by co-captain Lee Westwood, co-captain Ian Poulter and Sam Horsfield. Welcome, guys. I'll start by just saying welcome home.

Lee and Ian, you guys are considered England's most celebrated players. You have a combined 61 professional wins and 18 Ryder Cup appearances. How does it feel to be back in the UK playing in front of your home crowd this week?

IAN POULTER: Well, the way you've said that, it feels like we're pretty old, to be honest. Whenever we have the opportunity to come and play in front of home fans, and especially this week, extending the tickets to 14,000, should be awesome for us. We don't play enough golf over here, so when we do, it's pretty special.

This is going to be a tough test this week. Golf course layout is good, but it's going to be strong, and we're really looking forward to the challenge.

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, this is obviously our home event, and even more so for me, I guess, because I'm from the Midlands, and I did grow up only an hour and 20 minutes away. My phone has been quite lively for the last month or so with people wanting tickets. It'll be fun playing in front of friends and family and also people from this area in England.

It's always special to play in the UK. Golf fans are very knowledgeable. They're great fans. I'm sure they're looking forward to coming out and seeing some world-class golf.

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thought three 69s might be good scoring, but I haven't seen the other nine. The volatility is there. There's quite a bit of water involved. Nobody knows what to expect. That's the great thing.

IAN POULTER: I think there's a number of factors, like Lee said, weather being one. If we get a strong breeze in the afternoon, it generally can pick up. Pin locations is key. We've got massive putting surfaces, so depending on where they want to tuck some of these pins, that would be a factor, and then they've got the option to move some of these tees forward. We've got some long par-3s, we've got some long par-5s, do they move some of them forward and give us an opportunity.

I think there could be a wide range whatever they want the score to be. It's entirely up to the whole setup.

Q. The party hole is making its debut in England this week. I would love to hear from the Brits what you guys think compared to the Aussies, the party hole, what can we expect?

SAM HORSFIELD: I'm really looking forward to it. It's the Digger Inn? Is that what it's called? Yeah, should be really good. There's a little swale in that green, so hopefully they put a pin down there, and hopefully we get a hole-in-one.

But yeah, obviously the one in Australia is crazy. Yeah, I was there when Chase made his hole-in-one last year. Ian, you played with him, didn't you?

IAN POULTER: I did. I'm still sticky from it.

LEE WESTWOOD: Might be different in England, though. English people tend to not waste their beer like that.

SAM HORSFIELD: Yeah, that's true. Hopefully another hole-in-one. I'm sure they'll bring the good atmosphere.

Q. Do you think the British fans will be rowdy out there?

IAN POULTER: Hopefully one of us can get a hole-in-one and everyone comes to the Majesticks pub and we can all go and celebrate and have a beer. Everybody needs to sign up to be a Majesticks GC fan and they get entrance into the pub. If one of us get that hole-in-one, then we'll see you there for a pint.

SAM HORSFIELD: Rounds on us if we do get that.

Q. Sam, you recently posted your best LIV Golf finish in Nashville, a T2. Tell us where your game is trending and what you've been working on.

SAM HORSFIELD: Yeah. Game is feeling really nice. Yeah, finished second in Nashville a couple weeks ago. I started moving the ball in different directions, so I hit a little fade, feels a bit more in control, and yeah, I qualified for the Open, so that was really nice. Didn't play my best last week. But yeah, I feel like my game is in a good spot.

This is a good golf course for me. I feel like having a bit of home-course knowledge and sort of knowing where to hit it -- there's quite a lot of blind shots around here. Yeah, should leave me in good stead for this week, and should be good fun.

Q. Lee, you've had three consecutive top 20s. Your game is also trending. What have you been working on, and what's different?

LEE WESTWOOD: Just the same old things really. Myself and Pete have been working on a different setup of the ball which has got me in a different position. I put on a bit of distance with the last month, month and a half with stuff I've been working on with Steve in the gym and getting in good positions. Found a key with the putting and started rolling a few putts in. I also like Valderrama a lot. I always think that suits my game. I finished 12th there the last time out on LIV and was only six off the lead in score and felt like I left a lot of shots out there.

Everything has really been moving in the right direction. I tend to find I play better when I play a run of tournaments, which through the summer I feel like I do a bit more. A bit of stop-start at the start of the year. Living in England it's tough to go from tournaments to back to England and keep the practice up and in the kind of tournament conditions that I would want.

Really it's a culmination of all those things, but I would get going away from the golf course and being able to practice is one of the -- keeping my eye in is one of the things that's kept me going.

Q. Sounds like this is the week for the Majesticks?

LEE WESTWOOD: Well, hopefully. We haven't made a podium yet this year. We've come fourth a couple of times, been close. So it would be nice to be getting some champagne on Sunday night.

Q. Ian, you guys had your Little Sticks festival yesterday. Little Sticks is your impact program. Tell us about the festival. Also an announcement came out this morning that you launched a new program that's going to impact 40,000 kids. You're going to be in 200 schools across the UK. Can you tell us about

yesterday and that program?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, the festival was really cool for all three of us to come and support five schools from around the country that we piloted the program in. We had nearly 60 kids yesterday. To see them all take part in the whole program was really cool to see the interaction between the kids, see how much fun they were having, first and foremost, which that's what this game is all about, and exciting news moving forward is to make this thing real. So how does that happen?

We're now going to launch to 200 schools, and as you just said, 40,000 kids that will impact. To think this has only happened in a short period of time, 12 months, you start all these things off small and you try and grow them. For us I think it's a really proud moment to have the level of support from everyone around LIV, from the team that we have put together behind the scenes, and for us to be able to see this impact so many kids. The future is bright with it; where can we take this? How big can we grow this over the next 10 years? It's a big announcement, 200 schools for '24-'25, and let's see how big we can roll this out globally, so it's extremely exciting.

Q. Sam, you mentioned the blind shots out here. How many are there, and where would those be?

SAM HORSFIELD: There's a good handful. Probably six or so. More so tee shots.

10 comes to mind, 16, 18. It's just sort of more going about having the confidence, knowing that you can sort of miss it on a side. When you're blind you're just sort of hitting at nothing really. So to have played it a lot, hit it in spots you shouldn't hit it in around here, obviously those are all in the subconscious memory, and you're always thinking about that.

It'll be a good challenge for the guys. You're probably going to see some interesting shots being played. The greens are ridiculously undulating. They want to put some pins in some spots, they can put some pins in some spots for us.

It'll be a lot of fun. A good challenge for us.

Q. Ian and Lee, what about blind shots? Is that the biggest challenge do you feel like on this course, or is there another more difficult aspect of it?

LEE WESTWOOD: I just feel like when you've had a few practice rounds, blind shots are sometimes an advantage because you kind of pick a spot out and focus on that one spot rather than hitting down a 30-yard-wide fairway. It

tends to focus your attention. Once you've learnt the golf course, it's not too much of a problem.

Probably the greens are a little bit different because they are so undulating. There's runoffs. So you've really got to know where to land it. I'm thinking of like the 8th where you're only hitting a wedge or 9-iron in but it's blind, landing on a green with a lots of undulations. So accuracy is important, not only line-wise but distance-wise, as well.

Like I said earlier, it's really going to pinpoint ball control and distance control and flight, bringing your flight down. It's one of the defenses of the golf course.

IAN POULTER: Yeah, you're going to have a number of tricky shots this week. No fairway is really perfectly flat. Those blind tee shots, as Lee said, you really have to do your homework. Yardage books today are so good that they give us great feedback on exactly where to hit it. You've always got a line in the book where you can take reference from.

That isn't too challenging. The challenge is going to be putting the ball where you need to put it for your second shot to give yourself a decent opportunity to make birdie. The green surfaces are very large. Pin locations, you're going to have to use some of these ridges in the green to feed it into certain pin locations. If you miss those ridges and you're the wrong side, you're going to be left with a very difficult two-putt.

I think for me, it will be distance control, second-shot iron play, not being too overaggressive.

SAM HORSFIELD: I was going to say someone asked me yesterday what I think was going to be key for winning here and that was exactly what I said, iron play, distance control, and being able to leave it in the right spots, speed putting. That's what they just touched on. So there you go.

Q. You guys were third in 2022, fifth last year, which I think was your best result of the season. How much of an advantage is it for you guys to play here at home? It seems like there is a tangible advantage.

IAN POULTER: I mean, this is home from the perspective of UK. It's not home. It's obviously Sam's home because he practices and plays here an awful lot. For Lee, I and Henrik, it's about us trying to get to grips with the golf course over the next couple of days before we obviously start.

The home fan is a big piece of the puzzle for us. I think to have that level of support, you've got that little bit of extra



pressure to want to go and play well in front of home fans, which is good, because it gets the adrenaline going early. Your brain is switched on right from the get go.

But in terms of knowledge of course, we need to learn it just as much as everyone else does. We'll be pulling on the home fans this week.

Q. Lee, you said you found something in your putting, and the stats prove it. You were second with 75 putts in Valderrama. What did you find, and how did that go?

LEE WESTWOOD: 74, yeah. I can putt my ball.

Just some things I've been working on in the past. Going back to having my hands a little bit higher, maybe the heel off the ground.

Valderrama is strange. I played it that often, they're probably some of the great greens around the world that I'm familiar with. I could almost just walk up to a putt and hit it.

I think my routine has improved a lot. I'm spending a lot less time over the ball and then basically letting it flow, not really thinking about it too much. I think that's the secret to good putting, just being very reactive.

Q. If I can ask all of you, this is the third edition of the LIV Golf UK event. To have the support of a big corporation like JCB, what does that say about LIV Golf and the impact it's having in the UK?

LEE WESTWOOD: JCB are obviously a massive company around the world. I think they're the largest privately owned company. They've had -- seeing these events here, I heard about this golf course being built 10, 12 years ago. They were lucky enough to be able to design it, and I think European Tour Course Design came in and built the golf course for them.

It's a bit of a natural progression to try and get tournaments here and build the name up, so they've started off with seniors events on the European Seniors Tour, and now they're obviously having LIV events. They've managed to elevate it to like a world-class level very, very quickly.

I think that's the goal of most companies that come in and build a golf course. Obviously they're a huge company, and I think you just see their colors are very distinctive around the world. They're a well-respected name.

I think they do a lot of business in Saudi, as well, and maybe building a new plant there, as well, so there's a

tie-in there. Hopefully they hang around in golf because we need sponsors like that. I think they're in Formula 1, as well, probably other sports that I don't know about.

It's very important to all sports to have huge sponsors like this.

IAN POULTER: Lee said most of it, but brand recognition around the world, a company like JCB being as large a company as they are, the logo speaks for itself. Most people know exactly what JCB is. To have that level of brand associated with LIV, with us, to help grow LIV Golf moving forward, will hopefully hope the door for more sponsors to come in just as big and powerful as JCB are.

We're proud to have this as our home event, to be able to come and support, and hopefully over the next couple of years we can continue to bring big brands coming into LIV Golf.

Q. We got this press release today about your partnership. Talk about the logistics part of it. How do you plan to reach 200 odd schools and 40,000 kids?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, just before Jordan does step up, I think this has been very much a team effort to do -- to get involved with charities and things like that. It's part of our agreement really for the franchise that gives us instructions to have a charitable arm, and whilst it is very much a team effort and James is involved and Ollie is involved and the players are involved and everybody in the Majesticks is involved, it's really been Jordan being the driving force behind it all.

This is his baby, I suppose, and it's phenomenal the job he's done. I think we all as a team would like to thank Jordan for his hard work because it's been incredible what he's done in the space of a year and a half or something like that.

It's really driven all of us on.

IAN POULTER: From the first meeting that we had meeting Jordan and his vision plan of how we're going to deliver this, it was a head scratcher, to be honest, because I sat there and I was like, how are we going to pull this off. It sounds incredible, but I don't know how we're going to do it.

LEE WESTWOOD: We've done things for charity for 25, 30 years, and it seems like we've done it on a very small scale, doesn't it, when you start talking to Jordan and the people he's able to talk to and the processes he's had to go through to get it to this place.

IAN POULTER: We know the hard work that's gone in behind the scenes, and obviously today's announcement for us we're very proud of. Jordan pushing this through for us to get to 200 schools is remarkable.

I think it's a credit to him, and we're proud to have him support as many kids as we can get through the program.

LEE WESTWOOD: For anybody that's been to the Little Sticks thing, we have this massive inflatable, so you must have an incredible pair of lungs to keep blowing that up and down.

JORDAN STEPHENSON: Me and Ollie spent quite a bit of time pushing that thing around.

From our perspective with Little Sticks, the main outcomes are to support young people's development, to use golf as a vehicle to develop life skills but also engage them in an activity for life so the wider health and well-being benefits that young people will transition as they take up the game of golf long-term will be huge and not necessarily impacted now but certainly 10, 20 years in the future.

From our perspective, what makes this program really unique is using our players as role models, so the key aspect of Little Sticks are developing these life skills that use our players and all of their achievements to be able to do that. So now young people have new role models, and these guys are every single lesson that Little Sticks is delivered in has video content from our players as producing the game, talking about how they're delivered, but also the key life skills that are associated to that, as well, and everything from the Ryder Cup, from Lee reaching World No. 1, Henrik talking about his Olympic success and the Open Championship, really using these guys as role models and every single child in our program sees these players in every single session that we do.

But the biggest aspect is we are upscaling teachers to be able to do this, to be able to grow something and give teachers the confidence but also the competence to deliver golf in a way which is fun, engaging, but also gives them enough knowledge to be able to deliver it successfully but also not give teachers too much knowledge that it's a little bit too overwhelming.

So it's a really fine balance that we've been able to do so far, but partnering this with complete PE, this takes our program from an after-school extracurricular activity and it's now putting it in physical education, so it's a part of the statutory requirement of schools to deliver PE and now golf through Little Sticks is something fundamental that they will be delivering through physical education.

So that's not a nice to do but that's a need to do, and it means that every single child in the schools that we're working with will have golf for at least a half term if not a full term every single year. So this isn't just a one-off. This isn't just children actively participating in one golf session. It's fundamentally driven through every single school, and for us we've got a really big job to build an infrastructure so schools are supported.

We provide them with all the equipment, all the training needed, but ultimately they'll need that regular support, as well, to be able to do that. We're looking to develop a national infrastructure of mentors that can support these teachers to make sure they're continually being developed so that 200 schools we're working with now, this isn't just a one-off, they will deliver Little Sticks every single year for every child that goes through that school they'll have a full program, so at the end of it, they'll have some fantastic role models, people who will be inspired by through their lessons, but also they'll have a new sport, a new activity that could lead to huge increase in the growth of the game but also the skills that they will have developed through golf.

I think the impact we can't really understand right now. If we're talking plus 40,000 children this year, it will be the same next year, it will be the same after that. So the exponential growth of doing it in this way in terms of the logistics means we don't really understand the impact yet. We have a research study that's just been conducted from a university, Sheffield Hallam, and that has been really clear that the program has been extremely successful for the outcomes we want, but it's using our players and them being absolutely fundamental to all of this, which makes it a success.

You see the children that met you all yesterday, this wasn't the first time. They're seeing you in their lessons week in and week out, so to spend time with you all brings it to life, and we've walked away with a lot more fans for us but also a great opportunity to meet you all since they've spent so much time learning about you.

LEE WESTWOOD: Also for anyone that didn't understand Jordan there because of his northeast accent, my wife is from that area so I can interpret and tell you what he said.

Q. Ian, obviously it's your home event. Wondering how much it would mean to win this week in front of a home crowd, and where would that rank for you in terms of the success that you've already had?

IAN POULTER: It would mean an awful lot. I don't think I've delivered the performance in the LIV events that I think I should have done. I'm not happy with my play over the

last couple of seasons. I think I'm very close. Had one decent round of golf and two okay rounds of golf and played 16 great holes and two poor holes.

For me, it's about having the right adrenaline, the right attitude, the right mindset to go out there this week, have fun on the golf course with the fans, enjoy myself, and hopefully if we are successful this week, this will rank pretty highly, being 48 and a bit. Hopefully if I do win, we can keep the pub open until early hours on Monday morning and celebrate with 14,000 --

LEE WESTWOOD: Have you got a late license?

IAN POULTER: It's a lock in a bit.

Q. Graeme spoke earlier this year about the idea of LIV teams owning their own golf courses. I wondered if you'd had conversations about that and how cool it would be to have a base in the UK.

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, we've been talking about that. It's at a very early stage, but it's certainly something that we should look at in the future and certainly consider, yeah, very, very seriously. I think it makes perfect sense to have home courses for every team and use those venues, and then when the tournament isn't there, you can use it for other purposes. We could bring -- just thinking out loud, we could bring Little Sticks to it certain weeks of the year, have ladies' tournaments there, girls' tournaments, other junior tournaments.

Yeah, there's infinite possibilities.

IAN POULTER: Yeah, we've spoke about it, but it comes down to finance at the end of the day. If we deliver on the golf course and win five tournaments next year, we can push this forward a bit quicker.

I think every team has been tasked with a go-forward plan; what does three, five, ten years look like, and it's definitely in that window of don't think small, think big. So we're sitting here trying to think big and how big we can take this Majesticks GC franchise, and home venue would be amazing. We need a location, we need some funding, and obviously if we play really well, then it will be that.

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