

LIV Golf London

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Hertfordshire, UK

Centurion Club

Graeme McDowell

Cleeks GC

Bubba Watson

RangeGoats GC

Cam Smith

Ripper GC

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the LIV Golf London 2023 press conference featuring Graeme McDowell from Cleeks GC, captain Cam Smith from Ripper GC, and captain Bubba Watson from RangeGoats GC. Welcome, guys.

We are standing here at LIV Golf London 2023. You were one of only 23 players that are playing this week that was here last year. Can you just take a moment to reflect for us on what this past year has been like, how far we've come and what it feels like to be standing here now?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, obviously it's been a pretty crazy 12 months in the world of golf. There was obviously a huge amount of trepidation this time last year when we were standing here at Centurion with a startup company, not knowing where it was going to go.

Obviously mixed reactions from the golfing world, you could say.

But I think 12 months in, I think the 48 players that are involved right now, there's a huge amount of belief in the product. There's a huge amount of momentum. There's been so much good stuff happen this year from a tournament point of view. Fans are getting it now. They see the potential of what we have out here.

The team stuff was probably the biggest thing that kind of took me by surprise last year was how compelling the team environment was, how much guys were into that stuff, and it's been a lot of fun.

We've got a bunch of great guys out here that are certainly great brotherhood that have been forged together through some tough times the last 12 months, what we've all been



through.

But like I say, momentum and LIV and the product and the fan base getting engaged, taking it down to Australia to Cam's part of the world and kind of the reception we got there was pretty epic. It really showed what was possible, what the potential is if we go to markets that really want to see us.

Excited to see the crowd here in London this week and see how much that's changed from last year as people really get into the product and really see where it fits into the world of golf.

THE MODERATOR: Cam, as the reigning Open champion, are you viewing this week as preparation for Royal Liverpool with it only being a couple weeks away and being here in London?

CAM SMITH: Yeah, absolutely. I suppose we've already got a little bit of Open weather the last couple of days. It's nice to be back in the UK, isn't it. Such a lovely place. I'm joking. (Laughter.)

No, absolutely. The golf course, I think there's a good mix of kind of that, I guess, old-school linksey type golf, and then inside the trees there the first few holes, it's definitely a good test out here, and it'll test every part of my game, and looking forward to getting out here this week and giving it a crack.

THE MODERATOR: Bubba, RangeGoats GC have been playing incredible golf this year. I don't know if you're aware, but half of the 2023 events of LIV Golf have been won by RangeGoats. Your team won in Singapore, and you guys are currently third in the standings, only a couple points off of the lead. What do you think is the driving force this year? Where is the magic happening with the RangeGoats?

BUBBA WATSON: Well, it's Harold. Harold is our glue. He puts us together. He makes us all laugh, and he gets us focused.

It's been fun. It's kind of what Graeme was saying. The bonds that we've made out here, not only from our own team but for the other 48, all of us seeing each other every



week, it's been fun.

That's really what's -- it's just been fun doing that. It goes back to college days, goes back to spending time with your buddies, traveling together, shooting the breeze, complaining about bad shots, and then cheering the good shots. That's what's been going well for us.

Then obviously Talor has helped out a little bit, too.

Q. Graeme, the results last year, one team swept the individual podium, and that hasn't happened since. I'm just curious what you remember about that final day, seeing those guys on the podium, and do you think because of the depth of the field now that that may never happen again?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, I mean, obviously this time last year kind of not really having felt it, obviously we need individual champions every week when we play golf, but we've seen that for 20 years, whatever we've all been playing. But to see teams come together and share the podium, and unfortunately the Cleeks haven't been on too many podiums. We're working on that.

CAM SMITH: Same with us.

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, okay, the Rippers.

Obviously the depth of field has changed a huge amount in the last 12 months. I think the major championship performances that we've seen from our players this year proves that we still have a lot of world-class players in this field.

Makes me feel a bit better because I feel like the scoring has been incredible. The standard of golf in what is kind of a sprint format, if you like, the 54 holes, has proven to be much more of a sprint than I ever imagined. It's only one round less, but it feels so much more significant than that.

I feel like in a 72-hole format you always have the opportunity to maybe have an average nine holes in there somewhere, but I feel like in this format there really is no -- there's not much room in there to kind of have an average day or an average nine holes even.

The scoring has been incredible. You really have to come out of the blocks fast. From a team point of view, it's incredibly volatile.

It's been a lot of fun. Like you say, strength of field is incredible, and it really is difficult to get on the podium with these teams and with these guys because the standard of golf has been way better than I ever expected.

Q. Cam, can you take us through your last 12 months. It's been pretty eventful. Do you remember actually watching this event a year ago in London?

CAM SMITH: Yeah, I remember watching it on YouTube when it first started off. For me then, I still hadn't made really my mind up of what I was going to do, whether I was going to come out here or not. Saw a lot of good stuff, and a lot of good stuff in Portland, as well.

It was definitely -- I think it's definitely a different style of golf to watch, and there's definitely a lot more stuff going on, like Graeme said, with the teams. It's interesting to watch. I actually love watching it.

Q. I wanted to ask you how many times you've seen your putts on the Road Hole?

CAM SMITH: I really watched the final round one time, but I've probably seen that putt on my Instagram feed probably 1,000 times. I don't know. It seems to pop up every now and again.

Q. Bubba, what did you put in Talor's cereal this year?

BUBBA WATSON: Yeah, exactly. You know what, he's so quiet, he's so to himself. But having his family travel with him, being able to spend a lot of time with his family, being able to spend time with his young one, his in-laws, he's just down to earth, and he's just focused on the next shot. He's just been grinding out.

Solid player, we've all known that, and for him to quietly jump ship out of nowhere to come over here because he loves team golf, it was cool to see.

Obviously somehow getting him on my team helped out tremendously and made our team successful.

Q. Can you talk about maybe his Ryder Cup chances?

BUBBA WATSON: Well, he has to be -- gosh, I don't know where Rickie Fowler is on the Ryder Cup standings, but he's got to be up there, too. But I would have to say those two have been the impressive ones the last few weeks, just their high finishes and how they've been playing pretty much all year. If they're not already -- if Rickie is not already in in points, he's definitely getting a pick, and Talor should definitely get a pick. He's playing that well, and he plays really good outside the U.S.

Q. Cameron, when you won the Open, there was a lot of almost overshadowed by the decision that you might be going to LIV. Do you feel what's happened in

the last 11 months has been a vindication, and has it been harder, perhaps, to deal with some of the repercussions of that than you anticipated at the time?

CAM SMITH: Yeah, it was definitely, I guess, a frustrating media conference after the Open. I think, like you said, perhaps a little bit overshadowed that I'd probably just won the biggest tournament that I'll ever play in and someone was asking that.

But as I look back on that, it's just a guy trying to do his job. I suppose it was a little bit harder from then onwards, definitely whilst making the decision, just some nasty stuff, I suppose, said by the keyboard warriors. I knew it was going to be tough, but I feel since I made the decision, I made the right one.

Q. In terms of how things have developed in the 12 months, this is probably the ultimate stage to be at, that there's been a peace deal that appears to be the end of the golf wars, as it were, and you're on the winning side?

CAM SMITH: Yeah, I think we're going to see how stuff unfolds. It's probably still a little bit early to assume, but yeah, I felt I made the right decision for multiple reasons. I think the last few weeks is another tick in the box for all us guys.

Q. Cam, just wanted to touch on something that Sir Nick Faldo said last week where he said that he sees now the merger has happened, this LIV Golf element fading away. Do you see it as having a place within the calendar, and how would you like your schedule to look like moving forward?

CAM SMITH: Exactly like it is this year would be perfect for me, 14 and four majors, I'd take that for the rest of my career.

I really can't see LIV Golf going away. I think team golf is here to stay, and if you asked every one of us out here, all the 48 guys, I think everyone has such a good time and everyone enjoys what they're doing out here, they love the competition, and like Graeme said, that team element really brings three or four guys really close that perhaps weren't before.

It's good to see. It's unique. I don't think it's going anywhere.

Q. Graeme, you said a little bit earlier that it was a mixed reaction from the golfing world this time last year, which would probably be putting it quite kindly. Over the last 12 months, is there anything that you

personally would have done differently, and do you think there are things that the game should have done differently over the last year, as well?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I think standing here looking back, there's really not much that could have happened any differently. I think the respective tours reacted in the only sort of defensible way that they had, which was to try and attack the weaknesses that they saw within this product.

I think thankfully common sense has prevailed. There's absolutely a place in the sport for something like this, like the guys are -- we keep reiterating the team side of golf is one of the most compelling and interesting things for the fan at home. For me, the four Ryder Cups that I've played have been the greatest experience of my golfing career, and creating camaraderie, playing for each other, creating emotion on the best players in the world that the fan knows is real is something very, very, very interesting for the sport.

Like I say, there's been a lot of stuff written about the players out here the last 12 months. I think 12 months on, I take it much more with a pinch of salt that I did in the beginning. I think I took it a little too personally at the start where when I have the sense and perspective that I have now, I look at the people that wrote these things, the professional people that wrote these things were really only protecting their own turf, representing the organizations that they were being paid to represent, which was all we were doing. We were representing the organization we were being paid to represent, as well.

Like I say, looking back, that perspective, I really don't blame anyone. I understand the motivations for the narratives that were being created, and like I say, people were just trying to defend their territory in the only way they could. Sometimes it wasn't very nice coming this direction.

But hey, I'm excited where the game of golf is going. I really don't think there are winners and losers as such. I think the only winner is the game of golf, and hopefully we can figure out what the schedule is going to look like because getting the best players together as often as possible in compelling events where the fan watches and goes, these guys are into this, they love it, and they're playing the best golf possible, that's what the fan wants to see.

Q. Perhaps a lot of those perspectives that you guys were coming here purely for the money, but to go to yesterday where you put yourself through two rounds of Open qualifying, is that a clear message that playing in the biggest tournaments still matters?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I mean, I think every player out here wants to be competing in the best events in the world, and the major championships are something I haven't played enough of the last few years. I was at U.S. Open qualifying a month ago, I went to Open qualifying yesterday.

I still care deeply about the sport, and I care deeply about trying to compete in the best tournaments in the world.

Of course it's about the money, yes. Every professional golfer on the planet is competing for financial gain, and that's just a part of it.

But it's not all about that. It is about chasing tradition and legacy, and that is obviously something that we've been accused of turning our back on. There's not one player out here that doesn't care about the sport and cares about looking at his name on the Claret Jug and his name on the U.S. Open trophy and a couple of green jackets in the closet. It's special stuff, and we all care a huge amount about that.

Like Cam said, creating that balance in your schedule where you get to play a tour like this but then you get to go and play in the major championships, as well, and the biggest events around the world, whatever they may be.

Certainly care a huge amount about that.

Q. You joined LIV wanting this free agency world. How is that achieved in a world with dominance where PIF is sort of effectively running the whole golf show around the world, and is there a danger competition is reduced in terms of the nature of golf if it's all centralized in one entity?

GRAEME McDOWELL: It's a great really big huge question that's very difficult to answer really. I don't think there's a guy in the golfing world that really knows what this all looks like. Yes, the PIF are going to become a very big investor in the global game of golf, and I think that that's good for the sport to have sort of that amount of money being directed into the sport across the board.

I think what's happened the last 12 months and the fracturing of the game is not something we ever, ever wanted. It's been said by players on the PGA Tour and DP World Tours that if this money is going to be spent, let's work out how to all spend it together.

Centralization and all that stuff, I don't know. To me, golf is the No. 1 most important thing here. The fan is the next most important thing, and creating a schedule where the best players in the world compete, like I said, at a very,

very high level as often as possible against each other with the team format kind of being sprinkled in there, as well, I think there's a lot of good there.

What it all looks like, I have no idea. It's very difficult to answer.

Q. You were all very appreciative of the money that's come in from being part of LIV, and now we're seeing PIF putting a lot more in potentially across the world of golf obviously from the Saudi funds. Does Saudi Arabia need something back, like a new major?

BUBBA WATSON: No, because that's not what it's about. That's not what they were trying to create. If you look at the PGA Tour, the PGA Tour is somewhere around, what, \$3 billion to charity over the course of its life? That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to grow the game.

When you think about what Saudi is doing, Saudi Arabia is just one investor in LIV. There's multiple. But we only focus on the one, when I say we, you guys only focus on the one.

Saudi is trying to change their country, their landscape of tourism by the game of golf. Look at what they're doing in 2030, all the golf courses they're building there. They're letting young people play, women play. They're letting everybody learn the game of golf because it's fun to get outside in beautiful weather like this.

That's what they're doing. So you have to look at it as a whole. You're focused on one entity and that's the investor. There's a bunch of investors in this. I know us three right here have invested our time and energy and moments in it, so we're part of that.

Q. Do you think Saudi is change? The PGA were very vitriolic in the tone of the lawsuit last year, and now they've joined forces.

BUBBA WATSON: I haven't read what the lawsuit said. I know that there was a lot of name calling everywhere, not only in golf but other entities, and so yeah, it's just sad to see it that way.

But we're all coming together because we know what's good for the game and to grow. That's what we had to do; we had to come together and merge together. Hopefully it all turns out in our favor where we like our schedule.

Q. Do you know anything about your readmission to the PGA?

CAM SMITH: Nothing. Way too early.

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Q. Do you think that actually you shouldn't benefit having been the ones that took the LIV cash and those told to reject it have lost out all that cash and you shouldn't just be allowed back in without any financial gain for them?

BUBBA WATSON: I think they did have financial -- it's funny you keep saying stuff about cash, but there was \$400 million the PGA Tour found randomly, so I think those guys are doing all right. There's two guys higher up than Talor I think this year on the PGA Tour in money earned, so I think they're doing all right over there.

Q. For you, Graeme, you talked about the future. I wanted to ask you a question about that. Cam got to experience playing a LIV event in his home country. Have you made any overtures to the powers that be to try to get a LIV event in Ireland, either in the northern or southern part?

GRAEME McDOWELL: I mean, listen, that would be a dream come true. I love playing in front of the Irish fans. I love playing the biggest tournaments in the world in front of the Irish fans. I've played every Irish Open pretty much that I've had an opportunity to since I turned pro.

Having a LIV event in Ireland, that's been a tough conversation to have the last 12 months, but perhaps as we move forward here into this new landscape, whatever that new landscape may look like, maybe we can start to have that conversation. But there's a lot of stuff that has to be worked out.

There's a huge laundry list of questions that guys have, things that have to be figured out. The schedule is something that's going to be super interesting to see it all come together. Will we play a LIV Golf event in Ireland one day? I really, really hope so, let's put it that way. But who knows. Who knows.

Q. The press conference last year here was probably the most hostile press conference I've ever seen in sports and it continued throughout the next 12 months. Obviously the last few weeks there's been the announcement of the partnership, and we haven't seen anywhere near the same amount of pushback from the press toward the PGA Tour. How does that make you feel?

BUBBA WATSON: It's great. I mean, he asked a question earlier, somebody over here, if I would change the year, I would have signed up earlier, but I had surgery so this tournament last year I got to watch from my bed. I had knee surgery. My son was with me, and that's what took

me over the edge of wanting to join is because of the team atmosphere.

But when you look back at the hostility, yeah, it's sad that we were in that -- that we had those problems, name calling. Everybody is trying to do a job. If you all change over news stations, nobody yells at you for changing over news. It's the same news but different station.

But it's been a fun year. Hopefully we can get behind it and the game of golf grows and we do some great things. Another \$3 billion to charities puts the PGA Tour at \$6 billion would be a good thing for the game of golf.

There was some kids out here yesterday. The Majesticks yesterday had a bunch of kids out here learning the game, and then I heard there's going to be some this afternoon. We're going to do some more this afternoon at 3:00.

That's the whole goal of all these tournaments is to grow the game, and when we say grow the game, get more people to play golf, even if it doesn't matter what the age is. It's the whole thing.

All the name calling and yelling is just sad. A year later now everybody is friends again.

Q. This week -- all three of you are captains, and it's obviously a different thing when you've got to do the captain sort of stuff for a golf tournament. How does that differ from when you used to play on your own on the PGA Tour?

CAM SMITH: I think I've got the three most blase guys on the whole tour, so my role really hasn't changed at all. They just want to have warm coffee and a breakfast and go out and play some golf.

Yeah, I think these guys are perhaps a little bit different. I know Bubba really gets into it. But as far as my team goes, they're the most laid-back guys in the world, so it's an easy job for me.

BUBBA WATSON: Yeah, it's a little different. Our team room is a little different. It's a little chaotic at times, but it's been fun. Sometimes you lose sight of what your goal is. Your goal is to play good golf that day, and if you're having to answer some questions or try to figure out some things, some travel logistics, it makes it a little tough trying to get out there to the course and practice, but that's what we signed up for. That's what we want to do, and all of us are thankful to be captains and be part of that.

Q. Talking a little bit about the golf course, Graeme, you've obviously seen it before last year. Boys,

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looking to get your first looks, as well. Any key holes you think are key this week, and boys, have you had a chance to look at it? What are your thoughts?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, it's a really good track here. Enjoyed the experience last year. Haven't had a chance to see it so far this week. I was up at West Lincs yesterday, so I just got in last night.

But from what I'm hearing, I think they have seven par-5s here at the golf course for the members, so we converted three or four of those last year. Most of them worked. I think the 9th hole was one of the key holes that didn't work as a par-4 last year, so I believe we've gone to a 5 this year. It was like 3-iron off the tee and a 3-wood into the green for a par-4 last year with like hay left, and the right wasn't very good, either. So it was a super tough hole, so sounds like we've gone to a 5 this year, which is great.

But no, I think the golf course has got some really cool stuff to it. Play the first four or five in the trees and then you come out into kind of that nice wispy, fescue kind of English golf.

It's a cool track, and like I say, looking forward to seeing what the attendance is like this week, what the atmosphere is going to be like.

I always love playing golf in this part of the world. The fans are educated. They understand what a good shot looks like. Wentworth and the Open Championship, of course, and just all my experiences of playing golf here in this part of the world, I always love it, so looking forward to the weekend.

CAM SMITH: I only played 10 holes yesterday, but from what I saw yesterday, I think there's a really, really good mix of extremely tough holes where you're grinding to make par and then also some holes where you get a wedge in your hand and you're looking at making birdie.

Yeah, as long as that theme continues, I think it'll be a good test. I think those first four or five there in the trees are quite tough, and once you get through there, I think you're looking at birdies the whole way in.

BUBBA WATSON: Yeah, No. 1 and No. 4, those are some stout holes starting off. But yeah, the scores were low, I think, last year. When I say low, 9-under won. When I say low, I was going the opposite.

I think top 10 was even, something like that, so it's a tough test out there. So yeah, looking forward to the challenge and obviously trying to make birdies as much as we can to offset the bogeys.

Q. It does kind of feel like you guys, and the way you're talking, your relationship with golf media seems to maybe have changed. I was curious if you think it has changed and maybe why?

BUBBA WATSON: Golf media you said?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Do you think we've got trust issues? (Laughter.)

BUBBA WATSON: First of all, everybody wants to feel loved, right, and when you change jobs, it's the same job, just a different company. It's sad when you get talked about, name calling.

I wrote a book about my mental issues, and so when that stuff comes out and then it comes to your family and it comes to your in-laws and it comes to the kids, that's hurtful, and it's sad. Then a year later, all is forgiven. Oh, man, we're partners.

We don't know what the merger is going to look like, but look, I forgive everybody. I forgive anybody that's done something wrong to me. I've done stuff wrong to people. I tell them I'm sorry, and then you try to be a man about it and go on.

Hopefully we can all hug it out and make the schedule that Cam wants, 14 and four, and hopefully I get to play in that one every year called Augusta, and then we just keep playing golf and trying to give the best product to the fans.

Us three right here think that team golf is -- hopefully the media sees that we're the same people, just trying to make putts.

Q. Do you agree with that, Graeme?

GRAEME McDOWELL: Yeah, listen, I kind of mentioned it earlier. I feel like perspective, 12 months has given me a lot of perspective into what's happened. I feel the same as what Bubba said. I really don't hold a lot of grudges towards anything. The keyboard warriors are one thing. That comes with the territory. But like professional media writing some pretty damning stuff about players that have spent 20 years building a solid reputation for themselves that seem to just dissolve overnight, I look back on it with perspective now and think to myself, those guys were paid representatives for a narrative that -- like I say, they were being paid to represent.

All these players out here are trying to do is represent the golf tour that they're paid to play on.

Everyone has their territory to defend, and they did that, and sometimes it was pretty vitriolic. Like I say, I look back on it now, and I really don't blame guys too much at all because that was their job, and I'm never going to begrudge anyone an opportunity to do their job.

I just hope we can all move on and that the game of golf will come together. Looking forward to catching up with a lot of guys I haven't seen in a long time.

Where this all goes from here, we don't know yet, but I think we're all pretty excited about the possibilities.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you guys so much. Good luck this week. We'll see you out there.

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