

The Ryder Cup

Monday, September 20, 2021

Steve Stricker

Padraig Harrington

Media Conference



JOHN DEVER: On behalf of the PGA of America, we want to thank everyone joining us remotely and those of us with us on site at Whistling Straits for the 43rd Ryder Cup in Wisconsin.

We are joined by our two esteemed captains. On my left, Steve Stricker from the United States, and on my right, European Captain Padraig Harrington

Gentlemen, both of you, thanks so much for not only being with us today but all week. We understand it's a busy, busy time. And we're grateful for all of your thoughts and insights.

Captain Harrington, we will begin with you. As we gather here on the shores of Lake Michigan, a year later than intended what are your prevailing thoughts and what is your mindset for the team and the journey to get here?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Obviously to get here, it's been three years, but now that we are here, it seems quick, certainly the end of the journey is quick. We traveled here today. Seems to be a great atmosphere amongst the lads.

Very happy with the work The European Tour has done behind the scenes and our team room is brilliant back at the hotel and here. We moved a lot around in the Champions' locker room and looks comfortable, looks great. They have done a good job with that. Couldn't be happier.

We are ready to go. Have got a few videos they have made and the guys will see that this evening and start seeing some of those. Really we're in a position that we're ready at this stage. Obviously there will be plenty of unknowns during the week but at this stage, we are prepared for everything and ready to go

JOHN DEVER: Captain Stricker, this is a home Ryder Cup for the first time in five years in the United States but quite literally home for you, being a native of Wisconsin. How excited are you to showcase Wisconsin as a backdrop for the greatest event in golf.

STEVE STRICKER: Thank you, very honored and humbled to be representing Team USA. Padraig, welcome to Wisconsin. We've got to get you a cheese head -- have you ever seen those?

It's been a long time coming. Fans love sporting events and golf is a big part of Wisconsin, as well. We are at the home of basically Herb Kohler and his family, and the family that got golf put on the map here in Wisconsin.

So we are showcasing everything right here in our great state. They are looking forward to it, and we can't wait to get the ball rolling on Friday.

JOHN DEVER: Well, we're rolling now. Let's hit the floor for some questions.

Q. Did you ever imagine in your days at Lake Ripley or Edgerton Towne that you would be sitting here one day in the culmination of so much that you've worked for?

STEVE STRICKER: No, not really. It's been an unbelievable journey. I think back to childhood golf at those two courses you talked about, and just all the years playing on Tour. I personally never thought I would be in this position to captain The Ryder Cup Team.

But again, very honored and happy. It's a great position. It's fun to be a part of it. Again, very honored and humbled to be doing it.

But yeah, you know, you just look back at all the things that have taken place throughout my career, and this was not on my radar for sure. So extremely happy to be a part of it and we look forward to it for sure.

Q. Can you just give us an update on Brooks Koepka and how the wrist is doing?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I haven't -- I've been talking to him ever since it happened. You know, check in with him every couple of days. He tells me everything is 100 percent and everything is ready and raring to go. I haven't



run into him yet today. I've heard that he's here but I haven't seen him yet.

From what I understand, he's fully healed and ready for everything.

Q. How much of an advantage to have a team with a lot of experience in The Ryder Cup and again, is it an advantage to come here without baggage or memories of previous Ryder Cups?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You can go first.

STEVE STRICKER: We have got some young guys on the team. I saw a stat earlier that we are on average about five years younger than the European Team. One thing is we come with a lot of enthusiasm and energy, young guys willing and ready to learn. No bad experiences for the most part from a lot of these guys.

You know, we haven't been on the winning side too many things, I think two or three times out of the last 12 times. We're not coming with bad experiences. I see that as a positive. We are using that as a positive and our guys are super fired up and ready to go.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Obviously Europe has a strong team when it comes to experience. That's quite relevant when you're playing an away match. If you had two players, one experienced and one not of equal ability, certainly in an away match, you would be looking for experience. I'm very comfortable that my team is that experienced. It will be interesting.

As I say, at the end of the week the experience versus the non-experience will be thrashed out many times to determine what the result was. Certainly it's pretty tried and tested in Europe that we're going to go with experience when we're coming across here. We do have a few rookies on the team to provide that enthusiasm but we are strongly relying on that experience.

Q. For both captains, if you can describe how set your game plan is for the week, and what would be the No. 1 factor in making adjustments to it? Padraig, you can go first. You gave it to Steve last time.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Clearly we have a game plan, a pretty strong game plan, all the way through, well-prepared.

But from being a vice captains, I know from these things, there's unknowns, things change as you go on through the week. You do everything you can to have a set program ahead and then you also have that -- certainly that vice

captain's ready for when something happens, something changes so that you can move quickly, not be acting retrospectively. Even though we don't know what's going to happen, you still have an idea of, you know, X, Y or Z comes along, and, well, we can pivot this way. We have plenty of options and that's the main thing.

As I said if everything went smoothly which it very rarely does, you could probably set out everything now. But as I said, we will expect some unknowns and some things to happen that will need to be dealt with.

STEVE STRICKER: I feel exactly the same way as Padraig. We got an early start on things obviously with the practice round. We've got a really good, sound game plan already in place. But again, there's always little things along the way that can creep up, anything. A guy could be playing poorly or he could get hurt or injured, but you've just got to be prepared with multiple options, and we are. We are going to be preparing that way.

I think we've both been a part of enough of these teams, you see it throughout the years and you understand that you need to be prepared coming into these.

Q. People love to debate how important a captain is in The Ryder Cup, myself included. Having been in that chair for three years, has your opinion on that changed at all? I would love to hear from both of you, actually.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Well, it's pretty clear we've seen good captains lose. We've seen bad captains win. But ultimately, the captain does have an influence if it's a tight game, and that's really it. If it is going to be a tight game, which a lot of these are, the captain and the atmosphere he brings to his team can be the difference.

Yeah, it's one of those things for us that sometimes, many times, the captain will not be the actual difference but it's possible that we could be the very difference. We could make that difference at the end of the week. We have to prepare like we are the ones that are going to make a little bit of a difference that just get our team across the line.

STEVE STRICKER: Agree. I've seen it, great captains win and lose. I've seen poor captains lose. You know, so I've seen -- or win, I guess.

But they can definitely influence a team. But I keep saying, I think it's a thankless job, you know what I mean. You're going to get blamed if you lose, right, and all the credit goes to the players if they win, which is fine. We understand that I think coming into this.

But you wouldn't trade it for the world. You want to be part

of these competitions and you want to be the guy leading this team and being in charge, and you wouldn't want to have it any other way.

Q. Question for Steve. What steps have you taken or will you take to ensure everything goes smoothly between Brooks Koepka and Bryson DeChambeau this week? Have you sat down them for a chat and will you send them out together in practice?

STEVE STRICKER: It's a non-issue, really, for me and the team. We got together a few weeks ago, the six of us and I've had conversations with them both. They have assured me it's not going to be an issue. I have no worries whatsoever.

Will we pair them together? I don't think so at this point but things could change. Could always happen. But probably not. But again, I had a dinner; they all showed up. We had great conversation, great talks. So I'm not seeing it as an issue at all and they are completely on board.

Q. How much can we read into the practice pairings from tomorrow? Will there be a bit of smoke and mirrors to try to throw the opposite captain off?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Read into it like you should. That's your job in the media is to make a story out of it. I'm not going to say what it means or what it doesn't mean. You know, at the end of the day, I have -- I do have ideas about what should be happening in practice, but you know, it's for you to figure it out, not me to tell you.

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, you're going to get that same stock answer from me, too.

Yeah, we are still in the process. We have good ideas about our pairings, but we are still in the process of finalizing things, ironing things out, which direction we want to go. Yeah, whatever Padraig said.

Q. This is one of the grandest stages in golf and we see a format inside it that don't get to see often with foursomes. As players, did you learn to embrace foursomes and how do you get your younger guys to find comfort in it?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I was brought up playing foursomes. Played it a lot in amateur golf, many in my team have. It's not really alien to us. It's certainly somewhere that I don't think -- because it's not so alien to us, we don't read that much into it. I think sometimes when people haven't played, it they can over-complicate it.

But as I said, I was brought up playing it. It's made at our

golf clubs at home, not just in championships. It's a very common game, and really don't read into it anymore than there should be. I think sometimes you guys, again, might look at it, and try -- it's just two guys playing a golf ball around the place. It's not that difficult when you're brought up playing it.

STEVE STRICKER: I think we always tend to try to look for guys with similar game styles or game styles that would complement the other player. Good putting always is a big key I think in alternate-shot or in foursomes.

You look for the guys who embrace that. That's the important part is some guys are a little bit -- they don't care for that style of play. Other guys want to play it. It depends on the player and it's up to us or our job to try to figure out those guys and try to pair the games together that make the most sense.

Q. I think since you played in The Presidents Cup the last time in 2013, you've been part of this every year maybe except one as an assistant, obviously the captain in 2017 at the Presidents Cup. What have you learned and taken from all that? What did you see that you think is helping you now?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I think I've learned a lot being an assistant captain more so than being a player. Yeah, it's just learning what works well with the players, what doesn't work well.

I'm probably the most experienced captain, really, that's ever been a captain if you want to -- if I want to be truthful with you. I've been a part of every team since I've quit playing on these teams, and a captain of the 2017 Presidents Cup team.

So I've seen a lot of different things. I've seen some things that worked. I've seen some things that hasn't worked. I've put all those in my memory bank over the years and hopefully lean on those things that I've learned and apply them to this week.

Yeah, it's been fun to get to know the other side of things other than the players side, and I've definitely learned a lot.

Q. Things specifically you've cut out, just in the lead-up, not the pairings or whatever, things that you normally do that you said no, we don't like that?

STEVE STRICKER: No, not really. I think the biggest thing that I have brought or want to bring is just communication, and I think the hardest part is when you don't communicate to your players. If you throw a guy a curveball at the last second, it's hard for these guys to

adjust. They are a product of, you know, when they are playing on a weekly basis, they are doing a routine, day-in and day-out.

You want to make sure that you don't get in the way of that routine so much. Give them enough lead time, give them some notice when we are going to play so they can prepare and prepare well to go out and play.

Q. Question to Harrington. You said that everybody wants to play with Viktor Hovland, but it's just evident at the same time, can you play what your plan is for Hovland this week? Can he play all the five matches?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: He certainly can. The reason players want to play with him is he's not just a good player. They like the enthusiasm that he brings to the golf course. I think all the guys look at Viktor and we see the youthful exuberance that we once had. I think that's why he's such an attractive partner for anybody in the team for foursomes or fourballs.

Viktor brings a lot of options during the week, that's for sure.

Q. If I may, just going back to Brooks, please. He made some comments last week about The Ryder Cup which gained a lot of traction and suggested he was a bit maybe indifferent towards the week. What did you make of that, and did it concern you at all heading into this event?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I've talked to him about it. I've had experiences with Brooks over many, many of these teams, and the conversations that I have had with him and what I have personally seen in the team room does not jive up to what I was reading in those articles.

Again, I am not worried about Brooks. He assures me he's healthy. He assures me that he is 100 percent all-in on this team and whatever he need to do for this team to become the winner at the end of the week. Again, I'm not worried about Brooks at all and it's been good talks and he's ready to get down and start playing.

Q. How do you see the role of a caddie different in The Ryder Cup versus a regular golf tournament, and do you have to coach the caddies how to do their job differently this week than others?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Clearly these are the best caddies in the world. Why would we be telling them what to do? They know their job. It is a difficult job week for the caddies. There is a physical requirement; if they go 36 holes a day, they need to stay mentally sharp.

Yeah, it is a different week for them, that's for sure. And there's no doubt that in many ways, it's nearly a thankless job. They will be forgotten about at times but they do pull their way when it comes to tournament golf and no more so than at The Ryder Cup.

Q. Over the years, if it's a U.S. Team it's pretty easy for them to play for their country, all that stuff. Europe obviously is a different situation. What's been the common rallying point to get Europe --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Seve. Pretty straightforward. Seve. Started with Seve in the '80s. He pushed for this to become continental your open rather than Great Britain and Ireland and it was a way for Seve to legitimize The European Tour. It was a way to give The European Tour a standing. The great players in Europe at the time didn't get great access to play in all the best events in the world. Seve was always fighting against that, the tide in that. And playing and winning in The Ryder Cup was the way to say that Europe deserved a seat at the table.

You look at the great players we had in the '80s and a lot came from Seve and those players to drive Europe into a much stronger position in world golf, and you know, without a doubt we rely on Seve for that. We are here to very much play for the European Tour.

When I'm playing in Europe at the moment for the last couple weeks, South African players, Australian players and Asian players play come up to me and wish me luck and are rooting for us because they know it's a big part of our tour, how we do in The Ryder Cup.

So yes, the technicality of qualifying has been born in Continental Europe but the reality is we are playing for The European Tour.

Q. There's always the risk that the wrong Tweet could become a big event at an event like this. What have you told your guys about that?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, we are going to pay attention to that, and we are going to talk about it. They have been good, and knock-on-wood that they won't say anything that they shouldn't say.

But yeah, again, I don't think it will be an issue at all. I think we don't have any like mandates, like, hey, we are not going to do any social media this week or anything like that. But they will be smart about it. I think they all realize, they do this on a daily basis and they know they need to be careful and cautious on what they put out there.

Q. A long established feeling is that European success has been about team spirit as well as being excellent golfers. Is that something you agree with and what have you done to create a better bond among your team?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I think that's a misconception amongst our team. When you're getting beat, it's hard to look like you're bonded, right, and they have done a really good job of that, of beating us nine out of the last 12 last week I've said.

But I've been part of plenty of these team rooms where the chemistry inside is nothing but great. Sure, we've had occasional things, occasional hiccups along the way but for the most part it's always been very good. Guys are anxious to play. They are very proud to play for the USA wearing red, white and blue and to be here in Wisconsin. It's all fine. It's all good, yeah.

Q. For both captains, congratulations, guys, you have done a great job leading up. Can both of you or either one of you honestly say that you would accept right now, all-even going into Sunday's singles matches, first you, Padraig, you're the visitor.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: We don't get to choose that. It's a good question but why would we bother thinking like that? We don't get to choose what we are going to be going into Sunday. We have to play as hard as we can Friday, Saturday, and see where we're at.

If I'm going to start, you know, dreaming and predicting and wanting, sure, there's plenty of other things we could look for in life. I think I'd go for having a half a dozen shots lead rather than go for even.

What do you think? I think you'd do the same.

STEVE STRICKER: I don't know if either one of us would like to have even going into Sunday. I think we are both looking a little bit more of having a lead going into Sunday. I'm sure he's thinking the same way. I know we are as a team, of having the team going into Sunday.

So we are both trying to prepare that way. We are both trying to get to that point so we have a lead going into Sunday for sure.

Q. You joked about the packers when you first came up here and that's pretty much what everyone associates with Wisconsin. Now that Whistling Straits has had three PGAs and Ryder Cup, in Europe is this course starting to get recognized with some of the more popular North American courses?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: For sure, maybe I'd be a little biased, because Herb Kohler when he was bidding this thing here, he was thinking of Ballybunion so it has some relevance to us Irish and we would have known about it with the Irish connection.

I do think Whistling Straits and Herb Kohler have put this part of Wisconsin on the map with golf throughout Europe. I'm sure the PGAs did that but The Ryder Cup will probably elevate it to a new level.

It's amazing what one individual, what one family can do for an area and it is very impressive and I think we're thankful of Herb being here and I'm sure everybody in the area, the economy has gained so much from it, so it is important to have people like that backing their hometown.

Q. Could be the biggest home-course advantage as far as fans go in history. How do you use that to fuel your teams? For Padraig what, if anything, do you teach your guys or tell your guys to draw out the noise and not listen to the haters so to speak?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, every time you play at home you realize you're going to have a home-field advantage, basically, when it comes to the fans. So you just go out and embrace it. Let them energize you. Let them pick you up.

Yeah, so I'm going to show off for them, right. It seems like our teams over the years, the teams that have played well, they get to the point of almost like they show off for the home fans, and hopefully that's what our guys are going to do this week and provide a lot of excitement.

Like I said before, the state of Wisconsin, I said this a week or two ago, I know there's ticket holders from every states in our country that's going to be here. It's not just Wisconsin but the whole country is showing up. It's been a long time waiting and everybody is excited to get this thing going.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: From our perspective, our players play for the glory of this event. If there was 40,000 U.S. fans and no Europeans, we'd prefer that than having no fans. That's just the reality. We want the noise. We want the excitement. We want the buzz of it all. Yes, the players will have to deal with it and yes, they will have to embrace it. But they wouldn't want the alternative. Having no fans is no fun. They will enjoy it.

We expect a loud crowd. We expect excitement, and the players should be well-prepared for it. It's not like they haven't seen it before. After all, it is only golf. It's pretty



save inside the ropes. I don't think they need to worry about too much.

Q. You brought the team up early because you said you wanted to get to know the course in a way that in other Ryder Cups, the team never really got to. Do you feel like you did that, and what else were you trying to accomplish with that trip, and did you accomplish that going into this week with the team?

STEVE STRICKER: It was a great couple of days.. and I think my message from day one is to try to out-prepare.

The way the schedule of the Tour ended and having some time off between THE TOUR Championship and The Ryder Cup gave us that ability to come up here, to not only see the course but to get here as a team, to get these guys comfortable with one another right out of the chute, to build that camaraderie. I feel like everything came together really well in those couple of days and they left here feeling good and they came here feeling good as well.

So it was a good couple of days we had.

Q. Just a couple of quick ones. Is there any chance at all that Tiger will make any visit here this weekend or is that not going to happen?

STEVE STRICKER: Probably not going to happen. He's been, you know, obviously in my ear a lot and I call him pretty regularly. He's part of our Ryder Cup Team. He's part of what we do. He's been part of so many of these teams. So to bounce ideas off of him, all of us, players alike, I know some of the players went over to see him.

But I think it's just not a good time for him to be here physically because of where he's at in his rehabilitation and tough course to walk, right. Everybody is going to see it, from tee-to-green, it's difficult. So probably won't show up. But he's getting better and his focus and mine is on making a comeback to play again. We don't want to get in the way of that because we would all love to see him come back and play.

Q. Jon Rahm was a bit crooked last week; is he back to fighting fitness?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: He was lifting very nicely in the gym today when I arrived. After hearing the reports last week, I arrived in to find him too sweaty to give a hug to lifting some heavy weights. I said, okay, things are looking good.

Q. Based on all your years of experience as you mentioned as a vice captain, what is the difference

between the looseness and the confidence of the U.S. Team in The Presidents Cup and The Ryder Cup? Is it simply the difference of winning one cup all the time and losing one cup most of the time?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, that's a great question and we get asked that a lot, why aren't we winning more Ryder Cups like we are Presidents Cups? If we had that answer, we'd be winning more Ryder Cups.

I don't know if we are getting in our own way at some times. I'm also trying to bring an energy, a little bit more relaxed, and I don't know if we play a little bit more relaxed in The Presidents Cup teams versus The Ryder Cup.

Yeah, we are trying to learn all the time between the two. Different competition, obviously. Europe brings a strong team and they play well and are tough and we always have tough matches that seem to have gone their way more times than our lately. But we look to try to change that this week and move on.

But yeah, we are worried about this one and just trying to win this one.

JOHN DEVER: Gentlemen, you've put us off to a good start for this week and again we appreciate your time tonight and all week long. Have a good evening and thanks again.

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 . . . when all is said, we're done.®