

The Ryder Cup

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

Lee Westwood

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, and welcome to the 43rd Ryder Cup here at Whistling Straits. We are joined by Mr. Lee Westwood. Lee, thanks for being with us, and welcome to what is your 11th career Ryder Cup. Had a terrific career. I have to imagine, though, playing in 11 Ryder Cups now, and especially in such an era of European team prosperity, that must be one of the things you hold in the highest regard about your own career.

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, for sure. You know, the first time I ever went to watch a golf tournament it was the Ryder Cup at the Belfry in 1989 and then again in 1993. I didn't ever go and see the PGA at Wentworth or the British Masters at Woburn. First golf tournament I ever played in I actually went to I actually played in, it was Medeira.

Really the sort of best feel for professional golf I ever got was watching the likes of Seve Ballesteros and Ian Woosnam and Nick Faldo and Bernhard Langer playing at the Belfry in the Ryder Cup.

When I did come round to playing it in 1997, it gave me a real feel for it that this was the pinnacle of team sport, and nothing really compares to the Ryder Cup, I think.

It's very difficult to make Ryder Cup teams and very special when you do qualify for a team and get to represent Europe.

Q. I'm curious what you think has made you such a great Ryder Cup player.

LEE WESTWOOD: I'm a pretty good golfer. (Laughter.) Always helps, doesn't it?

I think I get on pretty well with everybody. If somebody partners me I'm pretty straight hitter of the ball. I hit a lot of fairways, hit a lot of greens. That's sort of what my game has been renowned for. I do make putts when I need to, despite what people's opinions might be.

I just try and make my playing partners comfortable and let them just do what they're doing. That's really what I learnt from playing my first one with Nick Faldo. He just let me -- he was there to back me up, and I knew he was always

going to be there, and just let your playing partner get off and express themselves.

Best player to ever do that was Nicolas Colsaerts in his first-ever match in a Ryder Cup in Chicago. He went out and shot 10-under, which was a phenomenal debut. Only came in once that day, but I'd like to think that he just felt comfortable that I was going to be there if he needed me. That's just the way I've always tried to be out on the golf course.

Q. Are there any common denominators between yourself and Sergio and Poults, for example, because you're three of kind of the veteran guys in the group and you've all had success? What's your level of respect for those two guys?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, obviously I have a lot of respect for both of them. I think all three of us are very passionate about the Ryder Cup and we hold it in very high regard. We give it our all when we're involved.

Q. Given this is going to be almost an exclusively American crowd, have you guys done anything different to prepare for that?

LEE WESTWOOD: No, not really. Just sort of understand that it is, and nothing is going to change that. You just have to deal with it. I'd much rather play in front of a crowd that's solely U.S. fans than no crowd at all like we experienced last year.

Playing professional golf is all about playing in front of people and entertaining people, and the majority of the crowds are great fun. I've played in them in the U.S. most of this year, and I get great feedback from the fans. They've watched me grow up out here, and they really feel like I guess they know me now. There's a familiarity there.

The U.S. fans are generally very good with me and give me a lot of support. Probably be different this week, but I understand that. This is different this week. This is more like a football game or a basketball game where people have picked a side and you cheer for your side, which I enjoy it. That's what the Ryder Cup is all about.



Q. Rory mentioned a video you guys watched last night and the numbers that you were given. Can you tell us a little bit more about that video, what was in it and what the message was?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, the video was about representing Europe, obviously, and there's 164 players that's represented Europe. You have a far greater chance of going into space or climbing Mount Everest than you have representing Europe in the Ryder Cup.

We've all got numbers. Mine is the smallest number, obviously, 118.

But yeah, it's something to be very proud of, being able to pull on the clothing with the European team crest on it.

Q. Viktor was in here just now, exactly half your age. You're going to be practicing with him this afternoon. When you look at that contrast, does it make you feel old or even more proud of your longevity?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, it makes me proud of my longevity really. Week in, week out I play with somebody that's the same age as my son now. I'm pretty much used to that. The fact that it was his 24th birthday was a little bit surprising, but I made my Ryder Cup debut in 1997 when I was 24.

He's a special golfer, Viktor. I enjoy playing with him. I look at his game, and I think there's not a lot of weaknesses to that game. He's a really nice kid. I would say credit to his parents for obviously the way he's been brought up. He's just a really nice young man.

Secondly, he's a phenomenal golfer and one I just enjoy watching and being around.

Q. Has he got more in common with your caddie even than you?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, I would say they chat about more things that they can both relate to than myself and Viktor can relate to. Certainly not music, all that heavy metal stuff.

Q. Another question about being old, I'm sorry --

LEE WESTWOOD: I'm not old, I'm 48. How old are you?

Q. Older than that. Fair enough.

LEE WESTWOOD: Can we use the word mature? No, actually mature doesn't apply to me, either.

Q. In 2018 you were a vice captain, and I'm just wondering if back then were you sort of thinking this might be the end of my playing days or how did you take all of that? And did you see this coming?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, I think when you become a vice captain, first and foremost I enjoyed being a vice captain. I enjoyed watching the guys play and obviously performing very well, but it does give you a taste that you want to still be involved.

As the years go on and you get a little bit older, you don't know whether you're going to play Ryder Cup again. It's obviously nice to be back holding the clubs again rather than other people. I said to the lads in the team room three years ago, I said, There's one thing worse than playing Ryder Cup practice rounds, and that's watching somebody else do it.

So it's nice to not be watching somebody else do it and doing it myself again.

Q. The Americans have made a point to cite that their youth is something that's a positive for their team. What do you read into that kind of comment, and do you think that is something that could be a perk coming to the Ryder Cup, being young and maybe unaware?

LEE WESTWOOD: Well, I think it's good that they've got a lot of young players coming through. I think golf in general there's a lot of good young players coming through. We've got players in our side that -- on our European Tour, the Hojgaard twins won recently. They're both 21 years of age or 20 years of age or something like that.

There are good young players around the world. It just so happens at this moment in time the United States have got a few good young players playing for their team this way around.

That's a balancing act, I suppose. Because the Ryder Cup is so different, do you think that experience counts for a lot this week, or do you think because there's a lot of golf, youth is going to count for a lot this week? I think it's got to be a balance of both.

I think in an ideal world you'd like to filter your young players in gradually a few at a time, not necessarily bang all at once in a team as rookies. But that just happens like that every now and again.

Listen, when I watched -- when I look at the United States' team I think they've got a lot of strong players. It is almost

like a changing of the guard for them.

Q. I'm always impressed by the passion of the European team having covered this event for many years. I'm curious, back in 1997 did Monty or Ollie or somebody put their arm around you to tell you how important the Ryder Cup was, or did you know from day one before you ever struck a shot in these matches that this was as important as anything you would do in golf?

LEE WESTWOOD: I knew from day one, really. Listen, that week the captain was Seve Ballesteros. There's nobody -- there may have been one or two people over many generations been as passionate as Seve about the game of golf, but I doubt there's been many as passionate about the Ryder Cup as Seve was. He was my captain the first one.

You just fed off him, really. With Nick Faldo as my partner, Seve and Nick both held the Ryder Cup in high regard, and just being around them you could see how much it meant to them. Passion was never -- passion for the Ryder Cup was never something that I had to learn or gain.

Pretty much like European team spirit is not something we have to work on; it's just there.

Q. How long did it take you to get over the defeat of 2016, and do you feel like you have unfinished business this time?

LEE WESTWOOD: A couple of days, I guess. Obviously you don't want to be on a losing Ryder Cup team, and I've only been on three out of ten, so I've tasted success more than I've tasted defeat in the Ryder Cup.

When you go into the Ryder Cup you have to understand that it's going to come out one of two ways: You're either going to win or you're going to lose. So you prepare yourself to play the best you can and you hope you win, but on the other side of that coin, you might lose. The other team might play better.

I think the United States team did that week. So you just have to accept that. If you can't accept defeat in sport, then you probably shouldn't be playing it, especially as a golfer.

Q. You have a bit of a history in the Ryder Cup with American Captain Stricker, two four-ball matches and a singles match. What do you recollect about those experiences with him that might show us how he carried himself and what these matches might mean to him?

LEE WESTWOOD: Yeah, I think Steve is a gentleman. I've always got on really well with him. We've sort of been through the same things in a career together, been high up in the World Rankings, had slumps, dropped right back down.

I remember playing with him in Tiger's tournament at Sherwood many years ago and we got drawn together and we had a great conversation on the way round about how we kind of brought ourselves out of the slump.

He's a nice guy. He's the kind of person that you'd want to sit down and have a beer with.

Q. What's the best line you've heard from a crowd at a Ryder Cup?

LEE WESTWOOD: I got called a turd at Hazeltine in 2016, and that's the first time I've been called a turd since I was about 12 years of age in a playground, I think. So that really made me and Billy chuckle, that one.

THE MODERATOR: Mr. Westwood, thank you for being here and have a terrific day and week.

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