

The Ryder Cup

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Kohler, Wisconsin, USA

Whistling Straits

Captain Padraig Harrington

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome back to the 43rd Ryder Cup. We're here at Whistling Straits and we're joined by European captain Padraig Harrington.

Captain, I'm going to take a leap of faith and assume you've been out on the golf course the last few hours. What are your initial impressions of what you're seeing out there and what your troops are experiencing and saying about the layout?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, I came up here about eight weeks ago now, had a look at the golf course. We knew what to expect. It's in great condition. It's set up, as I said, reasonably generous off the tee. Not that it's set up this way, but the type of golf course it is it's very difficult around the greens.

So nothing -- it's exactly as expected. It's exactly as we were aware. Obviously it's interesting playing a practice round at the moment know that the wind is going to change to a different direction at the weekend.

These guys are professional players. They know what to do. They've been doing it all their life, so they can figure it out.

Q. Was there anything different that you've seen here from what you remembered when you played in PGA Championships here?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: As I said, I've been back a couple of times since then. Not really, no. I think there's a certain flow and style to the golf course, and it doesn't matter whether you shorten the 11th or shorten the 1st or anything like that. The golf course has its own feel, and that's still there. Yeah, very similar to 2015.

Q. Where did you come up with the idea for the numbers video that is getting some buzz?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: This has been done before in Europe. I think certainly the Lions were famous for starting it out, and it was obviously, when you're looking for these

teams, this is a theme that the European Tour came up with, and I was very comfortable and happy to buy into it and believe in it, and it's really worked out very nicely.

As you would have seen in the video, but just looking at -- like we have a wall with the role of fame of who have played, and being able to look at those names and go through it, 164 is just a startlingly small amount of players.

Obviously you can blame Lee Westwood for that for playing 11 times, and Sergio, as well, but it's a small group of people.

When you think 580 people have gone to space and 5,870 people have climbed Mount Everest, it's incredible that there's so few who have played in the Ryder Cup. It makes it very special for the players to know that they have a place in history that can never be taken away from them. They will always have a name on that wall.

For me, myself, I'm up there 131, so it's nice for me to look back and remember -- kind of remember the person I was as a Ryder Cup player, and for these current players, obviously they're experiencing it.

The three rookies, it was extra special for them to be added in, and they had their moment to stand up and kind of receive the applause of everybody that they're new to this.

It was a lovely way to start the week. We have more.

Q. Do you and Steve have any agreement or contingencies in place in case any player shows up with a COVID issue?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yes, there is -- there's lots of protocols. I assume the captains' agreement is public, is it? So just like an injury name in the envelope, there's a COVID name in the envelope.

While we've asked, it's still not completely clear what happens when we have -- if, God forbid, we had a COVID outbreak of a number of players, but for one player it's pretty straightforward.



Obviously the first two days it's four players sit out. I'm sure -- so there's no issues on those two days, but obviously on Sunday you start losing a few players to COVID, it does affect the match in some way.

But one is in a COVID envelope for sure.

Q. You mentioned the wind; would you like to see it blow quite strongly once the match starts?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: You know, we're all golfers, and somebody like myself who's been brought up traditionally in a windy, linksy sort, we like a bit of wind, but we're not asking for it to be -- everybody blown off the golf course.

A little bit to test us. What was there today was very nice, but we're not -- I've got a group of great ball strikers. I don't want them blown off the golf course. I'm very comfortable what we saw today, but not looking for any more.

I think my guys are good enough anyway if there was no wind. They're familiar with playing golf around the world, and their quality of their ball-striking is right there.

No, we're not depending on a windy week at all.

Q. Just to follow up, if on Sunday if you had more than one player go down with either injury or COVID, you're still not sure how that would be handled?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: No, there's an injury envelope, there's a COVID envelope. We haven't quite clarified exactly what the position is, how many is too many with COVID, no.

Q. So there would be more than one player's name in

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PADRAIG HARRINGTON: There's an injury envelope and there's a COVID envelope, so that's two separate envelopes at this stage. Maybe the same name is in both envelopes. That's as far as I'm aware at this moment.

While the other issue is actually quite a detailed and complicated issue and is possibly above the pay grade of the two captains, how many would be -- and this is why we have the COVID protocols. It's not like it's an individual event, whereas if you lost a player in an individual event, while it's not great, certainly you don't want to be catching COVID, but in a team environment you don't want the number of people catching COVID because it affects the actual match.

This is certainly something that I'm sure that is causing a lot of thought and a lot of time thinking about what would be too many and what would be sustainable.

But again, it's not really for the captains. It's more for the running of the event.

Q. I was going to ask about how the practice round went, but on the COVID issue, how do you decide who goes in that, and is the person required to be in the envelope on-site? Are they assistant captain?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, well, it's the exact same as an injury envelope. The person that goes in the envelope, the captain decides, and nobody ever knows. We hope that stays that way. But we've had a few injury pull-outs over the year, so it would be just very similar to that. No real difference in how it works.

As I said, it is possible that you could have two different names. I don't see why that would be the case, but you could have somebody pull out with an injury. You could have somebody with COVID. Yeah, you have to be prepared for these things, and as I said, it's been there all along, so it's nothing really new. It's obviously highlighted because of COVID, but there's always been a name in the envelope for an injury, just like coming into this we were asked to be aware that having somebody as a reserve, somebody as a backup who you would bring along, and what happens if somebody pulls out because of COVID.

Because, you know, it's something that could happen in these times.

Q. You talked yesterday about Seve; Sergio talked about Seve this morning. Do you think Sergio with Jon Rahm could have the same energy with Seve and Chema and have the same kind of success?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Wouldn't I love that. Yeah. It's hard to believe that you could have the same energy as Seve and José over the years. I think the biggest picture in the champions locker room is of Seve and José.

Yeah, they're iconic when it comes to the Ryder Cup and Europe. I wouldn't ask anybody to live up to that. But if they came close, it would be nice.

Certainly, yeah, that would be an interesting partnership that maybe I should think about. Thanks for the advice.

Q. Do you think it's an extra incentive for the European team to have guys playing together from their country, not just for the team?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: No, I don't go in for that sort of stuff. You know, that was something that was done 30, 40 years ago, two guys from the same country, they should play together. No. If they're the right partnership in terms of if their games suit, if they are at the right time in their careers -- when I started out, I played with Paul McGinley in the World Cup and we won the World Cup very early on, 1997.

By 2001 we could handily -- we couldn't play together. We were so bad as a partnership because the dynamic -- in '97 he was clearly the captain of that ship, and I did everything I was told. By 2000 and 2001 I had matured as a golfer, and there was a little bit of friction about, oh, I think we should do it this way.

But then again, we came good again in the Ryder Cup because things moved on.

It's just not automatic just because you've got the same background, same -- it can come down to the age profiles and the timing of their career, whether they're a great partnership or not.

Q. You've known Steve Stricker a long time. Can you cite something memorable you've seen him do and something memorable you've heard him say?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, clearly I've known Steve a long, long time. I think what's most memorable when you think of Steve is he's a nice guy, but he's tough on the golf course. You've got to remember what's behind that. He's a perfect gentleman, he's exactly how you would want a golfer. He's somebody who goes out there, plays his golf, but strong, real tough out there, but is very straight about it.

I think the fact that he came back from the driver yips in the late '90s, that says everything about a person. Golf is a pretty tough game, but when you get a setback like that, that really knocks you -- to come back and be a world-class player after that is a very impressive person and golfer.

Q. Brooks Koepka recently in an interview made it sound like playing in the Ryder Cup is a bit of an inconvenience, whereas Rory came in here and said that we get along, we play for each other. Do you have a theory on why it comes more naturally for the European side?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think in Europe we definitely have a very common goal. I alluded to this yesterday. It's very much the -- the Ryder Cup is our way of asserting Europe's position in world golf, the European Tour's position. I think that was Seve's goal back in the '80s, and

we carried that on, and I think that brings us together. I think we obviously worked very hard at things like the Make It Count video and the numbers to create that atmosphere.

You know, so it's just something that we want to do, we're keen to do.

I think it also helps that some way when we travel a lot from outside of Europe maybe just to the States or to other places, there's somewhat of a -- we're outsiders, and we're, again, trying to prove ourselves. I think there is an element of all of that put in together that we're here to give credibility, I suppose, to the European Tour and the European players.

We definitely have the -- as I said, we definitely have the ground roots of Europe behind us. Everybody in Europe starting out at the start of the year, the European Tour, believes they have a chance of making the team. That really is -- when you have that sort of support it's easier for the team to work together, play together.

To be honest, as I said, my team at the moment, the atmosphere is exactly where you would want it. Literally I don't want to mess it up from here. That's why I'm sort of at this position.

Yeah, it's not just me, though, it's all our Ryder Cups, all the past, starting -- we tend to look back at Seve. Obviously it started before Seve, but Seve is the one we will use. All those teams that come before us has led to this situation, and the players know how important it is to play in the Ryder Cup, to play and win the Ryder Cup and how important it is to be -- they just love being a team, too.

A lot of -- this might be an interesting one, too. A lot of the guys on my team, a lot of the Europeans, they seem to want to be team players. Shane Lowry thought he was going to be a Gaelic football player; Sergio thought he was going to be a soccer player. So a lot of them have that team background that they nearly crave more so than the golf, so this is their opportunity for -- you look at somebody like Sergio, continually going around to the players and having a quiet word and saying things -- like nobody relishes being in this team more than Sergio, and what he does behind the scenes just is really very special.

Q. You've leaned very heavily on the shoulders of some very experienced players that are the bulk of your team. Do you see young guys on this team that are being groomed to take over that role and naturally step into that when these other guys who have been doing it for so long are gone?

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PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I do believe there is a nice natural succession in Europe. The players I see in the middle of their careers now -- probably just slightly less than the middle of their careers to the middle of their careers, they've got great role models in the experienced players and they see what they do. Yeah, I think Europe is in a very strong place going forward in terms of that.

There is a nice -- clearly we have the top-end experience, but there's a nice succession coming along, players who are prepared who want to take responsibility and want to have that leadership role, whether it's just in their foursomes or four-ball match or in a bigger situation in the whole team.

Q. Without divulging any state secrets or --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I'm not going to.

Q. -- specifics, how many of your pairings decisions are locked by now and how many are based on what you see in the practice rounds this week?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Some people play well in practice; some people don't play well in practice. You can't pick guys after three years and expect the practice rounds to determine what goes on on the Friday.

No, I'm not a great believer in judging people off a couple of relaxed days' practice.

So no, my picks are definitely based on the right partnerships, what we would have had in mind but narrowed down now. As we've got here, narrowed down even further.

I wouldn't think a lot is changing in my head and my vice captains' head between now and Friday, no.

Q. Can you think of an example as a player or in your experience as a player or vice captain where a pairing has come out of completely left field late in the week?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Oh, plenty. My first Ryder Cup in '99 I got told late Thursday that I was playing foursomes with Miguel Angel Jiménez, and that really was -- it was an afterthought because José felt he wasn't playing well enough. They were going to play the two Spanish together, and José didn't feel like he was playing well enough for foursomes, so I was thrown in there late.

That really was late. It was late Thursday, or Thursday afternoon, not far off when the team was going in.

So there's been plenty of instances like that over the years.

I don't think it happens as much now, but clearly circumstances, lots of things can happen in terms of circumstances. That's why the team sheet goes in Thursday evening, just to allow for those changes.

I think mine and the vice captains, we're pretty set at this stage and we have a fair idea of what we want and what role we want each player to play.

Q. I can go back and look at the result, but did you win?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: We were pretty good, yeah. I think we got a half point the first morning. Disappointing -- we were a very tight match the second day and lost, but we were actually a good partnership, yes.

No, we didn't actually. He hit the first tee shot, which is always a very nice thing for -- I think we were both rookies, too, so that was a very interesting one.

Q. Rory was in here earlier saying that he thought it has become progressively harder to win a road Ryder Cup. The stats may seem to bear him out. I think 2004 was the last time a visiting team had a lead going into Sunday. Obviously Medinah kind of flipped things around. Do you agree with what Rory said, and if so, what's the reason? Why is it getting harder?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think obviously you've got the fans. I think more to do with the home setup is a big part of it. Clearly the home captain gets a choice in how the golf course is set up, and he's going to do everything he can in that setup to get it to favor his players. I think that has a big effect on it, to be honest, just really the setup of the golf course.

You can set a golf course up to be tough or you can set a golf course up to be loads of birdies, as in any week on Tour. But the home captain gets to make that decision, and I think it has a big influence.

I think if you were coming -- traditionally certainly it would be tough to beat the U.S. on their home style of golf course, and as we've done in Europe, we've shown it's pretty darned hard to beat us if we're picking one of our courses that's naturally suited to our games.

It really is about picking the right venue and also then styling that golf course to suit your players.

Q. Are the players that different now? The game is so global --

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I would suggest not anymore. They are merging much more into -- much more so I think the best players in Europe are the same as the best players in the world is the same as the best players in the States. It's not as different.

'99 I had to be introduced -- Payne Stewart introduced himself to me. I had never met him. And there was others in the team like that. That's not the case now. Players are very familiar nowadays and familiar games and have played all the conditions that can be presented.

But there's still a difference in terms of you can play as much links golf as you like, but you never compete quite as well as somebody who was brought up playing that way. There is that natural element that's been learnt over a long time that is going to play into the hands of the home team per se.

THE MODERATOR: Captain, thanks so much for your time today. We'll look forward to speaking with you tomorrow.

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