

The Ryder Cup

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Kohler, Wisconsin, USA

Whistling Straits

Padraig Harrington

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, and welcome back to the 43rd Ryder Cup here at Whistling Straits. We are with the European captain, Padraig Harrington. The wind is up today; I think everybody is seeing and feeling that. How much different is this golf course with a little bit of wind, let alone a lot, compared to a pretty docile day? Maybe describe that and what the people experience out there.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, obviously the course is designed to play like a links, and you need a bit of wind for that. If there's no wind it's stadium golf, hit from A to B and move on; whereas if it is windy like it is today, and yesterday, there was a nice bit of wind yesterday, the difference today with it being cold and windy, it really does affect the golf ball when the temperature drops.

It's playing like a true links. You've got to hit wind shots. You've got to keep the ball down at times. You've got to aim off into trouble and trust that the wind is going to take it back. There's lots of little issues like that when it gets windy.

Nobody wants it too windy. I certainly don't want it too windy this week. That's not conducive to a good, fair battle, but a bit of wind is a true test of golf.

Q. Is it fair to say that your team has mounted a bit of a charm offensive out there, the cheeseheads and the colors and everything, and how much do you think it's working?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Look, the crowds are great. Everybody embraced that, as you would have seen on the first tee. When we were doing the clothing with Loro Piana, they were talking about maybe bringing some Irish colors in for me.

I'm not really into that sort of stuff, so I came up with why don't we do something with Wisconsin. Obviously the Green Bay Packers fit both the Irish and the Green Bay Packers, and then the cheeseheads came in and a bit of fun with it.

Look, it's lighthearted. You want it that way in practice. It's somewhat respectful of obviously the Green Bay Packers, and they were very much on board with this, so a bit of fun and we got a nice reception with it. That's kind of what you want on the practice days.

Obviously business starts on Friday, but at the moment the players are enjoying it and having a good time of it.

Q. Does this really remind you of 2004 in that front. Bernhard Langer had you guys doing something similar just the way you engaged with the crowd. Did you learn from that even back then?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, well, look, I think Steve alluded to it in his press conference with me the first day that they're going to try and give the crowd something exciting and kind of go back to sort of Valhalla style type things.

Yeah, look, everybody is out here to have -- to get on well with the crowds. There's no doubt about that. We obviously can't sign autographs this week with COVID, which is something that traditionally we would do.

So yeah, these fans have come out and they've come out on a cold day. They've come out to watch us, and we want to give them something to watch.

Q. When you were made Ryder Cup captain a few years ago, did you think you'd be standing here talking about throwing foam bits of cheese into the crowd?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I suppose not. No, not at all. You know, it is a nod to Wisconsin and obviously to Green Bay that we've gone with this, we've gone with the colors. And obviously the cheeseheads and throwing the things up there is a bit of fun for the fans that are here. The Wisconsin fans are very appreciative, so we want to show our appreciation back.

It's nice. We think the colors turned out nice. We think the outfit looks really good, and I think the players are pretty stoked out there that they're doing something to show their respect for the local state we're in.



Q. Shane was in here earlier today talking about the friendship you two have developed the last five or six years or so. What's the sense of pride for you to watch him earn his spot on this team, and what does he bring to this team?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: He brings an awful lot into the team room. All three rookies do. He's got a great personality in there and really mixes well and helps the others. Golf wise he's a big time player. He delivers on a big stage. He's good under that sort of pressure, and he has that belief.

Yeah, he's ideally suited for this sort of format, match play, golf course, but really for the occasion, and he's definitely -- he's embracing it for sure.

Very happy with the way he's going about things, and as I said, he's the type of guy who delivers on the big stage, so looking forward to that this week.

Q. Just to understand the Green Bay thing just a little better, when did you make that decision? Must have been a long time ago.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, it's 18 months ago at least. Maybe two years ago at this stage, when you're going through the clothing with Loro Piana, you're looking at the different colors. As I said, the first -- the obvious one, Oh, do you want to wear some green for Ireland. I'm thinking, Well, look, this is a European team. Let's do something different.

And then I said, Well, why not recognize Wisconsin where we're going to play, and it fit in very nicely then to go with the Green Bay Packers.

Yeah, it was just a really nice idea, and obviously grew a little bit when it came to the cheeseheads and the foam and the hats. And they were very good, Green Bay Packers. We've been in contact. They bought into it, too, and they supplied the hats and that, so it was -- it worked very well on all sides.

And now I'm a fan for life. I'm going to say this. I'm a Patriots fan, so now I'm a Green Bay Packers fan. I changed allegiance somewhat.

Q. I just wonder on a long and demanding course like this one, do you have to be careful how much you ask of the veteran players on your team?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Absolutely. We all know in Ryder Cups there's a fine line between playing too much,

trying to stay fresh, fine line, 36 holes a day. Obviously I have a slightly older team, experienced team, pretty fit team. That's the one thing about it. We're not struggling in that sense.

Some of the older guys, like you could put a Sergio or a Paul Casey, they're fairly fit and strong. You don't see them having any issues with playing 36 holes if they have to. But yeah, it's something I would be aware of that we don't want to burn players out before the weekend, before Sunday.

Q. The American players are coming through and kind of talking more openly about their pairings, what players they play well with. We had Cantlay talking about Schauffele, we had Justin talking about Spieth, and we know there's probably no chance that DeChambeau and Koepka are going to play together. Does that give you an advantage to kind of have this information, and how are you going to work with that?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Mainly I'm focused on my team. Somewhat when it comes to positioning the players, yeah, I would have a look at who we think we're going to come up against and at what positions and try and mix and match depending on what we like.

Yeah, not at this stage, but definitely when it comes to one, two, three and four matches, yeah, we would look to see, who do we think we're coming up against and who wants what.

Yeah, look, it's a little part, but it certainly wouldn't be -- there's no point in focusing too much on the other team. You have no idea. Just like you said with Brooks and Bryson, people have asked about that so much and I keep going, Well, we just don't know. They could be the best of pals this week and could be a great partnership thrown out there.

So I'm not focused on anything really about what they're doing until I'm kind of looking at my order of positioning of my partnerships and then maybe I might go, Well, who wants to play against who.

Q. In 2018 Thomas Björn gave his team a little bit of added incentive, promising them that he would get a tattoo on a certain place in his body if the team were to win. I wonder if you've made a similar type of promise to this year's team?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I am delighted that that's all they ask for, but I'd have given up a lot more. So yes, I will be getting a tattoo. If my team produce a winning week, I will be getting a tattoo to mark the occasion, and very

comfortable that they only asked that much of me because I would have given more.

Q. Did they actually ask you to do that?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think it's an unwritten rule, so it has come up, yes, in conversation. Maybe they didn't ask. Maybe I offered and they felt that was enough. But definitely, yeah, it's a given now in Europe. Captain has to get a tattoo.

And I don't have any other tattoos at this stage, so it would be a new experience for me. Where on the body? I don't know. It depends -- no, I can't go that route. Depends how long it is.

Q. Poulter said earlier that he relishes this kind of chest thumping atmosphere and would never apologize to any opponents over the years that have been irritated by him. Is it useful as a captain to have one guy who's not afraid of being a lightning rod draws to let other guys on the team fly under the radar if he draws all the public criticism?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: I think very much what you said there. In many senses it's useful to have somebody who takes the attention and somebody who takes away from others. It's useful for have somebody to build up other players, to get them into it.

So there's a lot of emotional swings and roundabouts and this, and you have to be very wary of it, because as Rory spoke earlier, it's easy to get involved and then burn yourself out for the weekend.

Again, the players play for the glory in this match. They come here because they're getting an experience that they get nowhere else. They want to have the excitement. You only have to look at the celebrations of the individual players when they've won matches. They're nothing like what they celebrate when they win tournaments. The character does change of a player this week.

Yeah, emotionally you have to watch that, good and bad. There's no doubt players can tire themselves out doing that. Yeah, and Poulter is -- he is who he is. We wouldn't ask him to be anybody different.

It's fun to him. There's nothing in it to him that's in any way -- it's not a deliberate thing. It's a bit of fun to him. It's a bit of his personality, and he just likes having a -- he is maybe a bit of marmite, but he's pretty much a crowd favorite because of his personality.

Q. It's fun for other guys on the team to let Ian draw

the attention for the week so they can go about their business?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Absolutely. You have players who you want to just focus on playing golf. They're just golfers. They want to concentrate. They want to know what they're doing just like a regular week, and you have other players who want a bit of a hyped up week, and Ian is one who can take that pressure and can deal with it.

Not everybody wants that, as you said, and he can take it, handle it, and can be a lightning rod to inspire the team, and also, as you've said, maybe to give the other guys a quiet or an easy run.

Q. There's been so much chat understandably about the kind of partisan crowd this week and 90 whatever percent is going to be an American crowd. At what point does that become pressure to the Americans, whereby there's so much expectancy on them delivering here?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: It is an interesting one, there's no doubt. Most of the focus for us coming in is the fact that it is going to be 90/10, 80/20. As I've said all along, Europe would rather play in front of 40,000 Americans than zero fans.

But maybe when we got here it has changed a little bit. You can see that there's expectation and pressure from the fans going the other way. They have a new strategy.

So yeah, there's no doubt, home captain has to deal with pressure and stress. But it's not like we don't have to deal with it, too. Yeah, a little bit added, no doubt about it, and I suppose we just have to wait and see.

Q. It's cool enough out there and quite blustery, and Shane said earlier it's like an Irish summer's day. That certainly won't hurt from a European team perspective if it's like that over the coming days.

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, this would be a beach day at home.

Yeah, look, my players don't need that. They're good enough. They're great ball strikers. We're not looking for extreme windy conditions, difficult conditions, tricky conditions. We don't mind a good solid test.

We're all happy that the temperature is to go up on Friday. We don't have a problem with that. We're relying on ourselves, not relying on outside agencies and the conditions.

But yeah, maybe there is a little bit of an advantage for us if it does go that way, but as I've always said, we really have probably our best team ever of ball strikers, so we're not relying on -- just like we're not going to be hiding any players or anything like that. We are not relying on conditions to give us the edge.

Q. Do you have any key holes out here this week that you can think of?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: All 18. All 18. You've got to start with the first. You've got to be ready to go. You can't just pick out one hole and say, clearly 17 is a really tough hole, iconic hole, and 18, as well. If your matches go there, yeah, they're going to be the key holes. 18 is the key hole if you get to it, but you've got to play 17 holes before that.

Yeah, every hole in itself is important and you don't want to be -- I can't see why you would choose any particular hole making a big difference in the match.

There isn't exactly a -- if this was stroke play or something like that, you might have a risk-reward hole that you could play safe depending on how you're going, and if you had to you could chase and go for. But this is match play. You've got to play for the conditions of the day, how your match is going at that moment.

Yeah, I can't say a particular key hole, even though there would be -- if it was stroke play, you're not getting through this tournament until you finish that last hole for sure. But in match play, you've just got to play each hole as it comes.

Q. You've obviously made a big effort to get to know your players as well as possible and you know many of them very well. Just wondering has anybody exceeded your expectations so far this week and surprised you with what they've brought to the party?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: Viktor. It's hard to believe he could exceed it, but he's been brilliant. Bernd is very relaxed, and obviously Shane is right on expectation. They're the rookies in the team. The other guys, I knew what to expect. They've been great.

Probably as captain, probably Sergio a little bit more has exceeded my expectations. I kind of knew this, but really he works really hard behind the scenes. I wouldn't say there isn't a player in that room that hasn't had a quiet word with -- Sergio hasn't had a quiet word with. So he's continually working, working that.

Yeah, probably ultimately -- they're all doing -- everybody is doing their job and nobody is in any shape or form below,

but definitely Sergio has really, I suppose, done what he should do, what he's expected to do, but definitely differing in the team room.

Q. What's Viktor done?

PADRAIG HARRINGTON: He's just great to be around. He really is really good at embracing -- he's at the center of a lot of the banter and fun, and yeah, he's excellent I've got to say. We kind of knew that about Viktor, but Tyrell was that guy in 2018, and you kind of see the personality on the golf course, but his personality in the locker room is completely different.

I wouldn't say that about Viktor, but he's certainly living up to it and he's certainly the center of a lot of the fun in the locker room.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time. We'll look forward to the chat tomorrow and talk some pairings at that point.

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