

The Ryder Cup

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Kohler, Wisconsin, USA

Whistling Straits

Captain Steve Stricker

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, and welcome back to the 43rd Ryder Cup here in Whistling Straits. We are with U.S. Ryder Cup captain Steve Stricker. Steve, we're 24 hours from not only opening ceremonies but from foursome pairings. What's your mindset as the week has gone on? I have to imagine you had things in order, but has anything changed since you've been here, as you've seen the guys and the golf course.

STEVE STRICKER: No, not really. We've stuck to our game plan. Guys are having a great time. They're enjoying Whistling Straits, especially the hospitality here and back at the American Club.

It's a great venue for us. They had a great time with the wind today. They thought it was fun and interesting to play in that sort of wind. We're trying to prepare for that as best we could and can because we don't know what that's going to be like this weekend.

Yeah, so they embraced it and played nine holes, trying to conserve some energy at this point, I think. But yeah, our game plan is still firmly in place.

Q. The cheeseheads this morning --

STEVE STRICKER: I didn't see it.

Q. The Europeans came out in cheeseheads. I'm just wondering -- you didn't see it, but it's pretty hard for a Wisconsin sports fan to dislike Ian Poulter and Sergio when they're wearing cheeseheads. I wondered if you think that was a bit of gamesmanship on Padraig's part or just a smart PR move?

STEVE STRICKER: No, that's smart on their part. Why wouldn't you when you come over to foreign soil try to win some fans over, right? We do the same thing when we go over there, and I'm sure they realize that we are on U.S. soil, and with the travel restrictions and all that, they're trying to roundup as many fans as they can.

We'd be doing the same thing over there.

Cheeseheads are a staple here, right? You know that. So that's cool to see. I saw, I think, Fleetwood on TV wearing a green and gold hat, so I thought they were kind of going down the Packer route, as well. So good on them and interesting to see, but we'd be doing the same thing, I think, and yeah, trying to get some fans.

Q. When you saw Fleetwood, did he not look like Aaron Rodgers to you?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, someone else said that in our team room, too, that Aaron Rodgers and Tommy Fleetwood look a lot alike all of a sudden. Yeah, they probably both wish they had each other's game on the football field and Aaron I'm sure wish he had Tommy's game on the course, but they do look a lot alike.

Q. This is a big hypothetical but it's also in play. If somebody were to get injured or go down with COVID or otherwise before the opening ceremony and you're allowed a substitute, are any of your assistant captains ready to play?

STEVE STRICKER: I don't know if they brought their clubs. No, and knock on wood, we talked about briefly a week or two ago on who we'd bring in, but we really haven't gone down that road anymore.

We're trying to be safe, like I said yesterday, and we all want to play this event. All the guys want to be a part of this team. It's a special event to be a part of, and they worked their whole entire careers to be a part of something like this.

We haven't really thought outside that box yet, and hopefully we don't have to.

Q. I saw something on the message board in the press center, kind of a message from you and Padraig on fan behavior, and if it crosses the line then the person faces rejection. Where did that come from? And secondly, was it at all a mirror of anything that Jay had said, Monahan, a couple weeks ago?

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STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I think these golf organizations are on board with each other and they work with each other. They're in this together, and they're just trying to come up with the right way to handle those types of situations. Yeah, I think that's what we're going to see moving forward, what Jay said in his state of the union address.

The PGA I know talked closely with Jay and the PGA TOUR, and they're just trying to tackle this potential problem together and handle it equally the same across both organizations.

Q. You have a pretty good Ryder Cup history with Ian Poulter. He was in earlier. Can you talk about maybe what makes him tick or what made him tick in the encounters that you had with him personally? And if you were a football coach, would we be asking you how to contain Ian Poulter this week?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, and if we knew how -- it's one of those questions, we just don't know how to contain him, I guess. We've had a difficult time. I played him in a singles match back at Valhalla, I think, and lost to him. He's a tough competitor, and this brings out the very best in him.

He seems to make some very crucial putts, hit crucial shots when he needs to, and then just rises to the occasion. It seems like he plays better at the Ryder Cup than he does at any other PGA TOUR event throughout the year, right, so he just elevates his game to another level.

Yeah, he's kind of the backbone of that team at times. Yeah, he'd be a good guy that if we could figure out, and hopefully we can this year, to give him a couple losses for a change. But it's tough to do; he's, like I said, very tough.

Q. You watched Patrick and Xander play together in Australia; they've been together in a couple sessions here. In the off chance they were to be paired, what do you like about that tandem?

STEVE STRICKER: First of all, they're good friends. They get along very well with each other. They've played some Cup golf together in the Presidents Cup. They just enjoy being around each other, and that's half the battle when you try to pair guys up.

Each of their games complements the other one, and that's another thing when you put guys together, especially in foursomes, that you want their games to complement each other, and theirs do.

Q. Have you learned a lot about Patrick in this last

year or so run-up to this event?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, he's tough. He's Patty Ice. That's what he is, right? He plays great. He's got a calm demeanor about him, a killer mentality. When he gets somebody down, he really wants to keep him down it seems like.

We're getting to know him a lot more -- I got to know him last year or two years ago in the Presidents Cup, or I guess it was last year, and getting to know him a little bit more this year. Yeah, just a good guy to be around and a heck of a player.

Q. Padraig has made the same bet that Thomas did before that he'll get a tattoo if Europe wins. Would you get a tattoo if the U.S. wins?

STEVE STRICKER: What's my tattoo got to be?

Q. Whatever you want it to be.

STEVE STRICKER: Oh, really?

Q. Thomas' was the score, so I assumed that's the direction you would go.

STEVE STRICKER: We've discussed tattoos in our room. The problem is my girls, my wife and kids, have always asked me to get a tattoo and I'm like, I'm not putting any decals on my body kind of thing.

So yeah, I'd have to check with them first, I think, to see if I could actually get a tattoo from the Ryder Cup.

I had an idea. The players gave me an idea what I could put on there. I told them where I was going to put it; it was going to go right on my cheek.

We'll see what brings about that, but we may have a tattoo artist guy come in on Sunday night. One way or another, it may happen.

Q. You're so associated with this state. I'm just kind of curious if you can express what your anticipation for this week has been dating back to the moment you knew that you were going to be a captain?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah. First of all, it's just a relief that it's here. I mean, for a while it was a question whether we were going to be able to play it, whether we were going to play it at all, whether we were going to play it with fans.

I was on calls -- I don't know how many times I've said this this week, but throughout the last couple years, dealing



with all of that above, what I just said.

Thankfully we're going to play it with fans. My thing from the get-go was what a crime it would be to play this unbelievable event without fans, especially here in Wisconsin that's never had the opportunity to experience this Ryder Cup.

First of all, it's just a relief, I guess, that we're here, and finally that it is here. Three years has been a long time, but yet all of a sudden it seems like it went by really quick. I'm sure we all as we get older, it all seems to happen that way for some reason.

Yeah, just grateful that it's here, grateful for the opportunity to be doing it, and finally, I wish Friday morning was tomorrow morning already. But again, I don't want to wish it to go by super fast so you don't get to enjoy it, so we're trying to take it all in as a team and enjoy each other and enjoy the relationships, and we're having fun with it.

Guys have been unbelievable. They've come together so well in the last couple weeks, so extremely excited to finally get out there and watch them play.

Q. Your key word seems to have been preparation. We hear that word a lot from you. I was curious, does that extend to your players? What I mean by that is do they know who they're going to play with already? And if the answer is yes, I'm curious how early they knew that.

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, yeah, we have that down. I mean, we went over this Monday. I wanted the guys to know what the plan was for Friday on Monday so we can prepare that way.

I think that's something that in previous teams that I've learned, the communication part, getting guys to understand their position and their roles, so we've taken a lot of time and energy in trying to talk to these guys and define both their roles and tell them what we expect from them and what they expect from us kind of thing.

That's been a huge part of what's been going on, and yeah, we went over that on Monday, and we're working towards Friday's already.

Q. A year ago at this time, obviously you know Jordan's positioning in the World Rankings, and he's said himself he didn't think that he was in the picture to be on this team a year ago. I wonder from your perspective at that time how you were looking at him and what you were thinking about the possibility of having to, say, make captain's picks and leave off a

guy like Jordan Spieth?

STEVE STRICKER: Well, and I've talked to him and he's talked to me about it that if it wasn't for this extra year, I don't know if Jordan would have been on the team.

But first of all, when I look at Jordan, I look at him as a friend. I've played golf with him. I was a teammate of his years ago back in a Presidents Cup at Muirfield Village. We're friends. I wish him the best, and I'm always looking at where is Jordan, how is he playing, all that kind of stuff. I'm always rooting for him.

So it was good to see that he turned his game around this year and got into position to make the team, because Jordan is an important part of a team. He brings a lot of energy, a lot of enthusiasm to a team, and he's great in the team room. He's guy that you want in there, and we're fortunate to have him in there.

Q. From your perspective, just the kind of resiliency it takes to go from that far down to this high up in that short of a period, can you put that in perspective?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I mean, that's golf, right? I've experienced it, and you can go either of two ways. You can kind of give up and go home or you can just work a little bit harder and try to bust through it and get through it and get better.

Sometimes you come out of those slumps even better than you were before. You learn a lot from those poor times.

I'm sure Jordan learned a lot about himself and his game, his family, friends, all that kind of stuff you learn about. He's going to come out of it strong. He's got a tremendous amount of talent.

I just look forward to seeing him just to keep improving really. His confidence level is back, and he just continues to get better and better all the time.

Q. I had a couple questions about the envelope. In your three Ryder Cups that you played, did you ever volunteer your name for it?

STEVE STRICKER: I did not, no, and I never knew who was in the envelope in all the times that I've played on the Ryder Cup. I never knew who the person was in there.

Q. I'm not sure it does. There is a high level of secrecy obviously. So when you have to make those decisions for either envelope in this case, how do you go about the process, and who's going to know who's in the envelope?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I don't know if I'll -- I've never experienced the envelope. I've never been a part of it really. I think the teams that I've been an assistant captain on for these Ryder Cups, I don't ever remember -- I don't remember a lot times, but I don't remember being a part of that, who goes in the envelope.

I'll probably ask my assistants. You want to make sure you put the right guy in there even though there is no right guy it seems like, right. It doesn't seem like a very good place to be, in that envelope.

But yeah, you want to make sure that -- now this year we've got more. We've got to put actually two envelopes with three guys, a total of three guys.

Yeah, I don't know. It's not a great thing to do.

Q. Would you talk to your assistants?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah.

Q. You get a sense you would be the only one who actually --

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, I probably will talk to my assistants and then probably not tell them who I put in there. Again, you don't want to have anybody know that they went in the envelope. At least I wouldn't want to know if I was in there, and I probably was in there at some point. I probably should have been in there in 2012, or Tiger and I both should have been in there the way we played.

Anyways, it was -- we'll take it from there.

Q. Have you learned anything about your team whether on the golf course or in the team room or anything about the course that you didn't know about on Monday?

STEVE STRICKER: You know, for the golf course, the wind has proved to be a challenge because we're going to see a completely opposite wind come the tournament. We've been playing with a northerly wind, and then it's going to switch out of the south and go to the west. So we're going to see something totally different come Friday.

I guess -- I don't mean to keep blowing smoke up my team's cheeks, like we talked about earlier, but I knew they were close, but they're close. They're really close. I think they've played so much golf together growing up, on the same college teams together, they play a lot of social golf together.

I mean, this team is really close. That hasn't surprised me to some degree, but the level of how close they are has surprised me, I guess. That's a good thing. That's what I wanted from day one is a family type atmosphere and everybody to get along, and hopefully that leads to good play.

Q. You mentioned the friendship of Patrick and Xander and it's pretty similar with Justin and Jordan. I'm curious, did the stats back up that they're really good pairings, and in general, how much relying on stats this week?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, the stats do back it up for sure. As far as how much I'm relying on it, I relied a lot on it leading up to the picks. I wanted to make sure that the guys I was thinking about for the picks and what kind of picks would go well with the current six guys that had already made the team. So we were looking at pairings quite a bit. I used quite a bit of stats for that.

And then some of my gut feeling on that, as well, what personalities mesh well with each other.

As we go forward, it's kind of less and less stats all the time. You know, watching these guys play, getting an understanding of how well they're playing here right now. Stats and playing here are -- could be two different things.

Trying to get a feel for those guys, how they're getting along with their potential partners, how they're playing right now. That's kind of now what we're doing. A little bit of stats, that's kind of gone away and now just kind of watching golf and going with our guts and what we're seeing out here and what we've seen in previous years with these guys.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much for being with us, and we'll see you tomorrow.

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