

The Ryder Cup

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Kohler, Wisconsin, USA

Whistling Straits

Pádraig Harrington

Press Conference



JOHN DEVER: We are joined by European Pádraig Harrington and we have pairings and now we have matchups, too. Maybe the overarching thought on the four teams you've put forth and what we'll see in the matchups tomorrow morning.

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Obviously I'm comfortable with the team I've put out there. Strong, experienced team. I had 12 players who could play foursomes, so that was a pretty tough decision to have to rest four. It wasn't a very easy decision. I think it was pretty clear to me where we were going though. Very happy with the partnerships I've put out there and clearly it's interesting when you see the matchups.

We would have been aware that J.T. and Jordan were going first, obviously, so we were obviously going to lead ourselves with a strong partnership with Jon and Sergio; the whole world will be watching that one.

After that, we got Viktor Hovland, rookie, what a great player, what a great guy. Equally matched up with Paul Casey, strong player over the years. Not really necessarily thinking that we are going there for an experienced guy with a rookie. Viktor is in a nice place but two strong players together.

Obviously Lee and Matt, both from the same town at home.

Two strong players. Matt himself, great match player, playing great. And Lee, a stalwart beside him with the experience. I like the way they have come out together and played together and I feel pretty strongly about that.

And obviously everybody would have predicted the last one. I assume that one wasn't too hard. Rory and Ian have played well in the past. Probably going up against their new young guns, Patrick and Xander look like a partnership that they may be looking for for the future going against an established partnership of ours.

Q. I thought it was very interesting that all four of your pairs only played together in the practice rounds one out of three days. That's highly unusual, not just for

European Teams, but Americans, anyone. Can you explain the thought process?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: We knew our partnerships well in advance. We knew our partnerships and picks and all that was considered. You don't want to get bored playing with a guy. Honestly, I've had it in tournaments, you play three days with somebody, and then you're playing with them the next five, four rounds of golf. That can be really tough.

I wanted everybody on my team to play with everybody in the team and not turn up on a week like this and by the end of the week go, I never saw a player; I never experienced that player and I never got to see what they were like in this situation.

I was very keen on the players to mix with each other and get the full experience of the other 11 players in the team. I knew the partnerships were looking after themselves. Yes, they have to try foursomes, and they did have a go at the foursomes and made sure that they are comfortable with which tee shot they are hitting and which ball they are hitting. They had enough of that. I just didn't want them to overdo it.

So I know I'm probably the first captain to do it like that, but certainly every captain has to bring their own personal experience, and from my personal experience, you just want to turn up on Friday and still have that freshness and enthusiasm and excitement and little bit of, I suppose a little bit of intrigue in the first when you're going out there.

Q. You hinted at it. How soon did all of these players know about these matchups? When did they learn them?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: I would think the earliest ever. So very early. They are well aware of what they were doing early on this week. Some players said they want to know. We knew. I could have probably told you these partnerships, likely partnerships, we've been working on these for months, and the team was named a week ago.

I would say I have 12 players that can play foursomes, so



yeah, there was -- there was no partnership -- there was other partnerships that could have gone in there but there was no surprises in terms of what we could do. We had plenty of options.

You know, strong possibility was we will mix and match our foursomes going forward, as well, because as I said, we have 12 players who are very balanced, very strong all the way through, and good ball-strikers that can play both foursomes and fourball.

Q. You have Matt Fitzpatrick going out in the third game, when you were an assistant in 2016, he had a rough go. Can you talk about the growth you've seen in him from that point to where he is now?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Look, he's always had it -- I know he didn't have a very good week, comfortable week that week in 2016. You know, we had a tough week as a team. But Matt's been an underestimated player, for whatever reason, for the whole of his career, he continually delivers on a big stage. He is a great player. Does fantastic.

All the way back to -- he's a U.S. Amateur Champion, yet he seems to get lost, just because he's a quiet lad and a studious lad and works hard, he gets lost in the general media in the sense that there's not enough razzmatazz. If you look at his results and the way he plays, he's great. You know, I've said it all along, I focus much more on the score and what a player does than anything else. It doesn't have to be all showy and fancy and all that.

Matt is just a great, solid golfer. Yeah, always underestimated, and not by me or his team, but people, sometimes just because you're not flashy, people seem to not think of him at first point. Even there, you were nearly struggling to get the name out, like. He's been around a long time and he's a winner.

Q. Steve Stricker was saying nothing barring injury or illness, nothing will change his plan tomorrow afternoon. Will you adjust your plan for the fourballs?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: No, I think we're pretty set. I would know my plan for tomorrow all the way through. Players are aware of that plan. Clearly we don't put the team on till late morning because things can happen. Anything can happen. There's unknown -- slightly unknown at this stage, but we would be very set in what we are doing and it would take a lot for us to change our mind.

Q. You've been a vice captain numerous times. Has the pairings part of this and when you told players changed from the first time you were a vice captain

until now?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Certainly changed since the first time I was a player. When I first went out, I found out just before the Opening Ceremony on Thursday that I was playing Friday morning. That was something somebody had pulled out sort of thing, so that was a little bit different.

I think we have tried over the years to be as early as possible, be given the information and I do believe this is the earliest this week for us. I got it out there early. We were very comfortable -- this is an interesting team for Europe, it's very strong and balanced all the way through. And foursomes-wise, it's very balanced, and clearly fourball-wise. So it's not like -- we had plenty to sit down and work with. It was a very fair way of putting out the team and the players responded to that, and they're comfortable knowing where and when they are going to play and they have responded nicely to that.

Q. Because of that balance, could you foresee playing anybody five?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, absolutely. You get a guy out there winning, yeah, you can push him a bit too hard. There's no doubt about that. Yeah, it is a possibility that players will play five times. It wouldn't be off the cards, no. Maybe in an ideal world, you wouldn't do that.

Q. With Lee Westwood and Matt Fitzpatrick both playing Pro V1xes and Hovland and Casey both playing Pro V1s, they are both playing the same balls as their partners. Was that part of the reasoning of their choice on top of their obvious qualities? And is there any truth in the rumor you have ordered Packers jerseys and ditched the uniforms for the lads tomorrow after Steve Stricker's Chicago Bears admission?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Golf ball-wise, yes, it was a clear part of it. Players are interesting, it depends on lots of -- and by the way there's no one-ball rule in foursomes anymore and it's a lot easier, and you can mix and match your golf ball as you go along. It certainly makes it easier if both players are using the same ball but it also depends on the player himself. Some players have good history and might have used another ball at some stage and are happy to change. Other players might necessarily have that in their head. It's strongly considered, what golf ball is being used for the players and something you have to be very aware of when you are looking at a partnership.

Yeah, we might recycle our lovely outfits from yesterday, the Green Bay Packer-esque ones.

Q. Given you said your team is very balanced and you

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can put so many different lineups out there, is it safe to say that all 12 of your players will play tomorrow?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: It would be like an unknown event if that didn't happen. Like, clearly, yeah, something that I can't predict right now. So we put the team in late tomorrow morning, and we do that for a reason because obviously we have to look up at all scenarios. But I can't contemplate a reason bar illness or COVID or something like that, but everybody will play. Everybody is ready to play and they have been ready for that for the last three days.

Q. You've put all of your most experienced players out in the first session. How much of that was by design?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Yeah, we have an experienced setup no doubt about it but it was our strong setup and just happened to be experienced. I was happy with that because no doubt when it came out like that and you look at it and you go, yeah, that is very experienced; that is a big bonus, but it was also a very strong setup, but it didn't weaken our fourballs. That's very important. We still have a very strong fourball setup, and we haven't taken from the afternoon by going with a strong setup in the morning.

Q. I don't know if you touched on it but just talk about the importance of the first session in a Ryder Cup on the Friday morning, and maybe a little bit on the reason for your ordering of the pairings?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: The first session, the importance of it is decided after the result. That's the way it goes. You know, the team that goes out there and gets a lead will say, momentum is everything, and the team that doesn't will have to find another way.

So in a perfect world, you would like to go out there and win the session, win it well and lead from the front and keep going. We don't get that choice. You've got to go out and earn it.

We put out a strong foursomes group, yes. As regards the sort of positioning of the matches, the only one we would have been aware of would be J.T. and Jordan, and we have got a very strong pairing in that match.

You know, outside of that, clearly Rory and Poults were a pairing that were predicted and I suppose if anything, we kind of just split those up in the first group there at the end, and we have two lovely pairings in the middle. It's just a nice way.

But we weren't too focused -- bar that first match where we

would have been aware, we weren't too focused on who they were going to come up against or how that was going to pan out.

Q. Was there something you saw in Rory and Ian in Paris a couple years ago that encouraged you to put them together again?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: Absolutely. They played lovely there. They work very nicely on this golf course. Both of them are in good form. It was a partnership, we came here; that you would have always had in your head and then when you match it up on this golf course, this is a running certainty from early in the week.

Q. Jon Rahm was in earlier talking about the great Spanish heritage in this event and what it's meant. How long have you been thinking about putting that pairing together with Sergio?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: It's been there a good while, yes. It's something both of them really want. I think they are both at a nice place in their careers now. It is interesting when you match up countrymen. I know, I started off playing with Paul McGinley in the World Cup back in the day and we won it in '97 and he was just a great partner, captain.

As I progressed as a player, there was a period where we just weren't a great partnership anymore. There wasn't a clear leader in it. I think with Jon and Sergio, they really have looked at this, they have matured themselves over the last couple ever years into a beautiful position. It is The Ryder Cup of course, where Sergio, he is the experienced one, he's leading out there and he knows he's playing with the world No. 1. Fantastic for both of them, and they really are very, very comfortable that they are going to get the best out of both of their games.

Q. We make a lot out of the matchups between the Americans and your team. If you would have known what the matchups were beforehand, would you have changed anything?

PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: You can't really focus on the opposition. You've got to concentrate on what your team is doing. I'm happy with what I see on paper. As I said, we did know J.T. and Jordan were likely to lead out and we wanted a strong start ourselves; that is an interesting match, but you have to focus on your own team, your own players and be comfortable that no matter who they come up against they are going to do the job.

Q. Tommy Fleetwood, how tough to lead a guy like that out?



PÁDRAIG HARRINGTON: That says a lot about our team. Very much says a lot about our team, that he is comfortable after going 4-0 and he's not there in the foursomes the first morning, he can look around his team and be confident that there's other people are taking up that strain, and he's prepared to sit there and wait his chance in the afternoon, which really just sums up our team how balanced it is and how comfortable and the understanding of the players that they have to give other people their opportunity, as well.

I want every player on my team absolutely dying to play every match. But I want them to also understand that there's other people in the team, they have to step aside, and they have done that brilliantly. They are in a very nice place that they know what they are doing and they are ready to go and very comfortable that their teammates are going to pull their weight and that everybody will do their job this week.

JOHN DEVER: Captain, you've reached Ryder Cup Eve. Thank you and we look forward to seeing your team tomorrow.

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