

The Ryder Cup

Friday, 29 September, 2023

Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

Team Europe

Luke Donald

Press Conference

TOM CARLISLE: First time the United States has gone winless in a single day. Can you give us your immediate reaction, please.

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, unbelievable start, as you said, historic day, but we want it to be an historic week, so the job is certainly not done. We will all celebrate an amazing day, but we'll be back tomorrow morning with the goal of trying to win tomorrow morning's session. We'll be getting our guys focused to be back in the saddle, so to speak. But what a day.

Q. Can you talk through the emotions of the day? This morning it was all one-way traffic; this afternoon it was quite a lot of red on the board before it came good. And second question, Jon Rahm, one of your huge characters, and that fight he put up at the end there?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, Ryder Cups are always full of amazing roller coasters and swings throughout the day. Obviously this morning felt a lot more comfortable than this afternoon. We got off to a fast start this morning. We held it; to win 4-0 was very special.

But this afternoon the U.S. for a while there were holing putts. They were turning around matches. Again, we got off to a pretty good start, but they fought back. And we knew they would. They are a strong team. There's a lot of talent on that team.

But what we did going down 18 just shows the determination, the grit, the perseverance, kind of the unity of our team. They never gave up, and they kept pushing till the very end. And to hole putts like Viktor did, like Jon did, and of course Rosey, right at the end, that is huge. It really looked like 3-1 at one point for the U.S.

5-3 is really -- they are well back in the game. But to win that session, when it looked like 3-1, is an unbelievable feat by my guys.



MARCO SIMONE
ROME, ITALY

Q. I know it's a team effort, but I'm sure I felt the ground shaking when Jon was jumping up and down.

LUKE DONALD: You know, didn't celebrate too hard when it went in because he knew he had hit it a little hard and got away with it. But what a line. We were sitting right behind the green, myself, Shane, a bunch of the guys, and we could see it tracking, and we knew it had a chance. Thank God he took the flag out because it might have bounced off the flag if he hadn't.

Q. It's easy to point to every player contributing greatly, but when you look at the three superstars on your team, with Rory going 2-0 and Viktor and Rahm obviously had the end of their matches that they did, can you just talk about how big of a trump card it is to have those guys?

LUKE DONALD: Well, they are superstars. They are studs. They are three of the top four players in the world. You need your superstars firing. You need them playing well. Without that, it's really an uphill battle.

They stepped up and did what they needed to do, and I'm so proud of them.

Q. It's been a while since we've had a close Ryder Cup. This one could still be close, we all hope that it's close for entertainment sake. Why is it such an advantage for the home team at this moment?

LUKE DONALD: Well, I can only assume it's for two reasons. We obviously have a good say in the course setup. We look at statistics and try and fit the course that we think will give us an advantage.

And the home support. To have that energy, that passion from the crowd is big. It can lift you.

Certainly midway through the back nine, it got a bit quiet. You could tell with the energy it changed a little bit, and some of the guys that weren't playing in the afternoon, it was their job to look into the crowd's eyes and get the crowd going a bit, to get our guys over the line, which they



did.

That's huge when you're down and you have the crowd against you in a way. It's very hard to get that momentum back, but they helped us through this session for sure.

Q. I know you want to focus on your team, but if you would let us know how personally pleased you are for Matt Fitzpatrick, having a personal Ryder Cup record of 0-5 and to do that in such amazing fashion?

LUKE DONALD: It's a personal goal of mine to, one, play him in a four-ball. He had only played the foursomes the last two Ryder Cups, and get him a point.

Fitz, you could tell, you could see the look in his eye on the first tee. He was so, so ready to be -- to get off to a good start. He was six-under through six holes on his own ball. He was carrying Rory. Obviously Rory played some good golf after that and it was a real team effort.

But I was so happy for Fitz. And I told him many times, you know, you look at some guys that struggled early in Ryder Cups in their career, Seve would have been one of them, you trace back to his first two Ryder Cups, I think he made a point. Francesco had two half-points in his first two Ryder Cups and went 5-0 in Paris. It's his time to start writing the next chapter of his Ryder Cup history, and he started that today.

Q. The rookie partnerships went as well as they could. Could you provide insight why you put certain guys with certain rookies?

LUKE DONALD: Well, I think it's important. It's a big stage. It's nice to play at home, but that first tee, it's nerve-wracking. It's a pressure-packed situation. It's something they would never have experienced before, so to have someone with experience next to them that had been through it, to guide them, to help them, that was the goal, really.

Rosey did a great job with Bob. Jon did a great job with Nicolai. Viktor and Ludwig, Shane and Sepp, all those guys that they played with are big characters and passionate. You know, again, my goal this week was to make them feel like they belonged; that they had an opportunity to contribute this week. Their voice and their contribution was just as important as any other player.

Q. You never seem like a complacent person, but how do you guard against complacency with such a big lead, or do you even have to?

LUKE DONALD: We won't. We'll enjoy the last hour and

the celebration, but you know, once I'm back at the hotel, we'll have a team meeting, and we'll be back to business.

You know, again, the goal tomorrow is to win the session in the morning.

Q. Brooks Koepka has been stirring it up a little bit about Jon Rahm: "I mean, I want to hit a board and pout just like Jon Rahm did. But, you know, it is what it is. Act like a child. But we're adults. We move on."

LUKE DONALD: What was that in reference to?

Q. Presumably to his conduct on the course and perhaps his body language. But as far as you're concerned, he's acted very well today and produced the better moment of the day?

LUKE DONALD: Yeah, I certainly didn't see any of that. Jon was a big support system for Nicolai today, and to hit a big drive down 18 and hit it on the front of the green and make an eagle for a halve, that's a lot of passion.

Jon is a passionate person, but I didn't see him acting any other way.

Q. You were the vice captain at Whistling Straits where Viktor made his debut, and now you're the captain two years later. How are you seeing his role in the team has changed since then?

LUKE DONALD: I think his confidence in himself has grown. He was a good ball-striker in 2021 when we played in Whistling Straits. His putting, his short game let him down. He told me he just wasn't -- what was the word he used? -- he wasn't clutch enough on the greens, around the greens.

This morning his short game stats were quite a bit better than anyone's on our team. He's worked so hard on his weaknesses, and they have become strengths. You know, wouldn't surprise me if he'll win a bunch of majors coming up.

Q. A lot was made in 2018 in the data analysis about the course setup. Europe never swept a session in the first session and are now five points up. What do you put that lead down to?

LUKE DONALD: The lead? Team unity more than anything. These guys have each other's backs. 12 strong, and there's no real hierarchy. Everyone wants the best for each other. We have had a tremendous four or five days; the atmosphere in the team room has been amazing. It's been very positive.



I think they are great guys and they are great gentleman, like I wrote in my speech. These are fine men that put a lot of effort into this score, and it's showing.

Q. With such a big lead, does that change any flexibility of resting guys more or change your philosophy in any way?

LUKE DONALD: Of course we'll be thinking about that. But tomorrow I'm really focused on going out tomorrow morning and showing another strong session and trying to win that session.

That will be our only goal for tomorrow morning, and it will be some wider thoughts, obviously, for Saturday afternoon and the singles, but this is a great start, and we want to build on that lead.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports