

The Ryder Cup

Sunday, 1 October, 2023

Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

U.S. Team

Zach Johnson

Brooks Koepka

Patrick Cantlay

Brian Harman

Max Homa

Scottie Scheffler

Justin Thomas

Jordan Spieth

Press Conference

STEVE TODD: Welcome, everyone. We are joined by the U.S. Team.

Zach, I'm sure you're proud of your players. Give us your reflections.

ZACH JOHNSON: My reflections. I'll probably say this a lot based on the questions, but I am -- I don't have the words to describe my pride for these guys beside me and above me. There's not an adjective to describe what this team is all about.

They played for each other. I'm so grateful for that. This is a moment where you literally just have to accept that The European Team played really, really good golf. And that is really my freshest reflection right now is that Luke's team played great, and my boys rallied and fought.

Q. If you can go back five, six days, what two or three things would you do differently?

ZACH JOHNSON: You know, right now everything is extremely surreal and almost foggy. For me to come up and devise some sort of plot of how to change or alter or whatever you want to call it, I wouldn't even know where to start right now. I know I'll reflect. It's natural when you



MARCO SIMONE
ROME, ITALY

have something of this magnitude.

I mean, right now, my reflection, not to be cheesy, I legitimately am beyond grateful for representing Team USA and serving these guys.

Right off the top of my head, I'm not sure I would change anything. It's still very raw.

Q. At what point today did you feel like momentum was going in your direction?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, there was a lot of ebb and flow from what I could tell. I feel like we kind of got off to a sluggish start. There was quite a bit of blue up there and there was a long territory where there was way more red. That's because of these guys.

If there was one specific moment where I thought, hey, this is getting interesting, it was toward the latter part of the day, which is always what you want when you have a deficit, to have an opportunity.

Jordan rolled in, I don't know what it was, on 15, and it felt like, man, this is really doable. But again, this is when you tip the cap to your opponent.

Q. Five years ago, there was quite a bit of talk that the Americans suffered a bit in Paris by not visiting and playing the course enough. Was that something that you guys did learn that you came and played this course too much, and was it lesson learned from Paris?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I mean, I don't think we actually played it too much. We had a great trip, whatever it was, two and a half weeks ago, both on the golf course and off. No, I don't think there's any situation where we saw too much of it. I don't know. I mean, again, I've got to figure it out. There's some time here where I'll reflect and figure out what we can do better going forward.

We're going to learn from this. I mean, that's what Team USA does. We reflect, diagnose and try to figure out what we can do better to make it more efficient. It's not anything

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other than that.

There's no perfect formula to it. The formula this week is they got off to a great start, and that momentum led them into a pretty nice lead going into today. And our boys fought like madmen and made it interesting, you know, made them earn it.

Q. Jordan and Rickie, you guys have played in a couple of these in Europe now. How can America get better in foursomes?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean, I think you could see from the play from both sides, I mean, they made more putts than us. They took advantage of opportunities, and I feel like it just continues to be that when we have those chances, we're not taking advantage, and not making as much as them.

You know, it's not to take away from anyone. These are the 12 best players on both sides, and yeah, it's tough. It just seems like all the five that I've been a part of. Four of them, I've been on the losing side. And damn, they definitely take advantage of those opportunities, especially on home soil, making putts, chipping in, and those are big momentum-shifts.

Q. Jordan, can you figure it out?

JORDAN SPIETH: Foursomes is a mesh of personalities and a mesh of games, and I think we had just what we wanted, and if you watched the foursomes here as they got started, I mean, Viktor chipped in from on the green, that ran to a pin. Like it was the perfect storm. They chipped in a lot. They holed a lot of putts over ten feet this week.

I don't really feel like -- I know what the numbers say of foursomes in the past however many Ryder Cups over here, but I mean, I've been a part of a couple of those points where we've won, and I don't feel like there was anything different than the points that I've lost in foursomes, other than it's just execution.

And they executed this week. They played as good of golf as individually I remember watching most all of them play this entire year, and they did it this week. And we played well, and they just played better.

Q. Max and Sam, can you sum up your appearance, rookie appearance in front of the away crowd, and what are you looking forward to playing in front of a home crowd?

MAX HOMA: I won't speak for Sam, but this was a very fun week. You watch this your whole life on TV and you

get to experience it. It's amazing. It's a bummer to lose, clearly, but it was cool. I really love these guys, and it was a true pleasure to be with all of them. It's always amazing to be around greatness, and we get to do it week-in and week-out, but to actually be in a team room with everybody, it's a pleasure.

In two years' time, I'm not sure. It would be fun to be on the team. I hope to get to experience this again, especially on home soil, but I guess I can't speak to what could be. Hopefully the U.S. comes out on top. But just this week was a blast.

Q. When you step back from the emotion of each Ryder Cup, the last five looked basically the same, which is that the home team wins by a lot. Everything is even in four-ball and singles, and foursomes is a blowout for the whole team. That's been a decade now of that. So I guess my question is, does the Ryder Cup have a home team blowout problem? And I'm not offering any solution, but if there was a solution, would you endorse it, whether it's taking control of the course, or is there something that has to be done now?

ZACH JOHNSON: No, I don't think any changes need to be made as far as the ability to do this or that or the other depending on who is hosting it. I think it's the beauty of the cup. I really do. I don't think it's anything too complex. I think there's so many nuances and characteristics of what this tournament is all about that it would be a shame to change anything.

I mean, I'd love to start the week over, but that's not possible. Furthermore, I would say, you know -- I don't know. I think when it comes to foursomes, four-ball and all that, yeah, I get where you're going with that, in a decade. The fans, the people of the home team or whatever are a big part of this. It's the energy. It's the -- kind of like the fuel to the engine of it, if you will. And that's special.

So four years from now, we'll learn from it and hopefully we can implement a better process, certainly, than I did, and we can show up in Ireland, obviously retain it, or get it back in New York, but keep it once we go back to Ireland.

So playing on foreign soil, I mean, I wouldn't have it any other way, as the leader. That's the way I'm wired. I mean, I don't know. I love playing in front of our fans. I know these guys would probably say the same thing. I know they would say the same thing. But there's something special about coming over here and having to fight because it's hard, and I like the fight and I like the hard. So I wouldn't change anything.

Q. For anybody, the seven guys who played, is there any feeling in the preparation that was different this time than two years ago, a 15-point span, and the result, just talking about the preparation itself, the readiness?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I personally didn't think so. I thought it was really great of Zach and the PGA to be accommodating to have us come over here and take a little scouting trip, and, I think that was -- obviously didn't show, but felt it was very helpful.

It's a very, very busy, long week with very different routines and schedules that you would have in a normal week, and this week, the loss that we had this week has absolutely nothing to do with team camaraderie because this is probably the closest team I've ever been a part of.

We unfortunately just didn't play well enough. Kind of like Max said earlier about Sam, I can't speak on behalf of everybody, but I didn't feel the preparation was necessarily the issue.

Q. This is probably arguably the first real analytic Ryder Cup for both sides to really delve into stuff, probably more information than any other captain had before. But yet you go down 0-4 in the first session. Can you talk about how -- if analytics were then tossed to the side or did you feel like you could find something in the analytics that made you be able to put together other pairings, or did you have to just go by gut at some point?

ZACH JOHNSON: I think it was all of that. Well, not to disagree, but I think analytics have been a part of what we've done for multiple Cups. I don't think it was any more or any less this year.

At some point, you have to understand, you know, the averages and means and percentages and things of that nature that could potentially help, given the golf course. It's a part of it.

It's not the bulk of it by any means. There's something to be said about feeling things out. There's something to be said about observing and witnessing that helps your decision process, and then you include everything else and you try to find every possible scenario so that you can score points.

I would say that it's pretty evident that the other team did a better job of that, certainly the first two or three -- first three sessions. I think it's really that simple.

Q. So you didn't defer to your gut more as the

matches went on?

ZACH JOHNSON: There was moments there where you really just check your gut, yeah. More or less, I don't know. I would say, again, it's hard to gauge which one was more. But it's all of it, and that's the beauty of it. You're conferring with your vice captains. You're conferring with the team. You're conferring with yourself and you're trying to figure out what is best, if you take, you know -- trying to find the best situation that puts these guys in the position for success.

And you know, regret is a strong word, but I wish I would have done a better job of that. I don't know what it looks like, never will, but it's not a matter of anything other than Team Europe scored more points.

Q. You've been at the centre of quite a few interesting storylines the past few days. Just wonder if you would mind giving us your take, if you could rewind 24 hours to the scenes on the 18th green involving Rory McIlroy, the scenes in the car park afterwards, with Rory, and your take on what happened with your caddie. And I see you did have a word with Rory at the end, the shaking hands. I'd like to know what's going on, please, if that's possible.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Sure, well, yesterday out on the golf course in the afternoon, I didn't really realise the genesis of why what was happening was happening. I didn't find out until after the match had finished, and obviously quite a scene there in the dark when it was finishing.

Like I said yesterday in the media, I didn't see the incident that happened on the green with Rory and Joe. I was wrapped up in a totally different head space than watching that. And yeah, I mean, it was a crazy 24 hours. I mean, last night I was just trying to give the guys a little bit of momentum, and fortunately, Wyndham and I were able to close that match out and try to set a new tone going into today. But like I said, it was a steep climb.

Q. Rory McIlroy still seems quite emotional about what went on with your caddie, and your hat seems to have become kind of the most famous thing in the entire tournament. There's also a story that apparently you're getting married tomorrow and that's why you have not worn a hat, is that you don't want to get a tan line on your head.

PATRICK CANTLAY: I feel like I've answered so many questions about it.

Q. Is it true?

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PATRICK CANTLAY: Well, I am getting married tomorrow, yes. I'm very excited about that (team applause).

Q. Is that why you didn't wear the hat, because you didn't want the tan?

PATRICK CANTLAY: Did you read it on Twitter? Yeah, you did. Yeah, you did (team pointing).

Q. It was on the radio.

PATRICK CANTLAY: I said it?

BRIAN HARMAN: He has great hair; that's why he didn't wear a hat.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Would you like to keep asking more questions about the hat?

Q. Followed you around all 17 holes --

BRIAN HARMAN: Big fan?

Q. Being impartial. A lot of wisecracks, and yet you kept your nerve and you played your heart out. So I just wonder if you can tell us about what the experience was like going around, and what you did say with Rory at the end because it was quite interesting that you had a few words together.

PATRICK CANTLAY: Yeah, you know, I was just saying congratulations, he played fantastic this week. He played fantastic in every session that he played. He's an unbelievable player. We both live in south Florida and play some golf from time to time, so just happy for him. He played fantastic.

Q. Most of your team haven't played for five weeks. Given the slow start on Friday, do you feel that was a factor at all?

ZACH JOHNSON: No. I mean, my first reaction would be no. I mean, there's also something to be said about rest and recovering and getting your game in a position where you can go compete. I mean, these guys have won a lot of golf tournaments with weeks off. I have.

So I don't think so. We had prep time here. Again, two and a half weeks ago. Reps are reps. The schedule is the schedule. You can't control that. We try to control what we can control. I thought I had a fairly appropriate plan in place. Again, I might reflect on that and there may be some changes in there that I maybe could have done or nuanced or altered or whatever it may be.

But I am not going to slight the preparation of these guys. Whether it was at home or here or wherever, I know they were working their tails off to retain and bring the cup back home.

Q. You said a little bit ago that this was the closest team you've ever been on. Curious now that this event is over, is there some sort of example or moment this week that you guys pondered the most, whether it was a laugh or a joke --

JUSTIN THOMAS: Where do you start? Scottie?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: I don't really know what to say.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was definitely on our trip that we took here.

(Off-Camera) PLAYER: The Colosseum.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I truly don't know what to say. We truly all got along, we clicked. We had a lot of fun hanging out with each other. Me, who had not played in the Playoffs, I had not seen these guys in about a month and a half, so I was pretty excited to see them and hang out with them. I don't know if it was Brooks all of a sudden becoming the biggest Texas football fan you've ever seen in your life watching the Alabama game -- exactly -- or Max making us stay up and watch the Cal game that kicked off at 5.00am.

MAX HOMA: Cal starts in 20 minutes.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was great. It was a short but sweet trip. I don't know, I think we all said that when we left here, it was just like everybody gets along and everybody just is happy to be around each other. There's usually a couple misfits or people that just aren't a part of the team, but we all were one.

BRIAN HARMAN: JT, what are you talking about?

Q. Brooks, you have anything to add?

BROOKS KOEPKA: I said it before the event, I thought this was the closest team that I think I've been on. We've got a great group of guys. This week, they just holed a lot more putts, a few more chip-ins. This team, we fought hard, and wouldn't want to do it with another group of guys.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Maybe it was Brooks, we don't see him very often anymore.

BROOKS KOEPKA: Yeah, it was exciting to see everybody. I felt like had not seen the guys in a few months.

ZACH JOHNSON: That's because he had a baby, right.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Living it up with the baby.

Q. Can you describe what the last, whatever, 24, 36 hours have been like for you from the way that morning session ended, regrouping and going out there for a lead-off match today, just what has that all been like for you?

SCOTTIE SCHEFFLER: After finishing yesterday, I had plenty of time to rest and get ready for this morning. Pretty much all there is to say.

It's a tough week, and sometimes you get on the wrong side of things. And like Brooks and I went out, and we both just decided we were going to play terrible. I kind of started the party. I got off to a bad start, and things spiraled out of control from there.

I was emotional after the round because I care a lot about this tournament. It's one of my favourite tournaments of the year. These team events are tough to beat. Like the guys said, this felt like the closest group of guys that we've had. And at the time I felt like I was letting these guys down. I was put out in the morning to get a point, and so far I had played in three matches and felt like we had a good chance of getting a point on Friday, and then we went out Saturday morning and just wasn't able to get much momentum going. And it was pretty tough.

Going out first today, I wanted to do what I could to get a point on the board for our team. We wanted to come out fighting, no doubt about that, and I put up another good fight on 18 for another halve, which is tough. I really don't know what to say because I just wanted to win my match today for these guys. That's really all there is to it. There's a long answer, but the short one is I just wanted to win the match for my teammates, pretty much it.

Q. For Jordan, just wanted to follow up on the question that went to Zach about the time lag between THE TOUR Championship for most of you guys and this week. It really wasn't any different of a schedule two years ago and they played the BMW before the Ryder Cup just like this year. But was there a sharpness that might have been missing or that they seemed to have that was different from Whistling Straits?

JORDAN SPIETH: Hard to say. It's kind of a hypothetical. You know, clearly our start Friday, the entire day Friday, was not what we were looking to do. And it's really hard to come back in on away game when you fall so far behind.

I've been a part of that before.

So I would say like, you know, I think if you ask -- I think maybe if I rephrase the question, if you asked us when we would like to play the Ryder Cup relative to our schedule, I think we would probably say, give us a week after THE TOUR Championship or two weeks after and then go, instead of five.

It's hard for me to speak for the rest of the team. For me personally, I'd like to feel pretty sharp going in and obviously individually, I did not have the opportunity to even play any of those events where I may have. But that's just how I feel. Some guys come off of weeks off, go through some prep and play great after more time off. I can only answer that question individually, and this year, it wasn't going to happen. If it were tighter to our TOUR Championship and/or even if it were later and we had more of an opportunity to get a little rest and play more of an event or something, then it helps a bit.

I think more importantly, to answer your question, if you look at how that played at the BMW, which is one of the bigger events of the year, and you add ten of the 12 finish in the Top 15 or something, they were in great form. It has nothing to do with them having to play that event. They just were playing really good golf and then they carried it right into here, and they holed a lot of putts. They holed chips and they played really, really good golf this week, and they stepped on us early, and then the crowd was able to get behind them. Their rookies were able to see that. It made it an easier transition for the rookies. You know, all of a sudden, we were in a hole and had to try to fight back today.

STEVE TODD: Zach, Team USA, thanks for joining us.

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