

Walker Cup

Thursday, May 6, 2021

Juno Beach, Florida, USA

Seminole Golf Club

Stuart Wilson

Alex Fitzpatrick

John Murphy

Joe Long

GB&I Press Conference



OLIVIA MCMILLAN: I am delighted to welcome some of the members of the GB&I team to our virtual press conference today. We are joined by Captain Stuart Wilson, Alex Fitzpatrick, Joe Long and John Murphy. Thank you all very much for joining us.

I will begin with Stuart, please. Can you give us a little bit, talk to us about what the last few days have been like and how the team's preparations are going.

STUART WILSON: Yeah, thanks, Olivia. Obviously we've been out here for a few days now. We arrived Saturday, and we started to assemble the team from all corners of America and the UK. The first time we were all truly together was Sunday, and that's when we came up to Seminole for our first look. We played nine holes, and since then we've been doing a lot of work on and off the golf course with our team preparations on the course and within the team room.

It's been really good so far. Everybody is coming together, bonding well, and we've had a few kind of special guests along the way. We had a little visit from Matt Fitzpatrick on Monday, so Matt walked the course with the guys, gave us a lot of good constructive feedback, and we had the same yesterday with Paul McGinley. Great resources to tap into and hear what they've got to say about the best way to kind of tackle things, not just the course but the match itself.

So the prep so far has been really good. Everyone is having a good time, and basically, yeah, we've got two more days to make the most of looking at Seminole and getting pairings and things all sorted out, so the start of the match is going to come on pretty quick in the end, I think.

OLIVIA MCMILLAN: Alex, you are the only member of the GB&I team to have played in a Walker Cup match in the

past. Do you feel like you're bringing a little bit of experience and wisdom to the team?

ALEX FITZPATRICK: Not particularly, being honest with you. I think obviously having some experience from that last one is important to bring, but a lot of these guys, if not all of them, have all played some form of match play before, so everyone is used to either playing foursomes or singles, and everyone is used to being in that environment, and I think that's what's good about our team is that we've all played that, and I feel like some of the Americans just haven't been in that format and obviously playing foursomes together.

OLIVIA MCMILLAN: John, you're getting ready to head out to Seminole this morning to have another practice round. What have your preparations been like and what have you been focusing on?

JOHN MURPHY: I'm just getting to know the course, I suppose, and getting familiar with our teammates.

Thankfully we've had a great week so far. Everybody is getting on great. The atmosphere in the team room is amazing. So I think we're all kind of on the same page where we're just trying to prepare for the course as best as possible.

There's obviously a lot of tricks out there. The greens are fairly slopy and wouldn't be anything like what we're used to, so we're just going to try to get a feel for that. We've got two days left; I think we've put in some great practice so far, so we're all just getting ready to -- I supposed to be ready for that first tee shot on Saturday morning.

OLIVIA MCMILLAN: Joe, as the Amateur champion, that's created a lot of exciting opportunities for you this year, competing in majors, the upcoming Open, but being included in the Walker Cup team for GB&I must certainly be a highlight of your year.

JOE LONG: Yeah, absolutely. It's a massive honour to represent Great Britain and Ireland. You don't get to play team formats too often. Well, I certainly don't. So to be part of a special team is pretty amazing, and it's something



I'll remember for the rest of my golfing career for sure.

Q. Stuart, obviously the preparations have not been ideal just with COVID, et cetera, but you've got everyone there now. Do you feel that you can overcome the obstacles that have been put in your way this weekend?

STUART WILSON: Absolutely. I mean, yeah, the preparation hasn't been what we were hoping for. Obviously when we first met up as selectors to start considering the match back in March 2020, COVID was just kind of coming on the scene, so we all know what happened with that, and the season was pretty much decimated as far as a full schedule of events, and not just a full schedule of events but events where all the guys would be playing together.

The R&A were very supportive in what they did with trying to create a little winter series. Again, we know what happened with that; more and more events fell off the schedule as we went along to the point that the home internationals and things didn't happen, which would normally be kind of the final roll of the dice for the guys to impress upon the selectors as to why they should be on the team.

But there's a lot of benefits, as well, and a number of years ago the whole plan was to -- as you know, I was the chairman of selectors for the boys team and that was a bit of succession planning in there that hopefully I would take over as the Walker Cup captain and have had experience working with the guys before and bringing similar guys into the team.

So 50 percent of the team we've had playing together in the past on Jacques Leglise teams, have played for GB&I together, and we're all very familiar with each other to the point that it's like old friends meeting up in some respects.

The prep for this match has been going on a little bit beyond March 2020, so there's a lot of positives in there, and the guys -- we've got a lot of guys based in America just now, so they've been playing consistently and are well familiar with the conditions that we've got in front of us.

There is a lot -- like you said, it's not the preparation and lead-up to the event that we were hoping for. There's a lot of positives in there to draw upon, as well.

Q. Alex, I think Matt was at Royal Liverpool for the last match. How was it having Matt down with the guys and also Paul McGinley? What do you feel like you've taken from their experience and what they've said?

ALEX FITZPATRICK: I'd like to think I have more experience in the Walker Cup than my brother does, seeing as he only played one. But we had some interesting information from Paul yesterday, which I can't share the information so the Americans don't hear, but it was very valid information and something that the whole team had an interest in and we can use that, I guess, to our advantage, and that's going to be our plan set in stone come Saturday and Sunday, and hopefully we can act on it and bring home a trophy come Sunday.

Q. Is that something to do with the course?

ALEX FITZPATRICK: I cannot comment on that information.

Q. Stuart, you also had a good 2003 Walker Cup at Ganton, appeared on a winning team, successful. What do you take from that that you can pass on to the boys this week to help them in this match?

STUART WILSON: Obviously, yeah, it was great to be involved in 2003 at Ganton, given that normally it's special to win the Walker Cup at any time for GB&I but to be part of a team that won it, and it was the third GB&I in succession to actually win, that just kind of gives them a bit of realisation what can be done as far as achievable. Nothing is impossible. We know it's always a very difficult match and the history books tell us so, but it's not impossible.

When we've drawn on experiences from back then, hopefully we can impart a few stories. We've got Nigel Edwards in there, in the team room, as well, as one of the selectors who was part of the 2003 team and three other events, so we've got a good resource there of previous experiences to draw upon and we'll be trying to impart as much of that as we can, and hopefully the guys will take some of it on board and use it to their advantage when the weekend comes.

Q. Can I ask a question of Joe, please. You haven't had the benefit of college golf. I'm just wondering, how have you kept yourself sharp for this match because the other boys have been playing competitively week in and week out in college golf.

JOE LONG: Yeah, I've been lucky enough to spend the winter down in South Africa, so I played two of the European Tour events in November, and then I was staying in Cape Town, basically, so I was always kind of playing and practising. Didn't compete too much, but I played in the Masters a month ago, so that was the first time I've actually played in the States, so it was interesting to see how the course plays. Do you know what; this week

at Seminole it's a second-shot golf course, as well, just like Augusta, and the greens are running pretty similar and they're firm. It was quite a good experience to get that before coming this week and I can draw upon some of the things that happened that week, as well.

Q. You played Jones Cup, as well, didn't you, so you've had a few experiences in America, haven't you?

JOE LONG: I actually didn't play Jones Cup.

Q. Georgia Cup, sorry.

JOE LONG: Georgia Cup, yeah, that's right.

Q. You think those three experiences should help?

JOE LONG: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I would say so. You know, just how the course is playing I think helps massively, so I think it helps me a lot, will help the team a lot.

Q. If I could start by asking Stuart a couple of questions. Stuart, firstly, the whole 20 years since GB&I have won on U.S. soil, it's quite a sort of daunting statistic to have. Is it something that you haven't mentioned this week or is it something that you have mentioned to say to the boys, look, you can go and create your own history this week?

STUART WILSON: Absolutely. We know there's only been two teams that have been successful over here. Again, which shows it's not impossible. But we've had a look at the numbers, and yeah, there's been 310 Walker Cup players, 84 of those have played on winning sides but only 20 have played on a winning side in America. We're trying to make that 30 basically.

Yeah, the guys are up for it, without a doubt.

Q. Again, is it a source of inspiration, as well, that this is a unique year having the Walker Cup, Curtis Cup, Solheim and Ryder all in the same year, and you guys are the ones that sort of kick off the festival of team golf?

STUART WILSON: Yeah, absolutely, and I think if memory serves me correctly, back when we were winning, all the trophies were on our side of the Atlantic around about 20 years ago, as well, so it would be a nice way to maybe kick off that scenario, as well, with a GB&I win over here.

Q. If I could ask Alex, early on you played down the fact that you had the experience of a couple of years

ago, as well, but were there lessons maybe you learnt at Hoylake, things you would do differently, and the experience you've got under your belt now that makes you more prepared this time around?

ALEX FITZPATRICK: I think probably just preparation-wise. I think it's such a long week to start with. From the last time at Hoylake, it was kind of like I tried to go out and play most days, and I think I ended up preparing in a way that probably best didn't suit me, just sort of playing too much golf, and I feel like this time around, I learnt that it's not all about playing 18 as many times as you can but pacing yourself and maybe playing nine here and there and maybe focusing on the first -- however many holes and just making sure that you don't overdo yourself because by the time come Saturday and Sunday, you're playing 36 a day, especially in the heat, it's going to be tough, and you don't want to be burned out before you even start.

Q. Alex, did you know that Matt was popping down to say hello or was that a surprise?

ALEX FITZPATRICK: No, I knew. I knew. I don't think some of the boys knew. But his plan was to come help out the team in as many ways as possible, and he came and walked the course with us, which was nice, and gave us some good pointers, so it was good to see him, as well.

Q. What pointers did he have?

ALEX FITZPATRICK: That is also classified information, I'm afraid, the pointers.

Q. You've obviously got Matt as a brother. Can you speak to what your golfing relationship is? Are you very close or are you keen to stride out as your own man in the golfing world?

ALEX FITZPATRICK: I mean, from a brother's perspective I think we're pretty close. It's a little difficult when he's thousands of miles away all the time, not like a normal brother who's probably there 90 percent of the time when you get home. But I'd like to think I'm as close as I can be to him with what we have.

From a golfing perspective, I mean, I guess I wanted to make my own name when I was growing up, and I feel like I've done a pretty good job. It's always going to be difficult when you both play the same sport, and I guess reaching a certain level you're always going to be compared, and that's okay, and I've learnt to live with that.

But I'd say yeah, from an overall perspective, we're still pretty close, which is nice.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. For Stuart, it's three Yorkshire lads in the team. Can you speak to the strengths of Ben and also the other guys, as well, Alex, Barclay?

STUART WILSON: Well, yeah, obviously it's a team as a whole and there's been a little bit made out of the fact -- me being a Scottish captain with Sandy's withdrawal there's not a Scottish player in, but we're a GB&I team, so we're not too concerned where everybody comes from, but I know Yorkshire is a strong golfing heritage and a good county for producing great golfers.

Everyone brings their own thing to the team. They're all well deserved to their spots and great golfers.

Yeah, it's nice to have that camaraderie there that's maybe being born out of the same county. A lot of the guys obviously know each other from all their national squads, as well, so yeah, we're in a good place, and we're just thankful for the guys that we do have that we could pick and throw into the team.

Q. Do you consider yourselves as ranked outsiders this week, and is that something you can use to your advantage with obviously the pressure being on this crack U.S. Team?

STUART WILSON: We'd never say we're outsiders because certainly with the format of the match and how 18 holes of match play, everybody knows anything can happen at any time.

As far as kind of being up against it, you're always up against it when you come, it doesn't matter what school you generally play in, America is always going to be strong, and I think this year with the closed kind of conditions for coming into the event, obviously I've only got -- this is my first experience of a Walker Cup in America. When we had the Walker Cup at Ganton the home crowd played a big advantage to us, as well, getting behind us and spurring us on. But we're going to have very, very few GB&I spectators here cheering us on, so we can use that to our advantage, as well, to kind of spur the guys on to not so much prove a point but use it as a motivation to do as well as they can.

Q. Who would you say -- the course itself, so little is known about Seminole. Who does it suit do you think?

STUART WILSON: Yeah, it's a great course, and the club have been fantastic with us between Jimmy Dunn, the club president, and all the members. I think we've maybe got some of the members on our side already.

Yeah, like Joe said, it's a second-shot course. You've got to be really smart with your approach shots into the green. It has been windy every day we've been here. It's been pretty much the same wind for all the practice days so far, so they're getting to know it playing this way. There is talk of the wind having a complete shift over the weekend from one day to the next, so that will make it really interesting because we won't have played it in that condition.

But yeah, the greens are fast. Like lightning fast. But as far as playing the course, windy, a little bit firm. We're not too unfamiliar with those kind of conditions, so the guys are coping with it pretty good.

Q. Joe, can I just ask you, was there anything that you took from your two rounds with Bernhard Langer at the Masters either from chatting to him or observing him on the course range that you can take into this week?

JOE LONG: I would say his strategy around Augusta was pretty impressive but more his kind of attitude and his process. He was so focused. First round we didn't really speak too much. Second round he was a little more relaxed, but I would say for his age and how involved he -- I think it was his 36th time at Augusta playing the Masters, and just how incredibly focused he was pretty amazing. So I think if you can take that focus into any tournament, that's great. And just kind of how he -- he didn't have the length to play that course, but he would position himself and put the ball in the right place every single time, that first round especially, which I thought was pretty impressive.

Yeah, there was quite a few things I took from him, but I think more than anything it was his mindset and like how much he wanted it still at his age.

Q. Alex, can I just ask you, it all kind of unravelled for GB&I when it came to the singles in 2019. Is there anything that you can do to combat that? Is there a way to cope with single matches head-to-head?

ALEX FITZPATRICK: Not really. That's kind of golf, I guess. We were looking good going into the last day, and I know we didn't have a great foursomes in the morning on the Sunday, but I mean, we were all up to go out there and win our points. I sadly didn't do my job. I didn't get a point on the board early for the rest of the team to see, and that was partly on me.

But I think the only thing you could kind of take out from it was that putting points on the board early is probably the most important thing you can do, making sure that the guys behind you can all see that you're getting that blue on the board as early as you can and getting them points, and I guess just trying to rack up enough points to make sure

that you win.

Other than that, I don't think there's much really you can say. Golf is a funny game, and all you can do is go out there, and if you give your best, that's all you can do really. So yeah.

Q. Stuart, a slightly strange question in that I read recently that Luke Donald has expressed an interest in becoming Walker Cup captain possibly one day. Is that something you would be in favour of? Would that be a good idea somewhere down the line, having professionals who obviously have a great Walker Cup pedigree coming to get involved in being captain?

STUART WILSON: That's not one for me to set policy on I'm afraid. I know I've heard Luke speaking in the past, even in his Ryder Cup days, that he's used his Walker Cup experiences to draw upon that to get prepared for things like the Ryder Cup. And obviously with players coming down this week like Matt and Paul, the Walker Cup obviously holds a special place in these guys' hearts and quite rightly so. So they're obviously still very keen and passionate on it even though it's been a stepping-stone in their career on to kind of greater things.

There's obviously going to be cause for conversations to be had, I think, because the guys are generally turning pro now. It's always kind of historically gone with a former player, but like I say, the majority of the guys in the last few teams have certainly gone on to turn pro.

Yeah, it's probably something that has to be considered, however the captaincy is going to be allocated going forward. Nothing stays the same. Everything is open to change. Yeah, like I say, probably somebody will have to think about it somewhere, but that's not for me.

Q. Stuart, I wanted to ask you about the two Irishmen on your team, Mark Power and John Murphy. Can you talk a little bit about what they bring to it, and would you expect to pair them this week?

STUART WILSON: Yeah, I'm just looking at John down at the far end of the room. I've known Mark for a long time, too, just like I say, that connection from the GB&I boys with Jacques Leglise, captained the team out in Ballybunion and did a fantastic job out there, and he's been on successive Jacques Leglise teams. I know Mark pretty well. I know his game, and it just gets better and better as the years pass by, and he's such a good guy, as well. He's a great guy to have around the team room.

I met John for the first time this week and instantly hit it off with him, as well, on a kind of relationship basis. A really

mature kind of good golfing head on him, so I think, yeah, often as captain it seems a little bit of a cop-out to pair up players from the same home nations, but we are in that position where we've got a lot of good golfers that can play together.

For one reason for another yesterday Mark and Joe played together in a little series of foursomes that we did, and they played fantastic. These guys can all come together and play with one another and play to their strengths, and they get on well. But it wouldn't surprise me if you saw them as a pairing over the weekend.

Q. John, how are you feeling? I believe you weren't well yesterday. Just wondering if you're 100 percent. Did you speak to Shane Lowry? I believe he made a quick visit down to the course, as well.

JOHN MURPHY: Yeah, he was actually here the day we got here but we just missed him. He was out playing. Yeah, there were a couple of us that have been unwell, but thankfully we're all good now. Myself and Angus, I don't know what it was to be honest with you, weren't feeling a couple nights ago. I think we're both back feeling okay and ready to play some golf today, and yeah, get ready, as I said, for that first tee shot on Saturday because once that first tee shot comes around it doesn't really matter who you are or what you've done, just a matter of going head-to-head with whoever you're against, so yeah, we're looking forward to that.

Q. The greens, 14 on the stimpmeter, I believe. How are you coping with that?

JOHN MURPHY: Yeah, it's certainly going to add an element of excitement I would say to the Walker Cup. It's probably not like -- none of us are used to it. I'd say a lot of Tour pros aren't even used to it, and then adding wind on top of that slope and green quickness is going to be pretty interesting. Might be a bit of carnage out there at times, so looking forward to that, as well, and hopefully we can manage it to the best of our ability.

OLIVIA MCMILLAN: I want to say thank you to the team for joining us today. We wish you the best of luck, and we will all be watching on and cheering you on from home.

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