

# Walker Cup

Thursday, September 4, 2025

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Cypress Point Club

**Captain Nathan Smith**

**Jackson Koivun**

**Ben James**

United States Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 50th Walker Cup match here at Cypress Point. We are all thrilled to be here. We hope you guys are going to have a great week with us. We're looking forward to it, a celebration of amateur golf.

We're joined by three Team USA representatives this afternoon, captain Nathan Smith, and then the No. 1 and No. 2 ranked amateurs in the world, Jackson Koivun and Ben James.

Captain, you played in three Walker Cups as a player, now you're on the other side as a captain. How does that feel and how is it different?

NATHAN SMITH: Well, it's a lot different. It's night and day. I feel like as a player you just went out and played hard, hoped you got a phone call and then you're on it.

As a captain you kind of go behind the curtain. You're on so many different committees. I think you get to see how hard the USGA works day in and day out to make the game better.

I think it's great to be a part of that, that they let you into that, and I think it's amazing to see so many people that care about the game of golf and want to get it right as much as you do. It's been a real honor for me.

**Q. What do you think the most important attribute as a captain is?**

NATHAN SMITH: Probably listen, listen to your players. I think they're great players. I think their learning curve is so quick. I think you just want to put them in situations to succeed, and I think you just kind of listen to them.

**Q. How are the guys looking, gelling so far?**

NATHAN SMITH: I think they look great. I think they look

great. We're up against a great opponent so we'll have to play well this week, but I think our team is in a great place. I think we feel good about our lineups, and we're just going to have to go out and execute and play very well.

**Q. Jackson, what are your initial impressions of Cypress Point?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: It's one of the best golf courses I've ever played. I was fortunate enough to play here my freshman year of college, and just to come back, play in the Walker Cup here, the golf course is in great shape. You think so much around this place. It's just truly one of the special points of golf.

**Q. You grew up about an hour and 15 minutes away in San Jose. Does this feel like a home game, coming back home?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: Definitely a little bit. It's good to get back on the West Coast, back in California. Pretty familiar with this weather, this type of grass. Just happy to be back.

**Q. This being your Walker Cup debut, have you talked to any past Walker Cuppers about what to expect this week?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: Definitely a little bit. I'm fortunate enough to have my assistant coach played in a Walker Cup, Chris Williams, and one of the former players at Auburn, Blayne Barber. They're both going to be out here this week. I know it was one of their best experiences on the golf course. I talked to them a little bit about that.

At the end of the day, just go play golf.

**Q. Ben, what are some of your impressions of Cypress Point?**

BEN JAMES: It's definitely my favorite walk in golf. Just the views and everything is amazing. It's spectacular to be out here. The course was in amazing shape today. It's cool how it changed from Sunday to today. Definitely firmer and faster, which is great. I think that's how the



course wants to be played. Today it looked really good.

Again, just an amazing walk, and really breathtaking every time we get a chance to play here.

**Q. This is your second go-around. You're a grizzled vet at this point. Do you think that experience will help you this week?**

BEN JAMES: I guess. Stew is our veteran, so we'll definitely lean on him being his fifth. It's great to be back here. It's an amazing week. St Andrews was the best week of my life up to this point, and I'm sure this week is going to top that.

It's just an amazing honor to be on the Walker Cup, and just looking forward to teeing it up.

**Q. Jackson, you said you played here back your freshman year. Now that you've gone around this place a couple more times, is there anything you've noticed about the course or the way any of the holes played that maybe you didn't appreciate or take in the first time you played?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: I definitely didn't take in the views as much. We've been playing a lot of golf the past couple days, and it's hard to take a rest day or just go play nine holes because you just want to play 18 at Cypress. There's just a couple lines off the tee. Hole 6 definitely stands out to me. Just trying to figure out what to do.

There's some greens that have a lot of pitch to them. You have to be really good with your wedges and just spin control and everything like that. It takes a mature golfer to play good out here.

**Q. Ben, you mentioned that the week of St Andrews was the best week of your life, but was there anything that week you feel like you didn't appreciate enough or that you want to try to take in more of when you come out this week?**

BEN JAMES: Yeah, as I kind of told a lot of people, each Walker Cup team makes their own special memories, jokes or whatever that goes on behind the scenes. We all have so much fun.

I think getting to do that with another team my second time is just another great memory for me. We're going to -- I'm sure most of us will come back and cheer on other teams, and just to have our own special memories within our group is pretty special.

**Q. Nathan, you've obviously got experience playing in**

**this competition. This can be a long week trying to get ready for Saturday. What have you been doing to try to help the team conserve its energy and make sure it is ready for Saturday while having such a long buildup?**

NATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I think that anytime you get into Walker Cups or team events, it always seems like the nights get a little later, the mornings get earlier. One of the things we've tried to do is preorder food to try to get the guys back to their rooms as quickly as possible.

But just getting your rest. It's a long week. You've got to pace yourself. Probably some little things like that.

**Q. Is that something you've talked to the team about in terms of getting their rest and pacing themselves?**

NATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I think it's definitely something that we're monitoring. Whatever they need to play their best over the weekend, we're going to do that.

**Q. Jackson, you mentioned sight lines and whatnot. Is there any hole out here in particular that has been something that you were surprised, or in your preparation that has been something that's been difficult to figure out and you're still trying to work out how you're going to play some of these holes? Is there something about one of these holes that's been tricky in terms of trying to figure out how you want to play it?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: Nothing really comes to mind. I feel like having all these guys talk to us and just in our team, we've been able to draw a really good plan to come out and place our ball here at Cypress Point. 6 is the only one that I've kind of really thought about. Nothing really comes to mind. I feel like we've just got a really good plan, and Cap has helped us a good bit, get us organized out here.

**Q. Nathan, you've played away Walker Cups, you've played home Walker Cups. What's the most difficult part of playing at home that maybe people don't realize?**

NATHAN SMITH: Well, I think it's probably like a home kind of playoff game, so to say, in any other sport. I think with families, tickets, everything, you just need to monitor. I think the biggest thing is just your rest. I think a lot of people are coming out to cheer and support you.

But there are a lot of advantages as well, so I think probably those, just kind of allocate a lot of those things.

**Q. Why do you think they've only won twice over here,**

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ever?

NATHAN SMITH: Well, every team is different. I think that if you look at -- I said it before, you have different captains, you have different players. It's 0-0. If you look at their team in the last couple years, they have a lot of guys, maybe nine out of ten players that play college golf over here, I believe. I think the last couple years they've won team championships.

I think this is one of their best teams that I've seen in a while, and if you look at those matches you're talking about, all those matches were extremely close. Even St Andrews last year, they were up going into Sunday, and there were a couple matches that flipped on the back side or it would have gone their way.

I think the matches are always close, and we have -- it's going to be a big test for us this week.

**Q. Nathan, you mentioned having your lineups kind of set. I know obviously you'll save that for tomorrow, but how much of the play in say the morning tomorrow is there a potential of that impacting either your selections for the afternoon singles or -- excuse me, Saturday morning, impacting things on Saturday afternoon?**

NATHAN SMITH: Yeah, probably not much tomorrow morning. It'll probably be a light day and everything, so we'll probably have a good idea.

**Q. I mean the play of the players in the foursomes Saturday morning, how much will that impact what with goes on after --**

NATHAN SMITH: No, I think for both teams, I think that's -- I'd say you kind of have to almost script it for all Saturday. The lineups have to be in by 3:00 p.m. on Friday, so Saturday you have to totally script out.

Saturday will tell you a lot going into Sunday.

**Q. Jackson, back on the 6th hole, GB&I is kind of struggling with that tee shot too. Is it the slope of the fairway or actually just picking the right line or both?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: I wouldn't say we're struggling with it --

**Q. No, I said GB&I is.**

JACKSON KOIVUN: Yeah. It's kind of figuring out what club to hit. We've got the line -- we know where we need to hit it. It's just do you want to try to test that bunker up

and push driver up around it or just take your medicine, hit your 3-iron or a chippy 3-wood short of it and give yourself 220 to 250 into a par-5.

At the end of the day we're all great iron players, so it wouldn't be that hard. We've got some long guys on our team. If they want to try to push driver and give themselves or their teammate an 8-iron obviously, that's obviously a huge advantage. Just trying to figure out whether that's the correct play or just see if you want to gamble or not.

**Q. Nathan, have you gotten into the details in match play scenarios say if somebody hits it into the water on 16? Do you have an edict, well, do we lay up, or are you leaving it to the guys to dictate, understand the moment?**

NATHAN SMITH: Sure, that's an option. It's probably going to depend on how the match, how they're feeling, how they feel comfortable with the shot. If it's a perfect day with no wind, maybe they feel comfortable with it. But if it's really windy and somebody goes in, maybe you do that. It'll probably be up to them, just kind of a game-time decision.

**Q. Along those same lines, in terms of strategy, 8, 9 if they push the tee up on 17, if they push the tee up on 18, is there a blanket strategy on whether go for it or lay back in general but also foursomes versus singles, or is it going to be more situational?**

NATHAN SMITH: I mean, that's up to the players. I'd probably say it's situational. I'd say some guys could do it. I think it depends where the match is at that point.

I think a lot goes into that, honestly. So that's probably a game-time decision with how the player feels and how the match is going.

**Q. But you haven't given any decree in the foursomes if you go for 8 or 9 you're out of here? It's totally up to the players?**

NATHAN SMITH: No, these guys are going to stay right here, I think.

**Q. Nathan, can you talk about how different the competition is in your mind from when you first started playing this to where it is now?**

NATHAN SMITH: Wow, it's evolved, probably like anything. You can see it on the Tour. You can see it here. The game of golf throughout the world has exploded, not only in the U.S. but everywhere in the world. I mean, the

quality of play is just through the roof, so it's changed, probably like any sport. Golf is the same, it's exploded, and it's really incredible to watch them play.

**Q. Have you seen any surprises from these guys taking certain lines, like I don't think I could have taken that line where they're taking certain lines that you wouldn't have?**

NATHAN SMITH: For me, yeah, there's a lot of that this week watching them play and everything. They have to play their game, what they feel comfortable with, and sometimes that's a big advantage, what they can do.

**Q. For both of you guys, can you talk about when you first actually learned about Walker Cup that you can remember, and how much you followed it and the guys that played it?**

BEN JAMES: Yeah, so funny, I think when I was about 10 or 12 -- no, probably like 14 or 15 I would say, you see on social media the Walker Cup. By that time I'm just getting into AJGA, and it was definitely a goal of mine. Just to see all the history and everything, definitely a big goal of mine.

It's amazing to be on one team, and it's even more amazing to be on two. Just to see the names going way back, it's a really cool honor. Definitely was a big goal of mine in my teens for sure.

JACKSON KOIVUN: I'd say the first time I kind of watched the Walker Cup was at Seminole. That was the first time I really got a first glance at it, and from then on out, I just really wanted to be a part of the team. I was a little young to make St Andrews, but it was something I wished I was a part of, and ever since I got to my freshman year, Cypress Point tournament here, I kept a Cypress Point pencil in my yardage book and told myself I'd get a new one once I played the Walker Cup here, so maybe I'll get my pencil.

**Q. Jackson, growing up in San Jose, being so close to here, how much did you come here as a kid to either play in tournaments or maybe go to the AT&T, and any cool experiences both playing or watching that are memorable to you?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: I definitely played a lot of golf here in Monterey. Not quite courses like this but some great courses like Poppy Hills and Bayonet Black Course and all those courses in this area. Didn't ever come watch the AT&T but definitely played a lot of junior events out here and had some good memories there.

**Q. What was your favorite course out here before you saw this one?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: I really liked Poppy Hills. I think it's a really well-designed golf course, and it's very challenging when it needs to be and just some really cool architecture out there.

**Q. Did you play a state championship there?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: I did not.

**Q. How come?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: I don't know. It's a great question. I was always playing junior golf events, the AJGA, that type of stuff. I moved out when I was 17, so just never got around to it.

**Q. So never high school -- you weren't in high school to be able to do that?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: No.

**Q. When you were going through your freshman year -- I know you got five wins as a freshman. At what point did the Walker Cup pop up in your mind because your name started floating around as you kept racking up points that year and into the summer? When did making that team at St Andrews first pop into your mind?**

BEN JAMES: Yeah, that was an interesting year for me. I obviously had a great college season, and didn't play my best golf in the summer. I was probably one of the last picks to that team, I can imagine. Very, very, very strong team.

It was there, definitely. It's different playing with that on your mind, I think, because I know everyone is thinking about it, who's on it, who's on the bubble. It was definitely there, I think, maybe the winter before that spring of my freshman year. Yeah, I played great at the U.S. Am and got it done when it mattered to make that team.

**Q. You guys probably know about the Crow's Nest at Augusta National. There's a lot of famous stories about guys rooming there together, what's come out of it. Years ago we know when they were amateurs Lanny Watkins and Tom Watson stayed up there, and just famous stories coming out of that Crow's Nest, but you guys are probably roommates this week -- you have your own rooms?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: We do.

**Q. What's the atmosphere like there?**



JACKSON KOIVUN: We're playing at Spanish Bay. It's a great spot. We're definitely having some fun out there. Just fortunate enough to have those really, really nice rooms so close to the golf course. Everything has been great there.

BEN JAMES: It's beautiful. So they have this great chocolate that they give us. I don't know if any of the guys have been eating that, but they give you two squares of dark chocolate. It's unbelievable, really nice touch. They give you two Dasani waters and who pieces of chocolate.

**Q. Do they have both the oatmeal and chocolate chip cookies and how do you decide if you have to face that decision?**

BEN JAMES: Here? It's always chocolate chip cookies, always.

**Q. Jackson, the World No. 1 has been leaned on quite a bit in this match. I think they've played all four sessions since 2007 other than Cole Hammer. Knowing that, what do you think has prepared you for the moment should this team need to lean on you over these two days this weekend?**

JACKSON KOIVUN: I would just say experience in the past couple years. I've been fortunate enough to play a lot of match play, NCAAs, match play tournament out here, all that fun stuff. Just racking up experience, how to play match play, who works well with who, all that stuff.

Just leaning on that and whether Cap wants to put me in for all four or what's his decision for that, it's up to him, and I'm happy with whatever.

**Q. Ben, obviously the chocolates are a big hit, but what's been something, an event you've had since you've gotten here off the course that stands out?**

BEN JAMES: Yeah, just the team dinners and the team room. Like I said before, each team kind of makes their own memories. Just a ton of laughs. The week is not over, so we're going to have a lot more fun to come.

Everyone is just laughing and joking, a lot of Clash Royale. It's a video game on the phone that we like to play. It gets everyone fired up too.

**Q. Is Clash Royale the one that you have all the soldiers and they --**

BEN JAMES: I think that's Clash of Clans. You've got these magical characters like inferno dragons, skeleton

army. I think half the team plays, so it gets everyone fired up and barking at each other a little bit. It's great.

**Q. Have you played that?**

NATHAN SMITH: I haven't played yet, but we'll see.

**Q. Ben, have you improved your ping-pong game since 2023?**

BEN JAMES: Yeah, I think I have. Definitely helps to have a ping-pong table in our facility team room. But I think I'm a little better, but I'm still not the best.

**Q. Nathan, what has been a particular message you've been trying to tell the team in terms of your preparation for this week? Is there something specific you've been trying to get across to them as they get ready?**

NATHAN SMITH: Well, I think every hole presents a challenge. I think you just need to -- there's a lot of angles out here. There's the speed of the greens. There's spin control. There's some fairways that slope.

I think Cypress Point is an incredible golf course. You're going to have to have all the shots and play it a lot to truly understand how to play it.

Every green it seems like there's three or four quadrants where the pin might be. It's really unique like that. I don't think you see that at a lot of other courses. We're trying to prepare for that.

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