

Walker Cup

Friday, September 5, 2025

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Cypress Point Club

Captain Nathan Smith

Stewart Hagestad

Mason Howell

United States Press Conference



all love, and it's just been really exciting for me just to focus on this and this week and this team. It's been kind of a dream come true.

Q. When we were down on 15 you were hanging out with President Bush. You turned to me and said, "this is so cool." What was going through your mind?

STEWART HAGESTAD: Yeah, it's his literal namesake. It's the Walker Cup at Cypress Point; it's an opportunity to represent your country, to spend time with one of the great leaders of our country. To do it with such a great group that you've kind of spent time competing with for the last couple years, as I said, it's a dream come true.

Q. Mason, let's go back a few months before the U.S. Open, before the Junior Am medalist, before the U.S. Amateur Championship. Did you think you would be on the Walker Cup here at Cypress Point?

MASON HOWELL: No, if I'm being completely honest, going into the year, the Walker Cup wasn't even on my radar. Honestly I was more focused on junior tournaments and things like that.

Yeah, got off to a great start this summer. I didn't even know the winner of the U.S. Am made the Walker Cup until about my quarterfinal match. This week has been so special. Definitely want to make more teams in the future.

Q. You've missed out on a month of school at this point. Are you doing homework in between practice?

MASON HOWELL: I have. I've gone back a couple times to do some homework. Sorry, not sorry to my teachers; I'm having a lot of fun. Yeah, hopefully just stay out here as long as I can.

Q. This is for Nathan and perhaps Stew as well. When you look at kind of the youthful exuberance there and this innocence and almost like you don't know what you don't know, we talked so much about history with this event too, how important is it for this team to be more like Mason than to worry about what's happened in the past?

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the 50th Walker Cup match here at Cypress Point Club. We're here with three USGA team representatives, Captain Nathan Smith, four-time Walker Cupper Stewart Hagestad and U.S. reigning amateur champion Mason Howell. You're about to go through the flag raising ceremony. What can some of the first-timers expect out of that ceremony?

NATHAN SMITH: Well, I don't think it's ever going to be a feeling that you might feel in your life again besides maybe if you make a Ryder Cup team. I think anytime you see the flag go up, it's a very emotional feeling. I think anytime you represent your country and see that flag go up, there's an enormous sense of pride. It's hard to describe the feeling until you see it going up there.

Q. What can we expect on the golf course from Team USA tomorrow?

NATHAN SMITH: Well, we're going to play our hearts out. I think we feel good about the lineups we have and everything with the guys. I think the guys have bonded all week. Now it's about getting some rest, going out and executing.

Q. Stew, you've played in four of these. This is your fifth Walker Cup now. How has this one been different from the first four?

STEWART HAGESTAD: They're all very unique. They're all very special. I think this will maybe be something I can answer better down the line when you can kind of see the forest from the trees, so to speak. I've really just kind of been focused on this week, spending time with the guys, trying to get to know the golf course as well as we can. It's been fun to watch the golf course change, get a little bit firmer since when we first got out here.

It's a special club. It's an iconic venue of the game that we



NATHAN SMITH: Well, I think it's refreshing, but I think he knows a lot more than you think he does.

I think it's been -- for me it's just as simple as it's been a joy to watch him play this summer and this week. I watched him shoot 63-63 to qualify for the Open, was out at the Olympic Club all week, watched him. It's fun to watch him play this week. To be at that age and make a Walker Cup is really special, and I think it's going to be special to watch him in future years.

Q. Mason, talk a little bit about the albatross yardage, what club you hit, and then just the -- I think Cameron Adam before said it best; it's a kind of a feast-or-famine course. Talk about the yardage and the club and kind of the dichotomy between --

MASON HOWELL: Yeah, this morning I had 237 into hole 2, and I hit a 6-iron and it landed right on the front of the green and kind of rolled a little right to left and kind of slammed the flag and went in.

No, this golf course there are definitely some birdies out there, but it'll bite you just as fast, just like you said. The golf course has firmed up a lot, so that's making it more difficult. It's one of those things that I think there will be some matches where there are a lot of birdies made, but there will be matches at the same time that par is winning some holes. It's one of those things that you just have to be prepared for anything. This golf course can -- the difficulty can be determined on the conditions, wind, and just things like that.

Q. Nathan, this has been almost a two-year process for you to get ready to be the captain of this team. You've played in a ton of USGA events, played in a bunch of Walker Cups. What are your feelings like on the eve, starting tomorrow, as this whole two-year process you finally get to go out there tomorrow?

NATHAN SMITH: Well, it's exciting. It's surreal. A lot of it feels like a dream. I think it was fun to come out today and start to see the crowds. I think that's always big. It has like a major feel to it once you get out there and start to feel out the people and everything, and I think that was definitely good for us today.

It's been great. It's really been beyond words. For two years to watch these guys, to get to know everyone closest in their lives, friends, families, coaches, parents, and then kind of see them all here now and kind of -- everybody come together here at Cypress Point, it's really been incredible, just beyond words.

Q. When was the first time being a Walker Cup captain came up in conversation, or when do you remember those conversations starting involving you?

NATHAN SMITH: I think probably seven or eight years ago they asked me if I ever wanted to be one, I think as I was on three teams, and of course you say yes. Then you kind of just were a part of it, go to all the different Walker Cups, and then eventually kind of your name is called.

Q. Mason, like you said, you were maybe prepping more for a Junior Ryder Cup team than you were a Walker Cup. When you look at the two guys next to you, Stew about to make his fifth start and your captain has played in this event a few times, too, what have you done to prepare yourself or who have you talked to to make sure you're in the best mindset and get your game in the right spot to succeed?

MASON HOWELL: Yeah, I can definitely lean on these guys. These guys have so much experience. I've bombarded Stew with some questions this week on kind of what to expect. At the same time, this group of guys on this team, they all play such high-level golf. Going into each tournament, everybody has their own way to prep, but we all can just feed off of each other this week.

Yeah, these guys have been big. Asking them a lot of questions, and yeah, just that first tee shot tomorrow is going to be pretty crazy.

Q. Mason, what has it been like for you since winning the Amateur? Obviously had a lot a busier schedule here than you probably necessarily anticipated. I'm curious, what's it been feeling like, and what's been the most challenging part of getting from there to here?

MASON HOWELL: Yeah, I think the most challenging part has been I'm still in high school. I'm trying to juggle some classes.

No, I got back home, took some time off and did some media obligations, and yeah, just started prepping again for this week. This is an event that you want to be at the top of your game. You know Great Britain & Ireland are going to bring their best stuff, so you've got to bring your best stuff. I've been thrown in a whirlwind, and it's been a lot, but I think I've done a great job managing it all. Just well-rested this week, and it's going to be a fun weekend.

Q. Has there been a toughest part about resetting yourself for another big competition here that you wouldn't, again, necessarily have anticipated you were going to be playing in?

MASON HOWELL: Yeah, absolutely. I went back home. I played some fun rounds with buddies that can't necessarily get the ball off the ground. But just being relaxed and just keeping it all in perspective and just having fun while doing it.

Q. In making your pairings, what factors are you looking at in terms of putting together foursomes teams? I'm curious what you value in terms of trying to make the right matches.

NATHAN SMITH: Well, I think both teams have 10 great players, so that can be somewhat of a great problem to have. I think you're looking for maybe guys that have played together before, how the course sets up for them, how well they're playing, different things like that. I think you want to kind of get everyone involved the first day and then just kind of ride it through Sunday.

There's a lot. I think we have our lineups. We feel good about it. We're ready to go.

Q. Stewart, obviously you have a terrific record in match play in general, Mid-Am, of course, good runs at the U.S. Amateur, and your match play record in singles here in the Walker Cup is fantastic. I'm curious, though, the singles here in the Walker Cup, is there a different approach, a different mentality here than there is in a U.S. Mid-Am or a U.S. Amateur?

STEWART HAGESTAD: I don't think so. These guys are really good. They're going to be the next stars of the professional game, and you know that you've kind of got to come out swinging.

I think back on my record, and I think on paper, it is one I guess you could say I'm very happy with, but at the same time, I personally care way more about the team record at the end of the week. I know what you're referring to. I'm very aware of it, selfishly. But when I think back on all of my different experiences with the Walker Cup, I think back to kind of the feelings that came after with your team.

The 4-0 that you might be referencing I think of more in terms of in '17, '19, '21 and '23 we were fortunate enough to win as a team, and I was just a smart part of that. Hopefully all of us can go out and do our job individually, but as I've said to a few people this week, typically the first question you're asked when it relates to the Walker Cup is where you played, and then the second question is did you win.

Q. How did you differentiate between finding inspiration and feeling pressure of the team?

STEWART HAGESTAD: That's a really good question. There's this really interesting thing that happens when you go to a USGA event that at least I feel like I've had the experience of. You do all your prep work before, you do everything you can. It's no secret obviously the USGA and the R&A for the sake of the question, they put on great events, but you do everything you can to prepare.

Sometimes you feel more ready than others, but when you get on property and you get around the players that are there, it's almost like your game kind of elevates to another level because you're surrounded with guys that maybe have shots that you don't have or they have skills that you're kind of looking at and you try and elevate your game to meet them.

I think that the two kind of go hand in hand. When you're at home, I've been fortunate enough to have kind of been around a bunch, and I've kind of seen the dance. I know in my eyes where I kind of have to be to feel prepared, and then you know that once you get on property and once you get around all those other players, if you don't have your best stuff, hopefully you can find it and then elevate it once you get there, but if you do feel good, you can kind of maybe lily pad off them, so to speak.

Q. Nathan, do you see the Pirates' sweep of the Dodgers as a good omen for the weekend?

NATHAN SMITH: You know, with that, I don't know when the last time I really watched TV was. It's been pretty hectic the last couple weeks. Maybe the other -- I like the other side a little better, so we'll see.

Q. Can you talk about since you've played in these, you probably after you're done you go back home and people say, how was it, and you tell them. You probably at some point think about what you wish may have happened that week, maybe something different you'd like to see, maybe I wish we could have done this or that or maybe if they give me a little more time to practice or I didn't necessarily want to go to that dinner, whatever it may be. What have you taken from those three that you might have brought into this week for your guys?

NATHAN SMITH: Yeah, I think we addressed it earlier in the week. I think anytime you play in the Walker Cup or majors or anything, I think you just really want to enjoy the moment, leave it all out there and kind of prepare. I would say a goal for this week was keep the guys rested and kind of keep them all in their element. I think even as Mason said, you have 10 guys that prepare 10 different ways.

I think everybody will always play Monday morning



quarterback, including myself, but looking at this week, I feel great about how we prepared and rested and got the guys ready. As of now, it feels great. But I think we're ready.

Q. There's no range on property, so a couple people won't play in the morning, but they might play in the afternoon. Is there something the captains' agreement about being able to practice somewhere here on property or do they go over to MPCC?

NATHAN SMITH: There are a couple different wrinkles with that. I know even in St Andrews while matches were going on, I think people were able to go out and play before they set up the course in the afternoon, so if you want to go out and play a few to warm up.

But obviously we'll have some different shuttles going back and forth from MPCC, and if there is a fog delay I believe or if there is a stoppage in play for a number of time, I think they were going to set something up between 12 and 13 fairway to get some quick reps in and then resume play. It could be kind of wild.

Q. Mason, did you shoot a course record when you went home between the Amateur and coming here; is that right?

MASON HOWELL: Yes, I did. I shot a course record 13-under 59.

Q. Before Olympic and here, you're a Georgia guy and it's a lot of Bermudagrass. A lot of people golf on the coast here is different kind of grasses and heavier air. Had you played in this kind of golf much before Olympic and now obviously before this week?

MASON HOWELL: Yeah, I've made only a couple trips out to California to play golf before. I've been down to San Diego and played Torrey Pines.

But the best experience for me going into the Amateur was playing in the U.S. Open this year, being able to test my game out of thick rough like that and at another U.S. Open venue. So I think I learned a lot that week, and I carried that over into the Am and kind of used some of the things I learned.

The same applies here; this golf course has hosted many great events, and it'll make you think.

Q. You said that was a 6-iron from 237?

MASON HOWELL: Yes, sir.

STEWART HAGESTAD: It was kicking downwind, it was very firm. Let's not read into that too much. Some of us hit 3-wood in.

Q. I know you're super focused on this weekend, but just looking long-term, GB&I has a professional golfer as a captain this week. Do you ever imagine that happening to the United States team, and I'm thinking about a particular golfer with nine USGA titles.

NATHAN SMITH: You know, that could open up the door for some different things. I'd first of all say there's so many deserving guys that are still amateur to be Walker Cup captains, but you would never shut the door on that, that that could happen someday with the right player that would be very accomplished. It could happen, sure.

Q. How do you think Tiger Woods would be as a Walker Cup captain?

NATHAN SMITH: He'd probably be pretty good; what do you think?

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