

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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STEWART CINK
ZACH JOHNSON



DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome two gentlemen that really need no introductions, Zach Johnson and Stewart Cink, captain, vice captain for the upcoming Ryder Cup team to the Fortinet Championship.

Thanks, guys, for joining us for a few minutes. First question, we heard a lot about catching up on sleep, getting right, this and that. I know it's been a very hectic time and it's going to be a very busy time for you guys, so just some thoughts on being here this week, Stewart as a past champion 2020. Zach, if I saw correctly, you're making your second start here with a top-15 in I think 2018. So just some thoughts on being back here at Silverado this week.

STEWART CINK: It's a feel-good event in a lot of ways. Coming to Napa's such a great place, and then the golf course is a fun course to play, it's just old school.

We see a lot of different kinds of tracks, but this is just a fun one to play. If you play well here you can definitely be rewarded and you can take this course apart, but it's got some defenses out there.

And it's been a little while since I played a competitive tournament, two or three weeks, and I think Zach's about the same. Seeing what we saw last week with the Ryder Cup guys, and seeing Marco Simone, I don't see how that can't get you fired up to compete. I mean, getting to mix up with those guys and see what they do and learn a little bit from them, I appreciate the opportunity to be a vice captain just so I can watch and learn from those guys and just be a little better competitor myself.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, that's well said.

I mean, I think this week for me, talking to some of my team, meaning my coaches and things of that nature, there were some hesitations on whether or not I should do this or not. At the same time, given the people I have around me, specifically someone like Stewart and our other peers, our leadership captains if you will, we've done a lot of good work to date.

So this is just like a nice semblance of reality for me. Getting into an atmosphere and environment that kind of feels normal is great because what we have in store for us is special, it's the best, but it's not normal. So I can kind of decompress here and compete. I love the golf course. This is a place I've always wanted to come back to since 2017 or '18, is that what it was?

DOUG MILNE: 2018.

ZACH JOHNSON: '18, just because I loved it, I loved the golf course and what it demanded, Obviously the community and everything that goes along with it. The food, it's pretty special, too. Love being back, love how Fortinet's really taken ownership of it, pretty special there. The guys want to be here, and nice way to kick off the fall.

DOUG MILNE: With that, we'll jump in and take a few questions.

Q. Zach, Stewart, welcome to Napa. Great to see you here. What is it like being here and being connected to Max Homa and Justin Thomas, who are also playing this week? What are your thoughts on just, you know, having four Ryder Cuppers here at this event this week? What does that feel like?

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure. Well, I think the beauty of having a month off from the TOUR Championship to the actual Cup does give us the luxury and freedom to come here and compete.

Max and J.T., I don't really want to speak on behalf of them, but if they don't play well, they may not play. That's the bottom line.

Kidding.

STEWART CINK: There was a little hesitation there, did you see that?

ZACH JOHNSON: But, I mean, you know, Max is obviously defending. Max, two times over, is that right? So that's pretty impressive, and it doesn't surprise me that he wants to defend his championship, that's awesome. J.T.'s obviously had a little bit more time off so it's great that he wants to get back in that environment competing. I mean, hopefully they both play great.

At the same time, Stewart and I were just talking about it before we sat down, we're on a nine-hour time change right now, so everything's kind of a little trying.

Now, that being said, we've got some time between now and Thursday. I'm sure we'll adapt and be OK. Yeah, it's pretty awesome. I wish we could have more, but it's not -- obviously it's not my decision. It's not easy -- part of the beauty of Napa is it's not easy to get to, but when you're here you don't want to leave, does that make sense? Kind of reminds me of where I'm from on the other coast.

Q. Sort of following up on that, how much value do you see in an event like this to prepare for the Ryder Cup? Obviously it's two weeks out, not next week.

ZACH JOHNSON: Right.

Q. Last year Max won here and then went 4-0 I believe at the Presidents Cup. But

where do you stand? You've been in this situation.

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure.

Q. Do you think there's much value in preparing like this?

ZACH JOHNSON: You're asking me, right?

Well, I don't think it's ever bad to go compete. That's what we're designed to do, that's where we're wired. I'm not going to put a ton of merit into -- I guess I'm just thinking about myself -- on how I play. Granted, I'm not playing in two weeks, but for me it's just kind of a fun week to go see where I'm at and get ready for October, November, I guess, personally speaking.

As far as the other two guys, you'd have to ask them. I'm sure they want to win, number one.

Number two, personally if they play great or play poorly, what I do know is that the opposite can happen. It's not -- ideally they get some momentum. Momentum in this game is pretty lethal and can be a really good thing. You stated what Max did last year, and no one was surprised by that. We saw him navigate Charlotte in the Presidents Cup quite well.

So yeah, there's something to be said about having control of the golf ball for a period of time that shows results, but you never know when that's going to happen and you never know when that's going to leave either. I'm not giving a whole lot of merit in that regard. Plus, four days of stroke play is vastly different than five sessions of match play in three days.

Q. Zach, question about the Ryder Cup. Have you started -- I'm sure you have -- thinking about the pairings, and are you kind of going back and forth each night jotting down mock pairings and things like that?

ZACH JOHNSON: Stewart?

STEWART CINK: I think he's got a secret camera inside your room.

ZACH JOHNSON: Or your room.

STEWART CINK: Or my room.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I would be lying to you if I said we hadn't started talking about that, discussing that, kind of piecing things together. It's not like we have it set in stone yet. It's one of those areas that's really, really difficult, but it's also really, really exciting and fun to kind of start to see how this team can take shape.

At this point in this captainship the worst part of my job is sitting guys, you know? I'd like to take 25 guys over there to play, we can't do that, and I'd like for all the guys to play every

session, can't do that either, but that's the way it is and everybody knows that.

Yeah, I mean, we're starting to get into some possible pairings to see what's best for that golf course and what's best for our team.

STEWART CINK: I think the golf course is going to solve some of that problem because it's so hilly and the temperature could be pretty hot, too, that I think guys are going to be happy to probably rest. There's not going to be a lot of disappointment for not playing.

ZACH JOHNSON: No, it's a brutal walk. Then, like you say, compounding that with heat.

STEWART CINK: It's probably the most --

ZACH JOHNSON: The caddies, too.

STEWART CINK: -- the most demanding physically of any Cup course I've ever seen that I've been a part of.

ZACH JOHNSON: No question. In my time, for sure.

Q. Zach, Stewart, what's your schedule looking like this week in preparation of going to Rome? Are you guys flying out Sunday night after the tourney?

And what are you hoping to achieve this week with Max and J.T. here and just overall feelings in preparation for the biggest event in possibly your career?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, what am I looking for out of those two individuals? Yeah, I kind of alluded to it. I mean, hopefully they show some signs of great form. I'm not overly worried about that, concerned about that. The bottom line is a lot -- for the most part, the majority of the team played so much golf in July and August that they need a break. Your body needs a break. It's unique that we've had a month off from the TOUR Championship to the actual Cup. I can't recall that ever happening in my time, can you?

STEWART CINK: Uh-uh.

ZACH JOHNSON: Maybe a week here, maybe a week there, but -- so that rest I think is actually probably better than actually competing off the TOUR Championship a lot.

Sounds like the European team might be playing a little bit more because of their schedule and the way it lays out, which is fine. Our guys will be rested. That was part of the joy and the purpose of our practice round trip is to let those guys see the course so that way, when we get there that week, they don't have to force it and push themselves to get their feet on the grounds that much because they already know kind of what to expect so they can kind of prepare accordingly.

Friday can't come any quicker. I mean, seems like you get there and Friday just takes forever to get there, but when it's there, it's a lot of golf in a short amount of time. Personally, I think rest is great. It's great that J.T. and Max are playing. It makes sense that J.T.'s playing because he hasn't played much. Again, I'm not going to give their scorecard a whole lot of merit when it comes to what we're trying to do two weeks from now.

Q. (No microphone.)

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, no. I'm flying out -- my wife and I have kiboshed redehyes, so I'm flying out Monday morning. I am a worthless you-know-what if I fly out Sunday night for days, and I'm still a dad, so I've got to get home and be at least somewhat in control.

STEWART CINK: I'm playing the PURE Insurance Championship next week, so I'm out here for two weeks. Then right now all of the assistants are all playing there, so we're all flying -- we're not taking a team charter, we're meeting them in Rome, flying from out west.

ZACH JOHNSON: I tried to get an exemption, but they don't take 47-year-olds yet.

STEWART CINK: I want to address one thing on your question. I think it's inevitable that whatever Max and J.T. do this week will be overstated to the good or to the bad.

ZACH JOHNSON: That's well said.

STEWART CINK: It will be. I hope they both win. I don't think that's possible, but I hope they both win. That would be great for their confidence alone. It won't have anything to do --

ZACH JOHNSON: And we tie for third.

STEWART CINK: And we tie for third, yeah.

ZACH JOHNSON: We're speaking obvious here, you guys know that.

STEWART CINK: I just think for us internally, it would probably be -- we hope that they have confidence coming out of this week and that would be a great thing.

Other than that, we just don't look at results from one week. You just can't do that, it's not a good enough sample size. You're not going to take somebody out of a pairing or put somebody in a pairing based on one tournament how many miles away, 7,000 miles away from Rome.

ZACH JOHNSON: 100 percent, and we've seen it in Cups before. Just to further that, be more specific, just because Stewart and I play Friday morning in a Ryder Cup match and we don't win doesn't mean that we can't go out the next day and do it again. You've got to take it with a grain of salt.

Q. If they win and you guys tie for third, will there be a playoff for third?

ZACH JOHNSON: No.

STEWART CINK: We already agreed on that.

ZACH JOHNSON: Half of a split. We'll go split a meal, too.

Q. Zach, I was curious, I don't know how much you pay attention to the Basketball World Cup, but I was watching that and was actually disappointed that the U.S. didn't win and then (indiscernible) finishing fourth, not even getting a medal.

ZACH JOHNSON: It was in Asia, right?

Q. It was in Manila, Philippines.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah.

Q. And Steve Kerr was the coach, coach of the Warriors, so I sort of followed that particularly close.

When I was watching the criticism he endured and sort of the reaction, and it had me thinking given that this was coming, I was thinking about the pressure that you are under as captain. How much have you felt that, how much are you feeling it more as it gets closer, and are there sort of parallels -- obviously it's a different situation, he's facing a bunch of different teams, but seems like there are some parallels.

ZACH JOHNSON: I think that's a really, really fair question. Number one, you know, U.S.A. basketball has more than one tournament. They're playing multiple games in a longer period of time and we're three days.

But I have thought about it. I mean, I think I kind of know what I'm signing up for. That being said, I didn't know all of what was going to be shot at me, there's no way to really know that. I mean, all the arrows, some of them you just deflect and some of them you kind of, you've got to veer and whatever, just try to navigate what you can.

What I think, at least this is kind of the way I'm looking at it, and I don't mind it, it's what I signed up for, I love responsibility, I love difficulty, I love being pushed and somewhat being uncomfortable if that makes sense.

I do know that if we win this, it will be those 12 guys. I mean that sounds really obvious, but it will be. It will be them playing golf and winning the Ryder Cup for Team USA.

If we lose this, I think there's probably some merit some of that can go on me. And I fully accept that, that's what I signed up for. I hope that's not the case obviously, but I am at

peace with whatever comes my way. I really am. Competition is competition, our opponents are going to be very, very good and Marco Simone will be a really difficult test for all 24 participants.

I mean, it's like any, any tournament, specifically any match play event that we've ever played in, anybody can beat anybody. We're going to hash it all out, we're going to use all the experience I have with my vice captains, we're going to utilize our statisticians, the same ones, the same company that U.S.A. Basketball employs, and we're going to navigate it properly. The guys have taken ownership in their team and it's so far -- to date it's been extremely special.

Q. (No microphone.)

ZACH JOHNSON: Understand, yeah. Especially in that sport.

Q. Especially in that sport to some extent.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah. I think the flip side of that is if you're talking about expectations, let's just look at what's happened over the last 30 years. We're supposed to win, right? I like that. I mean, this is an entirely different team than 1993, '95, '97, however far back you want to go, 2018. This is an entirely different team, a new opportunity, that's how we look at it. We've learned from the past certainly, continue to, but the bottom line is this team is -- has one mission in mind and we're going to do it collectively.

Q. Stewart, obviously a lot of discussion around the captains picks this year. You have some experience and have had quite a bit of success as a captain's pick. Is there any different pressure as a captain's pick or is it just kind of the Ryder Cup is full of pressure no matter what?

STEWART CINK: It's full of pressure, but I felt like being a pick relieved the pressure because out of the whole field of possible picks, you could say somewhere between, you know, eight and 12 players, the captain and the assistants chose me to be on the team. They wanted me to be on the team. To me, that relieved the pressure.

I've also been the last qualifier, the 10th qualifier in 2001 when 9/11 pushed it back to 2002. So I had a one-year wait for being the last guy on the team and that sent the pressure to the moon.

I felt much more relieved as a captain's pick, and I probably played the best in the Ryder Cup when I was a pick. I was a three-time pick. So I just felt like I was -- my services were desired to be on the part of the team and I felt empowered.

I haven't talked to the guys that got picked about that specifically. I might talk to them, but I would think they probably feel similarly, that it's more of a relief than like, oh, now you've got to perform, you got picked. It's more like the exact opposite. If you're one of those last

qualifiers, if you're close to dropping out, that's where I felt pressure.

Q. Zach, great to see you guys. How do you plan the balance being in Napa being such a destination, you're playing and competing and on field and also as captain and co-captain? How are you guys going to balance this week being involved with J.T., Max, or how are you going to balance this week?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I'll go first. I mean, again, it's nice being in an environment that feels very normal to what -- work environment. I haven't competed since before the Playoffs, I didn't make the Playoffs, so it's just nice. It's nice packing and unpacking and what I'm used to, just the routine of it all just feels comfortable.

Now, I say that, I did have two Zoom calls this morning that I didn't anticipate when I woke up, and that's fine. I know that I have essentially two different hats that I'm wearing. Once Thursday starts, I think it will be just competition. At least that's my intent, that's my hope.

All the best players I've been around, obviously Stewart being one of my closest friends and great at it, we're all pretty good at compartmentalizing things. I think you have to be if you want to navigate this sport, this job. You have to be able to kind of put things in its place and devote the amount of time necessary to each one given the proper parameters and timing. So I rely on that. I have my own systems that I employ and that's what I'm going to lean on. It's really nothing more than that.

STEWART CINK: As far as how to balance the schedule here, napa's pretty known for wine and I will be sampling some of the Napa varieties so I can compare it to some of the Italian varieties when we get over there. That's part of my strategy this week to keep my mind compartmentalized.

ZACH JOHNSON: I told him he had to play here for that reason alone.

STEWART CINK: Just to kind of piggyback on what Zach said, it's nice to be able to get inside the bubble. We're used to this. This is our weekly grind and we love it or we wouldn't still be doing it. So I am just a minuscule level compared to Zach with the Ryder Cup coming up, him being captain, but I can certainly feel my gears turning all the time, and when I get inside the ropes and get on the practice range with my coach like I was all morning, then I --

ZACH JOHNSON: Coach --

STEWART CINK: No, Coach Caesar. I feel my gears turning in a different way, which is much more of an at-home kind of place, and I need that. It's recharging of the batteries and the Ryder Cup is sort of a new territory in this role. So it's nice to be able to go back into the bubble for these two weeks and compete and play.

My wife's caddying so we're having a nice time, and then we'll get into Ryder Cup when the time comes. There will be a lot of discussions. We'll probably I think meet on the phone via

Zoom probably once or twice the next eight or 10 days.

Q. You guys have been so used to playing this golf course and now there's a reconfiguration, a rerouting, 10 holes that are going to be changed up. Is that a good thing? And how do you approach that golf course now with a 35, 37 configuration, three 5-pars on the back nine, will that influence the scoring this year? You dominated, Stewart, a few years ago, just blew this field away, but do you expect to see even lower scoring, or how will the golf course present that type of a test with the course being rerouted?

STEWART CINK: The routing won't change the scoring at all. The only way they can change the scoring is if the conditions change or if they change some of the holes, like build a new green or new tee or something, but the routing won't change.

There's one really good way to attack professional golf and that is to just be in the present all the time, and that means play the course right in front of you. The shot that's in front of you is the only one that matters, and it doesn't matter if that's a par-5 or a par-3 or whatever or where it happens in the course of the tournament. You just don't change that strategy until you get down to maybe about the 15th hole on Sunday and then you might think about taking more risk on or less risk, but it's not going to change anything.

It's great, I think, for presenting the tournament on television and for some of the spectators to get to see here in person that they'll see different holes. And this course has a lot to offer. There's some nice holes that don't get shown on TV because they're early, but that will change this year.

It's just not something that will really have a huge effect on scoring. It might have some effect down the stretch because you've got, I think it's three par 5s in the last six or something like that?

Q. Four, yeah. Oh no, you're right.

STEWART CINK: Three in the last six holes. But we used to have two in the last three, so it's not like we're not used to finishing on a rush of par-5s.

I still got to figure out where the holes are. I know all 18 holes here, but now I don't know which order they're going in. Where do I walk after No. 7? I don't know. I have to probably look at the ropes and the signs to figure all that out. I haven't played the course yet since I've been here.

DOUG MILNE: Gentlemen, thank you very much.