

PRESIDENTS CUP ANNOUNCEMENT February 12, 2019

STEVE STRICKER
FRED COUPLES
ZACH JOHNSON



CHRIS REIMER: Thank you. And good afternoon or good morning, depending on where you're calling from, Australia to U.S. I'm Chris Reimer, senior director of communications for the Tour.

With the 2019 Presidents Cup returning to Melbourne, Australia in December, we're excited to be joined today by U.S. team captain Tiger Woods and three assistant selections, Fred Couples, Steve Stricker and Zach Johnson. Let's get started with an opening question for our assistants.

Let's start with Fred Couples, who led the U.S. team as a captain for three consecutive years. He has also served as assistant captain twice. He and Tiger were actually paired together in Tiger's first-ever Presidents Cup in 1998 in Melbourne, Australia.

Fred, just some opening comments about how excited you are to return as part of this leadership team in December.

FRED COUPLES: I'm a Presidents Cup guy, I love the event. Certainly love the fact that Zach and Strick, or Steve Stricker, are going to be assistants also. We have a big job to do and we have -- I was on a couple teams with Jack Nicklaus as our captain, and now you've probably got the greatest player in the world and we're going to be trying to rally behind Tiger and do what he says and have these players ready to play down in Melbourne.

CHRIS REIMER: Steve Stricker, you're fresh off captaining the notorious 2017 Presidents Cup team, a five-time competitor. You were paired with Tiger when you guys went undefeated in 2009, probably your best Presidents Cup event.

Steve, what do you think Tiger will bring to the team as a captain, having been a captain yourself?

STEVE STRICKER: Well, he brings a lot to the team not only as a competitor and as a captain, but he brings that intangible thing that we all look up to him. All the players look up to him, they want to play for him. He's just a special guy and a special player. He'll get these guys fired up and everybody will want to play for him.

Just like Freddie said with Jack Nicklaus, we had Arnold Palmer as a captain. When you have a player of that caliber, you just want to really perform well and go out there and do your thing and win that point and move on. It will be a special team to be a part of and I'm truly excited to be a part of it.

CHRIS REIMER: Thanks, Steve.

And finally, Zach, you're going to join the team as a captain's assistant for the first time after making four appearances of your own. What are you looking forward to or thinking about as you sort of transition to a potential assistant captain's role?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah. First of all, I'm honored and excited to be a part of this team to represent the United States. It's a tournament and certainly a team that I feel very -- I'm blessed to be a part of. Any time you can represent your country in this sort of format, these gentlemen, to whatever degree that is, whether you're playing or helping alongside and serving, I'm going to relish it. Especially when you have Tiger at the helm and as our leader, a guy that these guys just mentioned, we all have the utmost respect for and certainly want to learn a little bit from him. I'm so excited to serve.

We've all played in these and that's obviously the goal of any competitor is to play, but if I can't do that, serving and being a part of such an awesome tournament and a team is phenomenal. I'm going to, like I said, relish the opportunity.

CHRIS REIMER: Awesome. At this time we'll open it for questions.

Q. Thanks for doing this. This question is for anybody who wants to chime in. So in '98 you guys mentioned going down, the U.S. got thumped obviously, which seems like ancient history.

But you now have two guys, Tiger and Phil, who are back winning again. I'm just sort of wondering what your take is of these guys just kind of refusing to go away and the possibility that one or both of them might be on this team?

FRED COUPLES: Honestly, it's amazing to me because, and Steve will tell you -- Zach's nowhere near there yet, but when you get to be 45, -6, -7, -8, -9, then things kind of change a little bit.

And I listened to Phil talk about how far he's hitting it instead of a lot of people saying how I'm hitting it shorter and the courses are playing a little different. I like the energy. He'll be on the team and so will Tiger, and to have those two be down there in Australia playing will just make our lives, Steve's and mine and Zach's, so much easier because they're both great, great players.

You can throw away all the stuff about records and the Ryder Cup and all that because Steve will tell you, a lot of times he's played with Tiger and they win matches, and I guarantee you Steve will say it's because I played really, really well.

Other times when I played with Tiger, when you're the other guy and you're not playing well, it's very hard to beat two guys. That's why it's so important, why Tiger on any team, he gets

picked on a little bit too much for Ryder Cup records. But it's irrelevant to me and I just love the way they're both playing. Obviously Tiger's been through a lot, but he's still a young guy, he's 42 or 43 years old. They're both amazing players at their ages.

Q. For Steve, kind of a similar question, as the captain of the team in New Jersey, can you imagine -- I guess difficult's not the right word, but the challenges if Tiger were to play and to captain? Can you imagine how much of a challenge that would be?

STEVE STRICKER: Yeah, and like Freddie says, we all expect him to be a part of the team as a player. It will add another dimension for all of us to take probably some of the responsibility off of his plate. Hopefully, he can delegate some of that, even though I find that he probably would have a hard time delegating some of that away because he's one of those guys that wants to do it and do it right and put his stamp on it.

But we'll be there to help him and serve him, like Zach said. If he makes the team as a player, we're going to have to probably do some more things to take some of that off his plate so he can concentrate on playing and getting those points, which we all know are so vital and so important, every point is.

So yeah, it will be a challenge. If it comes down to that, we'll have to all sit down together, all of us, and see what he wants to do as a captain and how we can help him to get through that.

Q. Question for Fred as a player from '98. You spent a long time between drinks for the Internationals winning. Can you put your finger on why the United States has about been so successful in the Presidents Cup as compared to the Ryder Cup over that period?

FRED COUPLES: I think it's a little momentum even though it's two years away, I know it's funny to say that. I've captained three times, I've been on a few teams, I was Stricker's assistant, I was Jay Haas' assistant, I've watched Zach Johnson play probably five of these things.

Zach could probably answer this a little bit, too, but as a captain, I was very confident. I felt like none of the decisions that I really made were going to come back to haunt me because I had a lot of faith in my players.

Now, you could say that for everybody that even has lost a captaincy, whether it's the Ryder Cup or Presidents Cup, but one of the things when we get there, we just play well as a team. And obviously there's not as much pressure in the Presidents Cup as the Ryder Cup. These are all major winners, these are all multiple winners. It's just a momentum thing for me.

And I would like to hear from Zach because he's been in the trenches and he's with the players. I don't try and pump them up any and tell them this is America, USA we're playing for. These guys know what's going on, they know how to play. We have great, great

players, we have great chemistry, but for me it's just a big momentum deal.

ZACH JOHNSON: You want me to add a little bit to that, Freddie?

FRED COUPLES: I do, I do.

ZACH JOHNSON: What was the question again? Forgive me.

FRED COUPLES: Why are we so good in the Presidents Cup.

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, to add to what Fred just said, I think our leadership we've had in both formats of both Cups have been terrific.

I do think there's a little bit of momentum thing, like Fred also mentioned, that we can certainly benefit from in the Presidents Cup. I think specifically Freddie, he was my captain twice and obviously been a vice captain many times for me, he is able to somehow, just being the guy that he is, the competitor that he is, certainly the leader that he is, he gives us the freedom to go out there and do our work in a way that's very successful. I don't know how else you coin that. I just feel like his demeanor and the way he operates has been a really good ingredient in helping us do our work and facilitate that. That's why he's been so successful. That, and the fact like you said, the talent of our teams have been so good, major winners, et cetera.

Now, if you really want to get down to it, nitpicky and whatnot, I'm not a total stat guy, but if you look at any index over the last so many-odd years, world rankings or however you want to say it, the depth of our team versus some of these other teams has been probably better on paper.

Again, I'm not trying to get too nitpicky but it's just factual. Compare that to the Ryder Cup, you know, the European team is probably on par with us at times. It's just the way it is, it's just factual.

All that being said, anything can happen. Steve said it, every point is important, when it comes to match play, when it comes to big team events, you've still got to show up and play your game because at any point in time anybody can beat you. I think there's just been more freedom in the Presidents Cup for the teams that have won on the United States' side. I don't know why that is. I wasn't there with Steve in '17, but you could see it. I watched every second of it on television. They just went out there and you could just see the freedom they had starting on Thursday and certainly going into the weekend.

Q. Steve, having gone through this as a captain and as an assistant several times on both teams, this kind of dovetails on an earlier question, but what do you think Tiger is going to lean on you specifically to do as an assistant, do you have any idea?

STEVE STRICKER: No, I really don't have any idea. I think this continuity that we've had over the last three or four Cups, including the Ryder Cup, we're starting to see a continuity. Each Cup kind of runs into the next and there's similar guys playing. I think we're starting to see that more and more.

But as far as what he's going to ask of me, I'll do whatever he asks of me. You know, I don't know what that will be at this time, but it's mainly getting us all together -- Freddie and Zach and myself and Tiger -- and we all work together. It's really not specific to one assistant captain or the other, but it's really a team thing. We all get together and make some of these decisions and help Tiger with some of the things that we see while we're out there, little things from making peanut butter sandwiches sometimes. We've all done little things to help make the guys feel a little bit more comfortable and get them ready to play. So you do whatever you can for the betterment of the team and to make things work.

Q. It seems that in these international cups one of the large factors for success is familiarity with the venue. My question is for all three of you, is there -- number one, would you agree with that as a major factor? And if so, do you have any plans for how do we encourage for the players who are going to be a part of the team to get down to the golf course, play it and get familiar with it before the week of competition?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, familiarity is always a benefit. It's always certainly an asset to anybody or any team. I think that was pretty evident last fall in France. That's a regular tour event venue on the European Tour. I'm not suggesting that's the reason for the outcome, but there's certainly a benefit in knowing the subtleties of a golf course or even the generalizations of a golf course.

Fortunately, some of these guys that very well can make this team played there in, what is it? '11, I believe? There could be some familiarity. I know it's -- Royal Melbourne is one of those courses that's kind of on a bucket list for many individuals and has hosted many tournaments, so there's a little familiarity there. That being said, it's not like it's a regular venue for the entire International Team, either.

Will we encourage? I don't know if I will, but I'm going to do whatever Tiger tells me to do. If there's an avenue where players can get down there and play at some point -- it's not easy because it's not around the corner -- I'm sure we'll at least ponder that idea.

My guess is that Tiger thought about that and I'm sure he has a plan, but we'll just see how time plays out and certainly how everybody's schedule plays out once the team comes into form.

Q. I know, Zach, that you've been on the playing end for quite a while before last year at the Ryder Cup, but in terms of the administrative part of things, what did you kind of learn from an initial go-round of being on that side? And how would you just be more prepared to do whatever it is that Tiger asks you to do come December, whether

he's going to be playing all the time or not?

ZACH JOHNSON: Right. I think that's a good question there. I think it's a completely different dynamic. Yes, you're a part of the team, but the way you're going to operate each and every day is totally different.

I remember in 2016 at Hazeltine when we had Tiger as our vice captain, one of our vice captains. We had numerous discussions, he and I, leading up to that point, and then also during the week. He mentioned, it's way harder on this side, I just want to be playing.

Now I understand that. After experiencing France, granted, it's only one vice captaincy, but after experiencing that, your role has totally changed. Obviously rather than being self-absorbed and trying to prepare for a tournament -- when I say "self-absorbed," I mean that in a good way, you're trying to get ready to compete as a player. You are totally trying to help, cultivate and facilitate and create certainly an atmosphere for all the players to be at their best. You're taking yourself completely out of it and trying to just help, whatever that may be. I think Steve kind of alluded to that.

It's totally, totally different, but it's so magnificent just because I love being counted on, and to whatever degree that is, I love knowing that maybe my experience and some of the wisdom I've been able to collect -- surely from a lot of these guys on this phone call -- could be a benefit. It's a total dynamic change, but again, one that I respect and honor and relish. I love being associated with these teams and the guys who will be hitting shots. I hope I'm hitting shots, but if I'm not, I'm going to be their biggest cheerleader and helper.

Q. I am wondering, Fred, did you maybe see Tiger make a hole-in-one late last year?

FRED COUPLES: I did. Thanksgiving week, yes.

Q. Pardon me if this is already out there, I don't know if it is, how did that come about and what was it like?

FRED COUPLES: Well, it was on Monday -- I'll go real quick because I know there's more Presidents Cups. On Monday, I made a hole-in-one on the second hole at Madison Club at La Quinta. It was a Monday and there weren't many players. On Wednesday, Tiger came in and we played. It was his friend Rob and his son and I. He made a hole-in-one and the whole club knew. I made a hole-in-one two days before that and no one knew. My feelings were really crushed, although I never have seen Tiger so excited and Charlie was screaming and yelling. It was a pretty cool shot because it was up over the corner of a bunker, so from the tee we had no idea. I was riding with Joe LaCava and we went around the back of the hole. I said, Joe, that ball's in the hole. He said, It can't be. I said, There's nowhere else for it to be. We sat in the cart and waited for Tiger to get out of the cart and get down there and pick it out of the hole, but it was fun.

Q. A question for Steve, I guess, as a follow-up to the fact that you won at

Metropolitan nearly 20 years ago. What's the unique challenges of the Sandbelt courses down here in Melbourne?

STEVE STRICKER: I think the biggest challenge for Tiger's team and our team is just the whole time change, getting the guys down there. Most of the guys are going to be playing at Tiger's event and then they're going to have to hop on a plane to get down to Australia. Like Zach said, it's not just around the corner, it's down there, a ways away, a big trip. So those guys to get over the jet lag and to get in that golf mode will take a few days.

But it's just wonderful golf. I don't know, if you're not excited to go down there to play on some of those courses in the Sandbelt area, something's wrong because it's spectacular golf, great condition. The wind I guess would maybe be the biggest challenge down there at times. It can get pretty breezy and it can switch totally opposite directions one day to the next or even in the same day.

Other than that, it's golf and it's about getting the ball in the hole as quickly as you can, I guess. I think the biggest challenge we're going to have is getting the guys on that time zone.

Q. This is a question to Fred probably as a former captain down here, but any of the guys. Delightful fans here in Australia, love their golf and they love supporting their home team. Ernie has added an International Team logo, he wants to try and counter the advantage the Europeans had at they Ryder Cup with home fans. What's your view on how the U.S. team will be received by the crazy Australian fans?

FRED COUPLES: Well, I played down there in '98 when we lost and I've played some other tournaments, like Zach and Steve have. You have phenomenal fans all over Australia. I played in Adelaide, I played in Sydney and Melbourne. The greatest thing for us is the golf course, Royal Melbourne. It's phenomenal, like Steve said. If you can't get excited about playing there.

The fans, that's a different thing. Our guys -- it's going to be difficult. They're going to be very vocal, they're going to enjoy it. The weather, it should be 85, 90 degrees and it should be perfect. Might be a little windy. We've got guys that play all over and I honestly think that everyone wants to see all the best players play, whether it's on the International side with Jason Day or whether it's our side, whether Phil or Dustin Johnson. But you do have phenomenal crowds and we are looking forward to coming down.

I'll speak for Steve and Zach. We played in front of ruly crowds, unruly crowds and great crowds and it's all great golf. But it is harder when you're the away team. That's why they've always said that for every sport. We'll be the underdogs even though we might have better players on our team if you go one to 12, but still hard to win when you're on the road.

CHRIS REIMER: Thank you, guys, that will conclude today's call. I want to thank all three of you for joining us, thank the media for being a part of this call. We also want to

acknowledge the global partners for the Presidents Cup, Citi and Rolex, for all they do for the event, as well as Victoria for the support they've shown to bring the Presidents Cup to Melbourne. We look forward to hosting the U.S. team and our new assistant captains down in Royal Melbourne in December. Thanks, everyone.
