

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
November 14, 2023

ZACH JOHNSON



AMANDA HERRINGTON: We would like to welcome Zach Johnson into the interview room here at the RSM Classic. Zach's making his first start on Tour since serving as captain of the U.S. Ryder Cup team.

Zach, you are one of two players who has played every single RSM Classic since its inception in 2010. Did you know that?

ZACH JOHNSON: Is this a quiz to find out who the other one is?

AMANDA HERRINGTON: I'm not going to ask you who the other one is unless you think you know.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I know it's not Davis, but it would be Davis if he could have played. I don't have the faintest idea. Charley Hoffman? No, he's west coast. Somebody old.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: No.

ZACH JOHNSON: Really?

AMANDA HERRINGTON: No. Getting closer.

ZACH JOHNSON: Kooch?

AMANDA HERRINGTON: It's Chris Kirk, thank you.

ZACH JOHNSON: Kirky.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Zach, as someone who's been here at the RSM Classic every year, what's so special about this event?

ZACH JOHNSON: We don't have a whole lot of time to get through the whole list, but for me personally, selfishly, sleeping in my own bed and coming to work, like true work every day is pretty spectacular. That's just me.

What makes this special is really it's collaborative. It's the collaboration of RSM making a tournament their own since the inception, seeing it evolve and get bigger and better every year. So those people deserve a lot of credit.

It's the people that reside in this facility right here. Certainly Davis and his foundation and

what they do is spectacular. And I would throw -- obviously throw in Sea Island Company and the amenities that they offer.

I've got a couple buddies on Tour, this is their first time here, which is kind of strange. A couple close ones in particular. But I get it, it's hard, you can't play every week, but it sounds like they won't want to miss it now.

It's those that come back, those that come here want to come back and I think that says a lot.

And I promise you, it was 75 to 85 every day last week.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Zach, how's your game looking coming into the week?

ZACH JOHNSON: You know I've actually been able to work as of late, which is nice. It's been a nice change and much needed escape. My game feels great. We've had a couple -- well, we had my entire team, we try to meet at the end of the year. We've already done that, which was really healthy and really effective. Then communication since that point has been spectacular so we've got a good game plan, I think, to navigate.

It's not like it's anything out of the ordinary, but the difference this year is it's a little more trying going into next year because of not uncertainty, just a different schedule as you well know. Don't need to get into the nuances of that, but it's just different. So trying to figure out where I can play and where I can't and my home life is going to be a difficult stretch. But my game feels good, I'm excited about this week and the remainder -- excuse me, and 2024.

Q. Do you get a gold certificate of some kind for perfect attendance?

AMANDA HERRINGTON: We will get that printed right away.

ZACH JOHNSON: I think I should get at least like a Chick-fil-A card or something.

Q. A little gold star to put on the hat?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't know, something. Well this is the 14th year, maybe at 15.

Q. Two questions. RSM and before that McGladrey, the same company, they've been a sponsor of this thing for 14 years. To the health of a tournament to be able to keep a sponsor for that long and going forward, how much does that play a part in the success of the tournament?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I guess I'm not into the actual architecture of this entire tournament and I don't really know specifically, you know, what those meetings are about.

I will say this: I do know some of the executives very well, even intimately, one in particular

sits on my foundation board, and so I do know the people of RSM very, very well. It does not surprise me that we're at 14 years.

Obviously this place is really great and they've made this a second home, whether you're talking about Sea Island, St. Simons community, the charities that have benefited, et cetera. There's a personal connection there, so that's number one.

Number two is there's measurables, there's actual objective data that RSM has used to basically the full effect on their business and I think if anything, they could be a model, I'm sure they are, in Ponte Vedra for other potential or current sponsors and how you utilize the PGA TOUR construct to better your services, your businesses.

I'm getting into specifics here, but there's real tangible data. Whether it's their clients or partners or whomever that come here, they want to come back. I do numerous things with RSM throughout the year and one of the common threads in those discussions is "I can't wait to get back to Sea Island, St. Simons." It doesn't surprise me.

Q. No matter how long you've lived here, how many times you play Ocean Forest or Frederica or here, playing out here, does it ever get old, the course, the scenery?

ZACH JOHNSON: No, not at all. It does not get old. If I'm going to be completely honest, it's my own fault because I am human, I probably do take it for granted on occasion. It's just spectacular. We're spoiled. If you're talking about these two facilities, get a lot of play but they're spectacular. I still call it the new Plantation, it's not that new anymore. I think it's a great compliment to Seaside. I think Seaside's one of the better golf courses we have on Tour.

And Ocean Forest is redone, Frederica is amazing, Retreat just right down the road is in the best shape I've seen it. We're legitimately spoiled in the Golden Isles.

Q. Zach, it's been a couple weeks since the Ryder Cup. In that time period, how often are you thinking back to the events of that week, either good or bad? What stands out when you're sort of sitting on the front porch thinking about that week?

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure, I think about it a lot. When it's something that -- well, I mean, I guess it was a year and a half, maybe 19, 20 months from the announcement, I guess, right?

There's really about a year of true work, maybe 13, 14 months of work. So when you have something of that magnitude that you're doing day in and day out for the most part and then it comes to an abrupt halt, you can't not think about it. And I love it, I am a fanatic of the Ryder Cup.

So given my role in the last one, yeah, it's natural. I've got a lot of 20/20 hindsight things that I certainly think about. Arguably, some regrets. But I think again something of that

magnitude, win or lose, you're going to have that, that's sports. And I think that's when you care, you're passionate about something, you're going to have those natural feelings.

I think when I look back, obviously the mission was to go win and we didn't, we did not do that, and you know, that stinks. Again, I wanted top win, I wanted these guys to win.

And it still hurts in some regards, but it's also the journey. This sounds like the right thing to say, but it's the truth: It's the journey with those people, specifically the 12 that I'll never forget.

Q. And apologies for maybe touching a nerve, if you had to pick one thing that you regret, what would it might be?

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure. You don't have to apologize. I am -- I think the best athletes, specifically golfers, that I've been around, it's a pretty obvious, especially if you can get into their intimate details of how they operate, I think compartmentalizing their life is an attribute that a lot of guys do very, very well. Tiger would be the extreme example, he's amazing at it.

What I'm saying about compartmentalization is I think when it comes down to it, I look at things, every piece of my job is just that. Even within that compartment, there's compartments. So I kind of try -- I try to treat the Ryder Cup in that manner. I'm not one to tell them what to do or how to play, obviously I'm not their coach, but I am trying to put these guys in a position to play their best golf. That's what compartmentalizing is.

So I looked at every aspect of the Ryder Cup before and the week of and tried to diagnose it and study it and figure it out, like what's the most efficient way to tackle each and every item.

The common denominator that I go back to that I wish I could have changed, or not changed, I wish it would have dawned on me earlier is just the pure commodity of time and understanding that it's precious. I think I've -- you know, we had the practice round trip. No regrets. Amazing. I don't think the guys would say they had any regrets in that, at least I hope they wouldn't. It was spectacular.

I think if I could -- you're looking back on things. If I could have put more value into time management, I could have put my guys in a better position to play golf at a better rate early on. I'm not suggesting that would have changed the outcome, not at all. I can't determine that, that's sports, right? I'm just saying I think in my seat I didn't see what needed to be seen until after the fact.

Now, it's been seen and it's been voiced by me and probably a couple others but specifically myself, so hopefully next time around there's a better template put into place so these guys can go play golf.

Q. Zach, it's kind of natural, it happens every time that the captain that wins is celebrated, the captain that loses gets kind of beaten up, but do you feel like you were

outcoached?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I'm not a coach, I'm a captain.

Q. You were outcaptained?

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't know. I guess that's such a subjective manner there. I mean, if you're going to look at the scoreboard, you would say yes.

I don't know. You know, it's sports. I mean, the bottom line is this is -- the beauty of this, the absolute beauty of this is it's once every two years, but if I had my 12 guys and I could take them two weeks after that cup to another one, it could be totally different.

Now it's not -- that's not the way the formula is, that's not the way it works, I get that. I'm not going to fault anybody for suggesting that Luke did a better job because they won. That's only natural. I think Luke would also attest to that, you know what, he's happy for his 12 guys that won. I'm upset that my 12 guys did not win.

Q. Stricker, Davis, they both had chances to captain again. Would you want to do this Presidents Cup or Ryder Cup in the future?

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh, my gosh, I don't know. That's the first time I've had that question posed.

I'll just say this: I will serve Team USA to essentially any capacity if there's individuals that want me to be a part of it. If I'm the best choice for this, that or the other whatever that role is, I am able and willing to help them out because I love helping and serving.

You know, I've learned a lot obviously, I have some experience, but at the same time I think again one of the beauties of Team USA is that we have new guys coming up that deserve an opportunity and have the ability and the passion to do it as well.

Q. As far as this week's event, in the past the way the schedule worked, it always felt like the last week of school, right? What does this week feel like when jobs, opportunities for next year are on the line?

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't know. I've actually thought about that in the sense that it is kind of the last week of school.

I'll say, you know, I only know myself here, given the uncertainties of our golf climate, there's some things that are probably in place and still some stability, but I'm not -- I'm not upset that I'm almost 48.

But there is opportunity. There will be opportunity for everybody and anybody and this is another week obviously that's opportunistic.

Yeah, fortunately I put myself in a position that I'm still going to be able to compete next year on the PGA TOUR and hopefully beyond. That's my only focus right now work-wise is to get better at golf. But, you know, it is the last week for some of these guys and they've got to make a dent. That's golf, that's competitive golf, that's meritocracy, that's PGA TOUR golf and I think that's a beautiful thing. It's also extremely brutal because it's hard. Everybody's really good and everybody essentially has the same goals and that's to win.

Yeah, I mean, you know, I don't know what's going to transpire down the road, I just hope that the stories that will come out maybe this week or even -- I mean, Camilo's an amazing story. No one's surprised about what he's done the last two weeks, but there will be more of those, beautiful stories like that. There's also brutal stories that don't get covered as much. I mean, again, it's hard, it's sports.

But, you know, hey, the PGA TOUR's in a good spot.

Q. Zach, regarding the Ryder Cup, there was a lot of conversation afterward that Europeans had played competitively right before, more competitively sharp than maybe our guys that had maybe not played much. Do you put much stock in that and would you recommend going forward that, hey, maybe before Bethpage they'll -- it didn't seem to bother at Whistling Straits.

ZACH JOHNSON: Correct. Yeah, I mean, we've seen it both kind of -- well, for Team USA we've seen both. We've had TOUR Championships right into a Ryder Cup, right, or Presidents Cup, and then we've had TOUR Championship and whatever, three to five weeks off.

I mean, it kind of goes back to what I said earlier, the commodity of time. That's one of those instances, providing time, but then also what you're doing in that time is another part of that.

Yeah, ideally you want to have some fresh guys. I don't know if it's the captain's role to say, hey, you guys got to go play. I don't know if that's the proper way to approach it. Bottom line is the FedExCup takes a lot of time, energy and they need to rest, too. Some guys played Napa. There was only a couple I guess if I think back on it.

Yeah, there could be some truth in that. And you had their guys playing the BMW, which is one of their signature events. You had I think it was 10 or 12 that were like in the top-15, something like that, maybe even better than that, which is pretty ridiculous. You had that and you only had one time zone change for them to travel. Actually, a couple were on the same time zone. There's some merit to be said there, too.

Yeah, I mean, it would be -- that's been talked about and I would say it would be nice to have some collaboration between the PGA TOUR and The PGA of America or Ryder Cup Europe or the European Tour in general to have some collaboration there to see if we could figure out a really good way to tackle that.

I'm assuming the dates -- I know the dates are scheduled for New York. I don't know about Ireland yet, I really don't know.

Q. Curious, Brian Harman was in here saying earlier this year he had texted his agent asking about announcing gigs, he was thinking about hanging it up. I think anyone who's played this game long enough has thought about quitting at some point and went on to win. As long as you've been at this, what's the closest you've come to hanging it up and quitting, and did a victory follow soon after?

ZACH JOHNSON: Can you say that again? Brian Harman?

Q. He said it, not me. He was texting his agent this spring, he was so frustrated about his game, yeah, June, about doing TV.

ZACH JOHNSON: Brian Harman?

Q. It looked like Brian Harman. I was wondering --

ZACH JOHNSON: I've never been -- I mean, at my age, yes, what am I going to do next, but I still want to compete.

Q. There was never a frustrating stretch --

ZACH JOHNSON: No. I mean, I've had frustrating stretches, but I look at it as opportunity. I flip negatives into positives pretty darn quick. It's like having a round where you shoot 73 and it could have been a 78 if you didn't putt well. Well, you putted well and know you know what you need to work on. That's kind of how I operate, I look at it from a different lens.

Q. I think it was a short-lived moment of frustration.

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, I'm going to assume it was too, yeah, based on his July or August stretch. Maybe even late June because that was Travelers, right? Was Travelers in June? Yeah. That's coming from his mouth, correct?

Q. He got shot down pretty quick.

ZACH JOHNSON: I mean, Jeremy depends on him for a lot. I'm just kidding. I know Brian well, very, very, very well. We've had discussions throughout the years on how to play this game, how to tackle this game, we approach things very similar. That's why I'm surprised by this. Maybe he was being honest or somewhat sarcastic, I have no idea, that's not the point. I'm just shocked by that statement because he is so good. I mean, obviously we're saying it because he had a great summer, but even before that. I almost want to model my game after him now, that's really what I'm getting at because he's really so efficient at what he does. Wow, I'm surprised by that statement.

Q. Going back to the Ryder Cup, have you guys done a post mortem dissection? Given a few weeks out, do you have any more insight into road versus home or it is what it is?

ZACH JOHNSON: Can you elaborate more? Be more specific.

Q. Just how it's been so lopsided for the home team.

ZACH JOHNSON: I mean, I think there's a number of factors there and all of them could be possibly correct. The bottom line is this is sports and you just never know until you tee it up. You never know, anybody can beat anybody at any given time. The fact of the matter is what we've kind of said here, I don't think I put my guys in the best position for success. Those guys on the European side were playing great golf and didn't have far to go. A lot of them played multiple tournaments between the TOUR Championship and the Ryder Cup.

So yeah, I look back at Whistling Straits, it was kind of the other way, like a lot of other guys were playing unbelievable going into it, right? Maybe there's something to be said about form in that regard.

I don't know. I think you could kind of pick it apart and like -- but you cannot prove one way or the other why and that's why this will be discussed over and over and over again, whether it's internally or in the media or wherever. It's the beauty and the curse of the Ryder Cup, it's just so substantial that you can look at it so many different ways. Yeah, there's a lot of potential in there for being accurate, but you're never going to really know. I think -- I think where -- we're going to learn from what happened. So I personally believe that Team USA will be in a better position for Ireland once we go back over there. Again, that's not going to say we're going to win by any means, because it's hard. I don't know. I hope there's not as many lopsided victories going forward. I say that, but God, it would be kind of nice to be on -- I don't know, I don't know. It's hard, it's hard to win in hostile environments no matter what sport it is.

Q. One of the things that Brian said about the Ryder Cup, his first Ryder Cup is that the losing side whether it's here or across the pond gets beaten up by their fans and their media. I wonder if Brian didn't have the perfect perspective when he said -- mind you, in a loss, he said my expectations for the Ryder Cup were exceeded. So for a rookie, and he talked about the experience of watching the greatest players in the world and about playing with Max, the day they had on Saturday and everything. Does he have that in the perspective that you would have wanted your guys to walk away with?

ZACH JOHNSON: I mean, I'm not going to sit here and have desires over their perspectives, but I will say it does not surprise me in the least. Shoot, I played in five and I won one and I cherished every one of them. Probably not over 2012 yet, but they're just all so special. Every team is special. Every week is just, it's unlike anything we do and yet

there's more to it than just the monotony of playing your own golf ball week in and week out, a lot more to it.

It's encouraging that he said that, I'm not surprised by that. I've talked to him -- again going back to it, I've talked to him because he's been close two or three times on making a team here or there, so we've had some nice discussions, simple and short, but I just kept encouraging him to keep doing what he's doing because he's good enough and we witnessed that. No one was surprised obviously with Brian being a part of it. I wouldn't be surprised maybe at the place in the next two or three going forward at least because he's so good.

Really what we're saying is once you experience it, you want more of it and that is so accurate. Again, the beauty of it is it's every two years. The curse of it is it's every two years because you want it again the next month, but that's not going to happen.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: All right. Thank you, all, and Zach, good luck in your 14th RSM Classic this week.

ZACH JOHNSON: Thank you very much.