

The Walker Cup

Friday, 6 September 2019

Press Conference

Brandon Wu

John Augenstein

Cole Hammer



THE WALKER CUP
ROYAL LIVERPOOL 2019



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm delighted to welcome the players from USA into the interview room. To my immediate left is Brandon Wu, and Cole Hammer on his left and then on the far left John Augenstein. If I just start with you, Brandon, there was discussion yesterday about the challenge of playing links golf and you having had experience of playing links recently. What do you think the key for the success is on these types of courses?

BRANDON WU: Yeah, obviously coming over here the conditions are a little bit different than what we experience in the U.S. Starting with this week, I'm sure what the boys have seen is the wind. I think for me, when I came over for The Open Championship, the biggest -- the most eye-opening thing was how much the ball actually moves in crosswinds, and I think it just takes a little bit of time to adjust, to visualise how much it's moving, how much it's moving on the ground, and then just trying to leave yourself in the right spots, like not necessarily being not short-sided but also you want to be chipping into the wind. It makes a big difference.

THE MODERATOR: Cole, it's been a great year for you. You finished as the world's leading amateur golfer, and now you're playing in the Walker Cup. How much are you looking forward to the match and being part of the team that's defending the trophy this week?

COLE HAMMER: Yeah, it's been a dream come true the last couple years for me, culminating in being here at Hoylake with these guys around me. It's really special, so I'm really looking forward to the week. It's going to be a great time and a really good test out there.

THE MODERATOR: John, can you just give us your thoughts how much you're looking forward to playing this weekend?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, I'm very excited. We have a really good team and a lot of close-knit guys on the team with Captain Crosby and Robbie Zalznick leading the charge for us. I'm very excited that the golf course is in great shape, and I think that we've been here so long, we're just ready to get it going.

Q. You might have coped pretty well on a windy day at Crail in St. Andrews, but the wind has been stronger here this week. How important was that experience that day with regard to this week?

COLE HAMMER: Yeah, I think it's really interesting just trying to stay patient and in the right mindset out there because I think the wind takes it out of you both physically and mentally. I'm just walking around like trying to get to lunch. But no, I think all those experiences kind of adding up has been really useful in preparing me for this week, and I feel like I've been able to kind of share with some of my teammates, as well, who might not have played links golf before this week, so I think it's good.

Q. How important is making the early statement and winning that first foursomes session? I mean, it's obviously not a must because you have three sessions after that, but how important would it be to go out there and win that session and make a statement?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, I mean, I think it's very important. Like you said, it's not everything, but in any sport, in any game you want to set the tone early and try to keep the momentum going throughout the week.

COLE HAMMER: Just basically in every match it's really important to get off to a good start and keep the pedal down because that can put you up to a good advantage and get them behind the 8-ball pretty quickly. It's going to be important for us to get off to a good start tomorrow morning and hopefully we'll keep that going.

BRANDON WU: I think, yeah, especially with the foursomes format, I think we've put a lot of emphasis on how important that is. I know historically we haven't done as well in the foursomes format as we would have liked, so starting in December at the practice session we played six rounds of foursomes there, we played foursomes at Pinehurst last week and played a bunch of foursomes this week. So I think we've had the experience of kind of getting used to the format, getting used to our partners, and looking forward to getting that started.

Q. Can you guys talk about what you think is the most important quality of a foursomes partner and what you want from that partner in those sessions?

COLE HAMMER: For me it's just about putting the ball in play and not getting too aggressive when you

feel like you could because especially out here, you can get in a bad spot pretty quickly, and as long as you have a plan with your partner what you want to do and you stick to that plan, you should be pretty set as far as playing well goes. Alternate-shot is something, like Brandon was saying, that we don't get to do that often, but I think we've played enough over the last two weeks and beyond that we've figured out a good plan.

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, and kind of echo pretty much what he said, but I think it's just really important to have great chemistry with your partner. You want to play with somebody, which all of us on the team are friends and known each other for a long time, but you want to play with somebody that you're kind of close with, maybe have the same kind of game, but also just similar attitudes so that you're all kind of on the same page all day. But I think that like Cole said, in foursomes and especially in these conditions on this golf course, you don't have to go out there and make eight or ten birdies, you just need to kind of play well and make the other two guys kind of work harder than you do.

Q. You talk about foursomes; you're one of the few American teams that will come over and talk about it in that way rather than alternate-shot. Has somebody said to you you should call it over here foursomes?

BRANDON WU: We call it both back home in the States, but I think foursomes is probably the better way to say it. I haven't put a whole lot of thought into that.

Q. Well, it's what we call it, so it's regarded as a gesture of politeness on your part.

COLE HAMMER: Sure, I'm happy to call it foursomes for the rest of the week. (Laughter.)

Q. Cole being world No. 1, if you look at the World Rankings you guys would be heavy favourites. Do you feel that's the case or do you feel like World Rankings go out the window at an event like this?

BRANDON WU: At this point you kind of throw everything out the window and you're just playing head-to-head matches. Obviously the American team has played a lot of great golf over the past two years and we're ranked highly, but at the end of the day, there's a ball and there's a hole, and you've got to get it in the hole before your competitors. We played great, but basically you have to throw it out the window now.

Q. About being No. 1 (indiscernible)?

COLE HAMMER: I would think there probably is to an extent. I don't know. I haven't talked to the GB&I players about it. Yeah, I think it'll excite me to play well, honestly. I'm not scared by it. I don't feel like it's backing me up into a wall or anything. I think it's a good target to have on my back, and hopefully I'll use

that to my advantage.

Q. I'm assuming you're all big sports fans aside from golf. There's a big cricket match going on over here. I wonder if you've watched it, if you've seen it. Are you curious about it? Are you going to go back as cricket fans when you get back to the States?

BRANDON WU: I watched a little cricket last time I was here, I think. I think it was the world championships, something about England was doing quite well, so it was quite exciting to watch, but I can't say I'm really learned the rules or anything, but they were celebrating, so it must have been good.

Q. Did it interest you?

BRANDON WU: Yeah, I thought it was -- obviously there's comparisons to baseball. I'm sure all of us are big baseball fans. But yeah, it's a little bit different because I think the games go on for way longer.

COLE HAMMER: I'm curious of it. I don't know a whole lot about it. Seems like it's almost like our American football over here, so I would love to know more about it, but I just haven't had the opportunity. This is my first time in England.

Q. Obviously you guys aren't that far removed from the guys that played on the Walker Cup team two years ago and they had a lot of success. Can you maybe talk specifically about a player or two that you may have spoken with and maybe really gave you some great advice or made you feel comfortable going into this kind of unknown new experience for you guys?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: I haven't talked to anybody from the team two years ago, but I spoke with Hunter Stewart, who was on the 2015 team, and Justin Thomas, who was on the 2013 team. That's right, isn't it? Both of them gave me a lot of words of encouragement and advice, kind of just handling the week and understanding it's a long week. We've been here since Saturday of last week, so six days ago. You know, just understanding how much golf you're playing, your body and your rest, and just trying to get accustomed to the golf courses and adjust, and talked about -- I actually talked to him last night or texted with him last night and he was saying that hitting as many greens as possible and really understanding the winds, like we've talked about the crosswinds, and then also the different shots you can kind of hit around the greens. It's just really important to get used to. Nothing revolutionary in those comments, but definitely good pieces of advice that I think we've done a good job with in our practice rounds this week.

COLE HAMMER: I've talked to Scottie Scheffler and Doug Ghim a little bit about it since they're Longhorns that were on the teams years ago, and they essentially just echoed what John said, it's a long week. But the one thing that kind of hit home to

me was when they were talking about how special it is to play for your country and how leading up to the week you don't really realise how special it is until you step on the first tee, and then it's like, game on. So I'm looking forward to that. And then obviously we have Stew Hagestad who was on it two years ago, so we've got that going for us.

BRANDON WU: Yeah, I would say beyond that, there's a bunch of support from past players, whether -- we got notes from Tiger Woods, Rickie Fowler, Webb Simpson I think just yesterday texted Robbie and he passed on that message. So I just think it's really cool. It's like a fraternity of people who have played this event before and they're all rooting for us this week.

Q. John, just to go off what you just touched upon, after walking with both teams this morning, you guys have played a ton of golf, and it seems like from both sides you guys are ready to play in the match. Is that really the sentiment that you guys share?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Yeah, I would definitely agree that we are -- I would assume that the GB&I are feeling the same as we do. We're ready to get out there and play. We've done all of our homework. We kind of know what to expect from the golf course. We've had our pairings for -- we've had an idea of what our pairings were going to be for the last couple days, and we've played a lot of foursomes golf. I think we're just fired up to get out there and start competing and start kind of feeling the pressure and the feels of what the Walker Cup is all about.

COLE HAMMER: I would say the same thing. In college golf we usually get one practice round and then go play, and here we've been here since Saturday morning and getting used to links golf, and it's been six, seven long days for us, and I think we're ready to get started and play some golf.

Q. Forget that your captain is sitting there in the back. Would each of you tell me what his father means to you?

BRANDON WU: I don't know a lot about Mr. Crosby, but I do know that my mom told me that my great grandmother would always have his records playing during the holidays and whatnot every time they went over to their house for dinners and whatnot. I also know that Captain Crosby was seated twice in the 1983 Walker Cup by captain Jay Sigel. A lot of scar tissue.

Q. He doesn't exactly keep that under his hat, though, does he.

BRANDON WU: No, sir.

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Well, as far as I go there, I know that he was an incredible entertainer, really involved in the game of golf, and I know the captain has told us plenty about him, and we've gotten a lot

of stories that I'm sure we will remember for a long time.

Q. Can you give us one story?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: Oh, gosh, you're putting me on the spot. Well, he's played in plenty of pro-ams -- how many have you played in? 24? I'm trying to get you to tell us some here. Yeah, 24 pro-ams. That's pretty cool. I haven't played in one. So he's got that number on me.

BRANDON WU: Yeah, I think around the holidays, kind of like John mentioned, I heard the Christmas carols he was absolutely legendary, and obviously the captain speaks very highly of him. And yeah, it's a little before our time, I guess, in a sense, but no, we all recognise his name for sure.

Q. Did you know he was a very good amateur golfer?

BRANDON WU: I assumed, I guess.

Q. You guys have talked about the different conditions over here, obviously the wind, fescue which you don't always see in the United States. What are one or two shots you feel you need to play over here before that you haven't had to play quite as much at home?

JOHN AUGENSTEIN: 110-yard 7-irons. No, you know, you just -- like we've all talked about, you just really have to control the golf ball as much as you can. You do have to club up an exceptional amount into the wind, and even then you need to keep it low kind of out of the wind but also on kind of the fat side of the wind. So by that I mean if it's marginally off the left, marginally off the right, you want to miss it kind of on that side so at least you'll have a chip or a putt that's going to be into the wind. It's going to be tough to -- especially in foursomes, and then also even in singles matches, it's going to be tough to come out here and just stripe it all over the place and hit 16, 17 greens. We do that a decent bit back home and when they're in good conditions, and you're just not going to do that here due to the wind and conditions and firmness of the course. I think that understanding where you know you can kind of get up-and-down from, understanding that chipping into the wind you can be pretty aggressive with and even make some of them is just going to be really important for all of us.

Q. Does it bother you that there seems to be a lot of talk about the Americans maybe struggling a little bit in the conditions and the wind and you know it's windy and you hope it's wet and they're going to find that difficult? Does that wound your pride in any way? Do you feel like you've got something to prove to the country?

COLE HAMMER: Not at all. I'm from Texas. It blows down there hard, so I've seen this before. I mean, I guess it does hurt my pride a little bit. (Laughter.) No, we're not worried about the weather. I think honestly,

the harder it is, the better it is for us.

