The Walker Cup

Thursday, 5 September 2019
Press Conference

Craig Watson
Conor Gough
James Sugrue

THE MODERATOR: We'll make a start. I'm delighted to welcome into the interview room the GB&I team. To my immediate left is the captain Craig Watson. To his left is Conor Gough, and to his left is James Sugrue. You and the team obviously have the challenge to trying to win back the Walker Cup this weekend. How much are you and the players looking forward to that challenge?

CRAIG WATSON: Oh, very much so. When I played, it was the highlight of my golfing career. The boys -- we're trying to get them to enjoy the week as much as possible, and they're going to have a great time, and they're going to look back on this week as one of the best weeks of their lives.

THE MODERATOR: Conor, you've played your way into the team after some fantastic results over the last year or so. Does that give you a lot of confidence coming in to play a match such as the Walker Cup?

CONOR GOUGH: I think it does, and especially I've had a lot of success in match play, so I think it helps coming in to play in match play competition like the Walker Cup. So yeah, really looking forward to getting back out there and playing some match play.

THE MODERATOR: James, it's obviously been a memorable year for you, being an amateur, getting to play in the Open. How much are you looking forward to making your debut in the Walker Cup?

JAMES SUGRUE: Yeah just as Craig said, it's probably the biggest thing I've ever played in so far. I just can't wait for Saturday now to get started. We see people floating in every day, it gets busier and busier, so just really can't wait for Saturday to come.

THE MODERATOR: Craig, you've said Hoylake is a course that's ideal for match play. What is it you like about Hoylake in particular?

CRAIG WATSON: Really everything. There's not any bad holes on it. They're all very fair, you can see everything in front of you, and it's come on leaps and bounds since we were here in July, obviously. We enjoyed the good weather last year, but the course suffered, but the greens staff have done a magnificent job in getting the course up to this kind of condition.

Q. Craig, you obviously had Tommy Fleetwood here earlier in the week. How did that come about, and to the boys, what did he have to say to you during his visit here?
CRAIG WATSON: It came about because his caddie, Ian Finnis, contacted us to say, if there was any help we needed, he would be more than happy to come along. So Ian came in July the first time, and he said Tommy was -- unfortunately because of the British Masters, I think, was on, and he had other commitments at Hillside. So unfortunately couldn't make it then.

But he said if it was at all possible, then he would be more than happy because I think obviously Tommy played in Walker Cup before, so it still remains a highlight of his golf.

Q. James, what did he have to say to you and how much of a boost was it to see someone like Tommy here?
JAMES SUGRUE: Yeah, it was unreal. He walked quite a few holes with us. It was a really good experience just to kind of get up close to him and talk to him about his experience and what he thinks of Hoylake and just pick his brain a bit. He really just told us to kind of just enjoy it, really. He said the week would go fast. Even already we came here Sunday, and it's flown already, so he really just said to just enjoy it, and hopefully we will and hopefully we get a good result, as well.

Q. Did Tommy play with you or just walked a few holes?
CONOR GOUGH: No, he just walked a few holes with every one of us.

Q. What was your take from meeting Tommy Fleetwood?
CONOR GOUGH: He made me feel very comfortable about it because he was very relaxed and he just talked about his experiences, so he was telling me like it's the best week you'll have of your life, just make the most of it, and it was quite comforting hearing him say that, because as I'm the youngest here, I just -- the best thing for me is just relax and just play golf how I normally do, so it was quite good when he talked to me about that.

Q. What kind of conditions would you like Saturday and Sunday given the fact that you're on home soil and the Americans maybe aren't so

used to playing links golf?
CRAIG WATSON: I think we would prefer a wee bit of wind. The Americans will be able to handle the wind, as well. It's not as if it's -- we are more used to playing links courses with the wind. You want it to be half decent for the spectators because they don't want to be watching people hack it out of rough every hole or looking for balls every second hole. But certainly a wee bit of wind would hopefully be to our advantage.

But as we said to someone during the course, we got the conditions favourable to us a few years ago and the Americans were leading after the first day under these conditions. It would probably suit us a wee bit, but I think it's just whoever plays the best, holes the most putts I think will come out on top.

Q. Conor, happy birthday.
CONOR GOUGH: Thank you, cheers.

Q. Have you done anything special to celebrate?
CONOR GOUGH: I haven't. I've played 18 holes at Hoylake, yeah. That's been my day so far.

Q. Are the team going to do anything special this evening, Mr. Captain?
CRAIG WATSON: Apart from listening to one of my speeches, no.

Q. How many times have you been here and seen Hoylake, the golf course?
CRAIG WATSON: I played in the '95 Amateur when Gordon Sherry won, and I played in I think it was 2000 when Ilonen won, so I played these two amateurs and had a couple of decent runs at it. So apart from last year, that was the last time I'd been, I think. There have been a few changes to the course. I don't remember 17 being quite as long. Maybe the tee was slightly farther forward when I played it.

Q. Nathaniel Crosby was joking, I don't think he was joking, but the last time he was here and played in a Walker Cup, he was sacked by his captain twice, Jay Sigel. Jay Sigel has subsequently said, play everyone all two days. What are you going to do?
CRAIG WATSON: I think everybody will play Saturday. I think it would be unfair to keep anybody out until Sunday. I'm very fortunate, I've got 10 good players here, so I'm going to have to come up with some excuse for some playing two of them. But they're all playing well. I've got some decent foursomes pairings hopefully. So it's going to be a tough decision to drop -- not drop, to rest two players in the morning and then two players in the afternoon. But I think everybody will play on Saturday.

Q. James, I know you had a lot of support from your home club at Mallow when you won the Amateur. I was wondering if you could maybe share how many people are coming to see you here at the Walker Cup and also maybe talk about the club and how it helped shape you and get you here today.
JAMES CRAMER: Yeah, I think there's probably over 50 people coming from Ireland over this week. I think my coach just arrived here today, so my parents are coming tomorrow and a lot of them are coming tomorrow, as well. So yeah, it should be a fairly noisy weekend here. But everyone at my club, they're very good for -- like giving me support, helping me throughout junior golf and everything. I played all of my golf there. It's kind of the only club that I was a member of. Yeah, they're just all very good really, everything positive.

Q. Being a member of the Walker Cup really enters you into an elite fraternity of players; have any of the GB&I guys that were on previous Walker Cup teams reached out to you guys, and if they have, what's some of the best pieces of advice that you've gotten from them?
CONOR GOUGH: I've had a few -- well, Fleetwood, obviously, Matt Wallace. They've just said, enjoy it. You're only going to have this week maybe once in your life. So make the most of it. Yeah, they just really said enjoy it. As Craig said, it goes by so quick, so just make the most of it, and hopefully by Sunday we come out on top.

JAMES SUGRUE: Yeah, that was the same thing. Noel Fox was saying to the lads that it'll just fly by. We're here a week, so usually a week is kind of a long time playing golf every day, but so far it's flown, and I'm pretty sure the next few days are going to fly, as well.

Q. What has been the best memory that you've had so far this week with the guys that you've been all around for the last couple of days? Lots of laughs or really focused so far?
JAMES SUGRUE: No, lots of laughs, to be fair. We've had lots of training sessions here and stuff here throughout the year, so we're all very familiar with each other. We play all the tournaments. We're all pretty good friends. So yeah, definitely lots of laughs.

Q. Historically home advantage is a big factor in this event, and the event four years ago at Lytham resulted in a record win for GB&I. How much of an inspiration is that for you guys?
CONOR GOUGH: Yeah, it's big. I think personally it will help us a lot this week being at home. All the crowd is going to be behind us, and as four years ago, as you said, GB&I won, I think we've got a goal to try to win again so we keep that winning streak going for when it's over in GB&I anyway. So yeah, really looking forward to it.

Q. That team had a big Irish contingent. Have you spoken to any of the boys, Paul Dunne or Gavin

or anybody like that?
JAMES SUGRUE: I haven't really. I saw Paul Cutler just kind of gave out a Tweet yesterday just wishing us the best of luck and everything, but yeah, so did Gav. I haven't personally talked to any of them, but I'm sure they're just wishing is the best of luck and hopefully we enjoy it.

Q. Conor, we've already mentioned it's your birthday and you're 17 today. I think we looked at it, and you'll be the second youngest player to play in the Walker Cup after Ollie Fisher. Just wanted to ask you, how does that make you feel as an achievement at that young age, and how have the other guys on the team looking after you and been making you feel welcome?
CONOR GOUGH: Yeah, the boys on the team make me feel welcome. I get on with all of them. They're all good lads. Yeah, it's achievement and everything, but at the end of the day you still have to go out and beat your opponent however old they are. It's a good achievement and I'm happy with myself getting in, but when Saturday and Sunday comes it's just getting out there and getting into it and trying to get your point.

Q. And do you feel a little bit star struck sitting next to the amateur champion, as well? Can you take some advice from someone like James?
CONOR GOUGH: Yeah, James, I played with him today, he doesn't miss a fairway. He's on a string every day. He's a good lad. I like playing with James. All the boys are good. It's good to actually play with all of them and see how they're all alright.

Q. Have you spoken to any former GB&I captains about what to expect this week and any advice you've been given from them?
CRAIG WATSON: Well, Nigel Edwards is one of the selectors, so it's always good to have a word with Nigel and see how he's done it before. I haven't really spoken to -- Andy did it two years ago, so again, with being the three of us, there's a reasonable amount of experience.

Q. (No microphone.)
CRAIG WATSON: Well, he just won a couple. He's a hard act to follow. The pressure is on. Nigel, I mean, he's obviously experienced, and I think he's played in three Walker Cups, captained three Walker Cups, so I don't think there's anybody you could have better as backup.

Q. Just going forward, Craig, I know you missed the last one, and it's usually a two-time deal. Are you expecting to come back two years from now, or is that all up in the air?
CRAIG WATSON: It's probably up in the air depending on what the result is. I've been a losing captain at St. Andrews Trophy team. I've drawn my other St. Andrews Trophy team. The pressure is on.

Q. I'm assuming you'd like to do it two years from now?
CRAIG WATSON: It's always a great honour to do it once, never mind -- I mean, obviously if they stick to the same criteria, then the choices are quite limited because so many of the boys turned pro now. There isn't a great -- if they want to keep going down, a past player who's still an amateur, then it's -- with our Walker Cup team there's nobody still amateur, and previous in 1999 I don't think either. It's good to have options a wee bit, but I might be the last option.

Q. How important is it for your team to set the tone by winning the opening foursomes session, and what advantages do you guys have in that format, if any?
CRAIG WATSON: I think it's obviously very important, the foursomes, because it sets the tone. If we can get off to a decent start -- it's not -- obviously there's two days, a lot of golf to be played, so you would want to take a lead. If you could win all the sessions, it would be brilliant. It's not going to be disastrous, but certainly if you lose 4-0 then it's a bit of a disaster, but I don't think we're going to be going into lunch and at lunchtime if we're behind worrying too much because there's still a lot of golf to be played.