

Europe's Ryder Cup team adds familiar names

BY STEVE DOUGLAS AND DOUG FERGUSON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

European captain Luke Donald is bringing the same 12 faces — one different name — to the Ryder Cup with hopes of creating a new experience while getting the same outcome as when they dismantled the Americans two years ago in Rome.

Donald filled out the rest of his 12-man team Monday with six captain's picks, all of whom contributed to a resounding victory at Marco Simone in 2023.

There were no surprises. Donald asked Matt Fitzpatrick to play the last two weeks at the British Masters and European Masters, and he obliged by delivering a pair of top-six finishes. The former U.S. Open champion was the final picked Donald announced.

The other choices were Shane Lowry, Jon Rahm, Sepp Straka, Viktor Hovland and Ludvig Åberg. It's the first time Europe has returned 11 of the 12 players from a previous Ryder Cup team.

The exception was Rasmus Højgaard of Denmark, who qualified for the team in the final week. His identical twin, Nicolai, played on the team in Rome.

The Ryder Cup has been increasingly difficult to win on the road — Europe's only victory on U.S. soil required the greatest comeback by a visiting team in 2012 at Medinah — and it figures to be especially difficult at Bethpage Black in New York, renowned for its hostile crowd.

“Even though we have a lot of continuity, this is a different animal,” Donald said. “We understand how difficult it is.”

The matches are Sept. 26-28. Europe has a 12-9-1 record against the Americans dating to 1979, when continental Europe was added to what previously had been only Britain and Ireland.

“If we’re sitting in New York on the Sunday night with the Ryder Cup in our team room, I’ll be a very happy man,” said Lowry, one of five Europeans without a win this year.

Højgaard is the only Ryder Cup rookie for Europe, its fewest since Nicolas Colsaerts was the sole rookie at Medinah in 2012. That was by design, as it's far easier to bring in a newcomer before a home crowd. Europe had four rookies at Marco Simone.

“You have to understand who you are playing against, what course you're playing and what the environment is going to be like,” Donald said. “Understanding all of that had a big factor in choosing the guys I did. They understand they can go head-to-head. I think they feel like they can compete with these guys.”

“That was significant in my thinking why they deserved to be on that team.”

The other five players who automatically qualified were Rory McIlroy, Tommy Fleetwood, Robert MacIntyre, Justin Rose and Tyrrell Hatton.

Among those under consideration were Marco Penge with his two European tour titles this season and

Matt Wallace, a runner-up at the European Masters on Sunday. He finished 12th in the standings and broke down while talking about his desire to play on the team.

“I called him 10 to 15 minutes after that emotional interview he did and I felt very emotional for him,” Donald said. “It shows to me what the Ryder cup means to these guys.”

While the team is nearly the same, Donald said this will be a new Ryder Cup for Europe that could feature different partnerships and other “techniques” to prepare for a road game. Most of his players will be at the BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth next week, and he plans a trip to Bethpage Black before Ryder Cup week.

All six of Donald's captains picks were made available on a virtual call, all with big smiles.

“These are the greatest days of our lives,” Donald said. “We unbelievably enjoy the Ryder Cup. As fun and as good as Rome was, I want to make this an even better experience.”

STICKING TO THE RANKINGS

Lowry, Straka, Åberg, Hovland and Fitzpatrick placed No. 7-11 on Europe's Ryder Cup rankings. Rahm, a two-time major champion who now plays on the Saudi-backed LIV Golf League, is playing in his fourth straight Ryder Cup, but this was the first time he needed a captain's pick.

Rahm did not win on LIV Golf this year, but his

consistency allowed him to win the individual title for the second straight year.

“Because we're playing in the U.S., we're always going to be the underdog,” Rahm said.

U.S. TEAM ALREADY ANNOUNCED

Bradley announced his picks last week and the big

news was that they didn't include himself.

Justin Thomas, Collin Morikawa, Cameron Young, Ben Griffin, Sam Burns and Patrick Cantlay were picked to join Scottie Scheffler, Xander Schauffele, Harris English, Bryson DeChambeau, J.J. Spaun and Russell Henley on the team.

The Americans will have four rookies: Spaun, Henley,

Young and Griffin. This is the third straight Ryder Cup when the U.S. team has had at least four newcomers.



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