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Southern Hills Country Club
Tulsa, Okla.

Table with 21 columns: Hole #, 1-18, Out, Total. Rows: Yardage, Par, Score.

An Interview With:

2008 U.S. RYDER CUP CAPTAIN
PAUL AZINGER

JULIUS MASON: Paula Azinger, ladies and gentlemen, the 2008 United States Ryder Cup Captain joining us today in Tulsa, Oklahoma for a couple of days.

PAUL AZINGER: Hello, everybody. Thanks for being here. I just want to -- just a quick kind of synopsis of my year so far as Ryder Cup Captain.

I thought my responsibilities were simply to try to make sure I get the right apparel on the players and figure out who is going to cook the food for the week, that sort of thing.

I've been busy. I've done several outings. At each of the outings, I've actually -- you know, when you do an outing, you're usually with some corporate group or something or the general public, whoever it may be.

So instead of taking questions about Ryder Cup, I've actually asked for suggestions, you know, from the general public because I know they all watch and they are all fans.

I've got some unbelievable suggestions -- I don't know if I should share any of them or not. Nothing has really been all that great, though.

Anyway, what else have we done? I met with several of the former -- we had a Ryder Cup Captains' dinner in March, and 13 of the 16 living Ryder Cup Captains showed up for that.

My golf game, you know, last year I played 33 events, and I did several broadcasts for ABC. And this year, I got off to a pretty good start.

So I'm not going to be a part of this whole FedExCup thing. I don't know if I'm even going to play the rest of the year. My back is out right now, so I couldn't play this week if I wanted to.

Next year, I'll kind of just do what I need to do to play a full schedule. My intention is to be out here as much as possible to see the players even if I, for whatever, reason am not playing and try to stay on top of what's going on.

So far the way the points system has come together. You know, to me, the way this system is currently structured, you all know that we have completely revised the way we are going to select this next Ryder Cup Team and I consider it more of a one-year system than a two-year system.

Although the four majors count this year, this is a big week for these players. I doubt that anybody will have enough money to secure a spot on next year's team. I think next year's going to be the barometer. The majors are double. If you make the cut next year, you're making Ryder Cup money. The four majors, they are obviously double money. So next year is more of a one-year system.

So you can look at the list now and get a little bit of an idea. But I don't think it's indicative necessarily of what we're going to see except for the best players, guys like Tiger on top which is no coincidence.

All of that being said, I've also had to mull over who my assistants would be. Faldo and I, after the Skins Game last year, we broadcast that together, we talked about Ryder Cup and what we would do. And we actually have a decent relationship now, which some of you may appreciate and some of you may hate that fact, but that is the reality. Nick articulated to me that he would like to have four assistants. All of the Ryder Cup teams and Presidents Cup teams I've played on, I really can't remember any of my assistants. I can remember Mike Hulbert in 2002.

The assistants really haven't been an integral part of the Ryder Cup until recently, and I believe now I've made a decision that with my picks, I'm going to make them an important part of this next Ryder Cup for me. And I believe that -- well, my intention is to lean on these guys that I'm picking. And right now I'm going to name three of them.

And you want me to just go ahead and do it, Julius?

JULIUS MASON: No, we've got the next 45 minutes in this room. We can stretch it if we like. (Laughter).

PAUL AZINGER: No, I'm not going to stretch it out too long. Two of them have a tremendous history here. I'll go ahead and name my first assistant is going to be Raymond Floyd, former captain of the Ryder Cup.

Raymond Floyd won the PGA Championship here in 1982, and is a very good friend, a tremendous player, very intense, a great judge of talent. I don't need to tell you what his bio is; he's won several major championships, had a great Champions Tour career. Raymond loves the Ryder Cup. He has actually attended -- how many -- he's attended several Ryder Cups since he's been captain. He just has a love affair with the Ryder Cup. I love Raymond Floyd and I love his family and I want them to be a part of it, and I want them to be a part of it with me. And Raymond is on the phone right now.

JULIUS MASON: Mr. Floyd, are you with us? Can you hear us? While we work on some technical difficulties, let's move in, Paul; your second selection.

PAUL AZINGER: My second choice is another dear friend, another guy with some Ryder Cup experience as well, and some great history here as well having won the PGA Championship here. I've decided to choose Dave Stockton as one of my assistants.

Raymond and Dave were both captains on Ryder Cup teams that I played on. I love Dave Stockton and his family, and I want him to be a part of these Matches with me. I'm going to count on them and lean on those two guys heavily their past experience.

I think that there's a lot of wisdom in Raymond Floyd and Dave Stockton and a lot of experience that I plan on leaning on; and I think that, you know, together, we're going to do everything we can to try to get this next Ryder Cup right. And I think Dave Stockton is on the phone as well, hopefully.

JULIUS MASON: Mr. Stockton, can you hear us?

PAUL AZINGER: Wow.

DAVE STOCKTON: Can you hear me?

JULIUS MASON: I can hear you. Fantastic.

Dave, say hello to your captain in 2008 and a nice gathering of media here in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

DAVE STOCKTON: Paul, I want to thank you for asking me and to all of the people there in Tulsa, obviously warm memories come back to me from 1970 in more ways than one. But again, Paul, thank you.

PAUL AZINGER: You're welcome, Dave.

Is Raymond on the phone yet?

RAYMOND FLOYD: I am, Paul.

PAUL AZINGER: Welcome, Raymond.

RAYMOND FLOYD: Thank you, Paul, for inviting me to be a part of this very special experience. As I said to you earlier, when we all met in Dallas, I know you're the right guy for the job; and to include me is really exciting for me, and I'm there to assist you in any way you see fit, and I know you can handle the job.

PAUL AZINGER: Well, I appreciate that, Raymond. Glad the phones are working.

I want you guys to know I have another guy on the phone that when I was named captain, he's the first guy that I chose for one of my assistants. I called him a few days later. He still actively plays the PGA TOUR. He got off to a late start. He started golf at a later age, but has been very successful at this level. He's one of the smartest men I know.

He's a contemporary. He's in touch with the players; he knows what's going on out here. All of the players love him and I wanted to share this Ryder Cup with him and his family as well; Olin Browne, and I believe we've got Olin Browne on the phone.

OLIN BROWNE: I'm right here.

PAUL AZINGER: What do you have to say?

OLIN BROWNE: First of all, congratulations on being the Ryder Cup, and thank you so much for inviting me to participate. I am truly honored to represent the PGA of America, the PGA TOUR and my country in the Ryder Cup.

JULIUS MASON: I believe we are having some weather problems with where he's calling from in Washington. And I believe Raymond is playing a practical joke on everyone in this room where it's 98 degrees in Tulsa, Oklahoma; he's calling us from Iceland. And I believe Dave is calling us from Mt. Rushmore.

DAVE STOCKTON: Yes.

JULIUS MASON: Very good. So on that note, ladies and gentlemen, the three assistants and Captain Azinger are ready for questions that you might have.

Q. To say the least, that's a couple of assistants who are a little fiery, just like you may have the rep for there. Are you guys planning on, you know, whipping these guys into Ryder Cup shape in any way? Seriously, is there an attempt to inject some emotion into this thing or more emotion?

PAUL AZINGER: I don't know that we really need more emotion. I'm not looking at Raymond or Dave or Olin Browne to interject emotion. Curtis Strange told me he didn't need to hold anybody's hand; we are all big boys. And I don't think that whoever makes the team needs their hand held; and I don't believe there's really any motivational speech who is going to get a guy who is playing poorly to play better. I don't believe that if a guy is playing great you can say anything stupid enough to screw him up.

I feel like I'm going to lean on them really to help me try to figure out who is playing best while we're at the Ryder Cup Matches and try to help me with my picks because I'm going to get four picks instead of two.

I think that all three of these men have a tremendous eye for talent, and actually even the gift of instruction, believe it or not. Some of the best tips I've ever received in my life as a Ryder Cup player or as a player in general have come from Ryder Cup. Stuff that you would never hear or get from a player ordinarily, he'll share with you at Ryder Cup because we're all of like mind and one goal, and that's to win the match.

To have Raymond Floyd, Dave Stockton, Olin Browne there with me I think is going to be fantastic for me. I'm just trying to surround myself with people to give us the best opportunity to get this thing back in America.

Europe has really stepped it up. They have a selection process that gets their hottest players there, and they have actually become an amazingly solid group of players. I don't think the fault of us not winning is necessarily a downturn in American golf or anything like that. I think it's the fact that Europe really has had a better process of getting players on the team and that European players have really gotten that much better.

Q. Olin, congratulations. Two questions. One is, you don't have the experience of the other guys in the Ryder Cup. What does this experience mean to you to be involved with the Ryder Cup at this stage of your career. What do you think you go bring to the table?

OLIN BROWNE: First of all, can everybody hear me okay?

PAUL AZINGER: Yeah, we can hear you.

OLIN BROWNE: Well, in answer to your first question, you know, my job during the Ryder Cup, I believe, is to be in an advisory capacity to Paul --

PAUL AZINGER: Hey, Olin. Talk right into the hole and talk a little bit louder.

OLIN BROWNE: First time anybody has ever told me to speak up.

PAUL AZINGER: (Laughing).

OLIN BROWNE: My job -- and thank you, by the way -- is to be in an advisory capacity to Paul and support him in any way he sees fit and keep an eye out for anything that he sees as important, and I'm glad to have his confidence that I can do that.

JULIUS MASON: What does it mean at this stage of your career to be a part of this event?

OLIN BROWNE: It's an incredible honor to be invited to participate in this, in a world-class event. Golf is global, but the Ryder Cup has preceded the rest of golf in terms of that. I'm proud to represent my country and my tour and the PGA of America, and also the fact that Paul had the kind of confidence and faith to invite me into the fold, so I'm basically speechless for the first time in my life.

JULIUS MASON: I'm happy to let everybody know that our court reporter understands muffle, so we're going to have all that in the transcript afterward (Laughter).

Q. You're going to have four picks next year. Jack has got two next weeks for the Presidents Cup team. Would you like to see him maybe get some young, fresh faces on that team and get some experience going into next year from your perspective?

PAUL AZINGER: Well, actually, I just saw the list, the Presidents Cup list. I haven't really paid a whole lot of attention to what's going on there. I noticed that No. 10 was -- or No. 11 was John Rollins and No. 12 was Brett Wetterich. So I

don't think you can go wrong with picking either of those two guys, and I'll leave that up to Jack.

You know, I don't really know that it matters. I think you just want the guys who are playing the best, whether they have experience and they are playing the best or haven't made it or whether they have no experience at all and they are playing the best and have just barely missed.

You know, to me I think you've got to look for guys that are playing the best. My best Ryder Cup was my first Ryder Cup, I felt like, in 1989, and I had no Ryder Cup experience whatsoever.

Q. This is an impressive list. You don't think there's a danger of too many cooks spoiling the broth, do you?

PAUL AZINGER: I don't think so at all. I think that Raymond and Dave, with the tremendous amount of experience that they have, I think also -- they have said to me, they want this to be my team, you know, and what have you.

Honestly, I'm really counting on all three of those guys. I'm really counting on Raymond and Dave's experience. I'm going to lean on them to be with the players, talk to the players, do the things I can't do. It's an eclectic group of guys, too. Our personalities are all different and there's no individual that's going to slip through the cracks that won't be communicated in any way, shape or form.

I love the fact that those two guys were willing to say yes and that they are still so in touch with the game of golf. They still play active schedules on the Champions Tour and they are both very clear on what's going on out here at this level as well.

Q. I was watching Westwood and Clarke play a practice round yesterday and was reminded of how good of a team they are. I was just wondering who the best American teams are in the past that you've seen or played on, the two-man teams on Friday and Saturday, and sort of what can you learn from that and how the U.S. side can actually do better on Friday and Saturday, because it seems like that's where it's going wrong, right away.

PAUL AZINGER: Well, I think that -- again, I'll keep going back to the selection process. I think that -- I'm hoping that we have a selection process in place that will provide the hottest

Americans and that we can get off to a hotter start. It's important not to get behind.

The perception is that Europe has more fun than we do, but the reality is that they are ahead in the morning of almost every match.

So, if you're ahead the first morning and the first day, it's going to be -- the perception is you're going to be having a lot more fun than the guys that are getting killed. You know, hopefully our guys will come in hot and we'll get off to a better start. But there's no denying those guys in Europe are all best friends. It's a cultural issue. They love each other and they will run through a wall for each other, there's no denying that. And there's no denying our guys go our separate ways. But on this tour we always went our separate ways even when we were dominant in the Ryder Cup and the Europeans were best friends and we were dominating them.

Europe has gotten better; they have included the whole nation instead of just England, and they have a bunch of players who are just playing better. So we just have to get hotter players to show up.

We talked about this earlier today: The New York Yankees, they have won, what, 25 World Championships and those guys used to fistfight in the dugout and have won probably who knows how many World Series when nobody got along. As long as everybody respects each other and do the best they can; I think often times too much is made of these guys being best friends and that whole thing. We don't have time to bond at this level. And believe it or not, actually, the American Team gets along quite well when the bell rings.

Q. First of all, a couple of things. Paul, number one, will you go to Montreal and watch the Presidents Cup?

PAUL AZINGER: I doubt it. I haven't really thought about doing that. I actually may consider it. I haven't really thought about it.

Q. It seems to me Lehman got a lot out of being at the Presidents Cup before. You'll be paying attention, in any event?

PAUL AZINGER: Of course. I'll watch the matches with interest.

Q. On the picks, I know that gives you a lot more flexibility. In the last year, has your

philosophy evolved, or is it what you were just saying, you're just looking for the four hottest guys you can find at that time?

PAUL AZINGER: That's what I'm going to look for right now; but, you know, I don't know what's going to happen. I'm not using the World Rankings. So you know, there could be an obvious guy red hot in the World Ranking that slipped through the crack and didn't get in. So obviously if so-and-so is ranked two or three in the world and didn't get on the team, I think the four picks gives me a little leeway in that regard.

But my belief is that you want guys that are hot, not necessarily guys that have experience. And at this point I look at experience as like, any American who has had any kind of experience has been a bad experience anyway. So, you know, what do you want me to do? (Laughter).

Q. How are you certain that Raymond and Dave will have any relevance to today's players, or that the players will be able to relate to them?

PAUL AZINGER: Well, Raymond and Dave, it's not like we were watching them on black-and-white TV. Those guys are still pretty relevant.

You know, I've talked to some players about them. They are pretty excited about those two guys, and everybody loves Olin Browne, so I really don't think that that's going to be an issue at all.

Q. I'd like to ask Raymond Floyd from his perspective, along with the fact that the Europeans have put together a great team the last few years, what has been the missing element in your opinion as far as the U.S. Team in the Ryder Cup?

RAYMOND FLOYD: Someone will have to repeat that for me, please.

Q. I'd like to ask on top of the fact that the Europeans have had a great team the last few years, what do you see as the missing element in the U.S. effort in the last few Ryder Cups?

RAYMOND FLOYD: Paul, I can hear you clearly, maybe you can relay that question.

PAUL AZINGER: The question was -- you want to do it, Julius? Other than the fact that the European Team has gotten better, do you see

anything as like a missing element as to why the Americans haven't done so well here in the last few Ryder Cups.

RAYMOND FLOYD: Well, I echo your remarks, Paul, the selection process. I think we've had much the worst of it there.

I think the camaraderie, or some of you fellows have used the word "camaraderie," I agree with Paul totally. This is about a competition and your pride and you're playing for your country. I just believe that they have had a number of players that have played together often enough and they have a comfort level because they have won. They have had the good experience.

And as Paul said, we've got players with Ryder Cup experience which has not been good. So I think those things, when you put them together, that's why they have been so successful, and I think with the new selection process, I think we will be much more competitive.

PAUL AZINGER: Dave, do you have anything to say about that?

DAVE STOCKTON: Sure, Paul. I'd go one step further, and I think the people sitting in Tulsa in the press right now realize you've changed quite a few things, one of which is the selection of four people for the team and four assistants to, you know, do whatever small job you need to have completed.

One of the biggest things I saw between the Europeans and ourselves is we would have two assistants and they would have way more than two. And they were like (Bob) Torrance and (Mark) James behind Woosnam and others. There was a group of people that were making an effort.

You and I have talked long and hard about this, and I think people are going to realize that you do have a lot of answers, and it wasn't necessarily in the past. And the things -- the selection committee that Raymond just alluded to, the way you're going to select the players, the timing of it following the PGA (TOUR Championship) next year, there are a lot of things that will give us an advantage that we haven't had in the previous years. I'm just looking forward to being there with you.

Q. Obviously Raymond and Dave bring a lot of experience and have been in your shoes. With Olin, is it more of a personality and his sort of infectious attitude that you're looking for to maybe bring something into that

team room that might carry over with the players?

PAUL AZINGER: What Olin lacks in Ryder Cup experience, he makes up for in his friendship with the players; the players' respect for Olin Browne; his ability to communicate. He's one of the most intelligent people I know. I believe Olin has a tremendous eye for the game and I believe Olin will have my back on a lot of things if he sees something going wrong. If he sees me making bad decisions, he'll say, "I think you're making a tragic error and I've talked to Raymond and Dave and we think you need to go a different direction" or whatever it may be.

I trust Olin Browne, and he's one of my dear friends. He's the first person I thought of, mainly because of his relationship with the players. So I think what he'll make up in lack of experience -- he'll make up for that just relationally with the group of guys.

Q. The next Ryder Cup is a little different than any other because it comes on the heels of the FedExCup Playoffs. How concerned are you about fatigue of guys coming right off of that? And if you are concerned, what might you do to get them rest or keep them fresh?

PAUL AZINGER: Well, I am concerned about it a little bit, but I think Europe is going to be in the same boat. I'm guessing that the European players will be participating in that series of events, as well. I mean, I would like to think that the TOUR would have had a week off between the four or five events in a row that the guys have to play and the Ryder Cup. But they didn't ask. You know, it's just one of those things.

So in some ways, I think it could end up being very positive. Our guys will be playing their way right in, and, you know, I want Monday night when everybody arrives to be more of a rest night and kind of maybe reset, get a different mind-set going; congratulate everybody on a great year and just get them ready to think differently for the week of the Ryder Cup.

Q. You know how fickle American sports fans can be. This has become the Super Bowl of golf, like the huge event, but if the U.S. Team keeps getting just obliterated and it's over on day one, are people still going to view this as relevant?

PAUL AZINGER: I don't know. I mean, that's a great concern. I would like to think that they will always view the Ryder Cup as relevant.

I think it will go in cycles. It's gone in cycles before, and I believe there's a new generation of Americans coming, a younger generation of 20-somethings that are all very good players. You know who they are. I don't want to name names because I don't want to leave anybody out.

It's cyclical, isn't it? We've been in a little bit of a downtime when it comes to this event. And, you know, you've got to give Europe credit. They have been red-hot and they have been playing really, really well.

We were beating them when they had their big stars, Faldo, Woosnam, Langer, Seve, Jose, Montgomerie. They didn't beat us at Kiawah; they didn't beat us at the Belfry in '93. Those were superstar teams. It's interesting, you know, how it works out.

I think hopefully the way we pick this team is going to make a big difference. Who knows what this next generation of Ryder Cup Team is going to look like. It could have a completely different makeup and a complete different face than the Ryder Cup teams that have been getting beaten and it may be the same player shows up. So we'll do the best we can at these matches.

Q. Obviously it didn't work out for Hal at Oakland Hills putting Tiger and Phil together. With that as a background, would you ever rule out anybody playing with anybody, and specifically, is it possible that Tiger and Phil could play together in matches on your team?

PAUL AZINGER: I doubt that I would put those two together. I think that both of those guys are capable of carrying a match on their own ball. So it's not likely that I will put those two together. I won't rule anything out, but you know, who knows, maybe we'll have such a huge lead that I'll put them together just for fun. (Laughter).

I will just see how it works out. I just want to try to mesh the right personalities together; and I think there are personality makeups that perform well together and personality makeups that do poorly. And I'm going to try to seek that out with the help of my assistants.

Q. Do you think we'll be at the stage next year where players will have to pee into a cup before they hit their first tee shot?

PAUL AZINGER: I think it's possible. Gary Player put the umbrella of suspicion on everyone when he made those comments.

To me, in the end, I don't think it's to be that big of a deal. We all know testing is coming. And if you have six or seven months of warning time before you have to pee in the cup, how are you going to get caught? I don't think anybody will get caught. I don't think performance-enhancing drugs are a huge issue at this level, and I think it's more of a knee-jerk reaction as to what's gone on in other sports.

If it's an issue, they are putting an end to it. I don't think it's an issue; if it is, it's coming to an end.

Q. Do you think they should have it at the Ryder Cup?

PAUL AZINGER: I don't think there's anybody that would have a problem with it.

You've got to remember, these players call penalties on themselves out here, and there's never been any kind of a drug policy that says anything is illegal anyway. So if anybody was doing anything in the past, it wasn't illegal.

So for something to be implemented, we've probably come to that time in American society and just sports in general where something needs to be done, so here we are.

Q. Dave, could you talk about the parallels that you can see between you and Paul in regards to when you were named Ryder Cup Captain? You were in a similar situation of trying to bring back a Cup that many people thought was hard for the Americans to bring back, and Paul seems to be in the same situation.

DAVE STOCKTON: Yeah, there are quite a few. Paul and I -- there are four of us that always talked about Ryder Cup, Lanny Wadkins, Paul, and Payne Stewart and I would continually talk about strategy, during a Ryder Cup year or not. And Paul and I have always been on like minds, like he mentioned earlier, about pairing people together psychologically. So you get the right player so their good play comes out.

At Kiawah, we had not had the Cup back here in six years, and I was glad that it was able to

stay; and I'm looking forward to helping Paul in any way I can, as with Raymond and Olin, so that when they bring the Cup back over next year, it stays here.

JULIUS MASON: Thank you, Dave. Questions? Questions, twice? Paul Azinger, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much.

PAUL AZINGER: Thank you, everybody.

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