

U.S. Open Championship 2020

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Mamaroneck, New York, USA

Winged Foot Golf Club

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to welcome Jon Rahm to the 2020 U.S. Open Championship interview area. Jon, who won the 2015 McCormack Medal, also won the BMW Championship last month. He is making his fifth U.S. Open start with his best finish at T3 at last year's championship. Jon is currently ranked No. 2 in the world. Jon, can you just start with some initial impressions about the course?

JON RAHM: Well, I haven't played it yet. I'm playing this afternoon. But I did come and play that Monday of the week of East Lake since we started on Friday, and it was playing very different to what it is now. It was kind of raining, soft and slow.

It pretty much played like the longest golf course I've ever played. I was hitting extremely long clubs into a lot of holes. I remember hitting 5, 8 and 16, 17 and a couple other holes, 4-iron to the green. So I know it's playing different. From what I've heard, fairways are firmer, they're rolling out.

Maybe somewhat similar setup to the BMW, which is good for me, and I'm just excited. It's one of those golf courses that's just good. It's right in front of you. There's no real trick to it off the tee. You see what you have, really difficult greens, and that's when the difficulty comes in, the length of the rough plus those tricky greens. There's no surprise after coming here that some of the winning scores in the past have been so high.

Q. What do you think you're going to do differently for a September U.S. Open? Have you packed differently? Have you brought enough warm clothes? How do you see this being different from a June U.S. Open?

JON RAHM: Well, we have better weather right now here than we had in June in Pebble. Pretty similar, just having sweaters on and that's it. Or the PGA in San Francisco, it was colder than it is right now. I know on the weekend it's supposed to cool here a little bit.

Seems like the golf course setup is where they want it to



be. I think one of the scares at least for me this time of year here was maybe being a little too cold and rainy and maybe having a lit bit of a softer U.S. Open, but it seems like it's going to be right up the U.S. Open alley.

Q. Can you tell me, what has it been like for you to sort of go back and forth with Dustin and Justin Thomas for the world No. 1 ranking? How exciting has that been for you?

JON RAHM: It's been -- I think it's been a really cool year for golf because starting with Brooks, you've had Brooks, Rory, me, J.T. and Dustin as No. 1s in the world, five changes. And since I took over at Memorial, it's been me, Rory, J.T. and Dustin Johnson changing back and forth.

I think we're at a point where, any given week, if any of us plays good and wins is going to get to the No. 1 spot. It's a good age for golf, I would say, and it's really cool to be a part of this. I think we're all training hard and trying to get ready to be the one to separate themselves a little bit.

We know it's going to be hard, but it's extra motivation to be playing more and better golf.

Q. You've won on two of the toughest setups since the return to golf, the Memorial and Olympia Fields. How does that give you confidence in your mental game when dealing with the adversity of the U.S. Open?

JON RAHM: Well, it's going to give me confidence knowing that I can get it done. I think it's going to be a little bit different just because this golf course plays a little bit longer, but still you just need to play solid shots.

And at the end of the day, there's going to be a lot of people playing really good golf. It just comes to mental strength, right, who can endure the most and who can endure until the end. It's that simple. Having done it in two tough tests like the Memorial and the BMW, I'm excited to start just because I know I can do it.

Hopefully I don't need to do a comeback like I did in Chicago, but if it may be, I know I can do it.

Q. I'm wondering if before your previous trip around



Winged Foot if you had played here before, and if you had ever gotten -- I know there's no Tour stops, maybe an occasional playoff stop in the area. Have you gotten a chance to sample some of the other courses around here?

JON RAHM: So a couple weeks ago was the first time I ever played. Seen a ton of videos online of the golf course, but no, not really -- I don't know what other golf courses are in the area. The only times I've come here have been for the Playoffs. The only thing I've played is Glen Oaks, Ridgewood and Liberty National here in New York, if any of them are close, I don't think so, and then Shinnecock and Bethpage.

So not really. Never came here in college, never really had a chance to come here even before that. I'm excited to play this one. If there's other good ones worth playing, hopefully at some point in time I can come and play them.

Q. Is it fun to kind of discover -- this is a historical course, but for your generation it's kind of a new thing. Is it cool to kind of discover a new thing?

JON RAHM: A new thing because there hasn't been an event since '06? We're excited to come. It kind of happened Oakmont when I played, it was the first event since '07, I know it's a little smaller gap, but still -- yeah, it's exciting.

This is history of the U.S. Open, history of golf in general. So I love coming to events like this one and hopefully becoming a champion on a traditionally difficult and historically tough U.S. Open. You can call the last two U.S. Opens massacre at Winged Foot 1 and 2, and hopefully this one is No. 3.

Q. Have you seen greens like these before, and if not, what makes them different?

JON RAHM: I have. The best way I could describe this golf course, especially the greens, was somewhat like Oakmont greens, but they were fair. Some of those greens at Oakmont are just craziness. The first two greens especially, sometimes you can hit a great shot and end up putting it off the green.

It can happen here, too, but if you hit the proper shot, you will have some looks at birdie. You just really need to hit really good shots and really be under control.

Besides that, I don't think I've ever seen greens like this, honestly. These are the two courses I can find that are similar to each other.

Q. Collin was in here earlier, and he said that you can be pin high and not really have a shot at making that putt --

JON RAHM: It happens in a lot of major championships, yeah. You've just got to figure it out. That's U.S. Open golf usually. That's major championship golf. It happens often.

Yeah, I mean, the one thing I can tell you, you do not want to be long for the most part. If you're over any of those greens, you're going to be struggling for par. If anything be short, and whatever the pin is, sometimes you might need to be more conservative. Other times -- it's tough sometimes to be as precise when you're hitting 5-irons into certain holes.

We'll see. Again, I like the history of the game. There's a reason why Billy Casper laid up on the third hole every single day. That tells you.

Q. There's a lot of discussion about how you really have to hit the fairways out here, but it's also a pretty long course. You can't really dial back that much. Based on just the one scouting trip that you took here, what is the plan off the tee? Do you have a 3-wood that you hit almost as far as your driver, like a Henrik Stenson, or what is your plan?

JON RAHM: No, I don't. Luckily I'm usually a pretty good driver of the golf ball, so it should fit. I spoke to Dustin briefly yesterday afternoon, and he was telling me how fairways were running out. He was telling me on some of the shots he was hitting, the difference between a ball landing in the rough and one that was going on the fairway was up to 30, 40 yards.

Clearly, hitting the fairway is going to be an advantage. Now, what you choose to hit it with is up to you, whatever you feel comfortable with.

There are some holes out there that might fit more right to left shape than left to right, which is what I like to play. I like to play a fade. If I need to hit a 3-wood and maybe take a longer club in from the fairway, I'll take it.

But again, I can say this now, and then Olympia Fields on the weekend I hit driver pretty much on every hole. It all depends how I'm swinging, if I'm feeling confident or not, and which hole we're playing. It all depends. There's some holes like the 8th hole or 16 or 5 where you have 500-yard par-4s, you've got to hit driver. It's as simple as that.

Q. How would you compare the degree of difficulty at this golf course versus Olympia Fields or Muirfield

Village, which were statistically the two hardest golf courses until we got here this week? Is it right there, one, two, three in your mind this season?

JON RAHM: Well, I would say Olympia was harder than Muirfield and scored reflected it. I would say Muirfield was made tricky because of how firm the greens were and how gusty the wind got. Those fairways were a lot wider than what we played a couple weeks ago, and even those BMW fairways are going to be wider than what we're playing this week.

I would say Muirfield wasn't as demanding off the tee, and I barely hit any drivers. I was hitting 5-woods and 3-woods and irons off the tee more than anything and still having short irons in because of the firmness and the wind. It was playing extremely, extremely short.

I would say Olympia was playing more difficult than Muirfield, so if anything I would say this week would probably play more difficult than Olympia Fields, so that would be my one, two and three. Again, I still haven't played the course in U.S. Open setup, so I'll see. But based on what I've heard, this should be the hardest one.

Q. Would you mind if I asked you who you voted for for Player of the Year and why?

JON RAHM: No, I don't mind you asking, but I won't give you an answer.

Q. How do you regard your readiness to win a major championship like a U.S. Open, and to do that, how much do you have -- you're used to making a lot of birdies driving it as far as you can. How do you have to adjust this week?

JON RAHM: That's a specific question right there. Well, I would say in the past maybe this type of golf wasn't my bread and butter, but again, based on the two events I've won this year, I'm pretty much ready. I've been able to dial it back when I needed to, and I've been able to play it properly when I needed to.

I think I've always thought U.S. Open is the type of golf course I can win on. I know my game can win on any golf course, but when you're playing good, again, it becomes a mental challenge, right, so I welcome those.

Plus, I'm not going to lie to say this; there's always something extra special to be possibly the first Spanish player to win a U.S. Open. That would be amazing. So it's a bit of an extra motivation there to play good this week and do what I have to do.

Yeah, I mean, I don't know what to tell you. Just besides having a strategy, it's playing good golf. It's sort of like in boxing where Mike Tyson said everybody has a plan until they get punched in the face. It's the same thing here. We all have a plan, but if you hit it sideways, you got to figure it out.

Q. You mentioned Billy Casper. It sounds like you really pay attention to history. That goes a long way back. When did you find out about him here?

JON RAHM: Actually, Tiger told me. We were talking about Winged Foot somewhere earlier in the year before the stop, and he said the one thing I'll tell you about Winged Foot, Billy Casper won the U.S. Open laying up on the 3rd hole every day. I'm like, okay. I heard similar stories about Ben Hogan hitting it short on purpose on the 6th hole at Oakmont. Same stories about Ben Hogan saying if he ever hit the green on 11 at Augusta, he had pulled it.

You know, it's just sometimes you pick your strategy and if you pull it off, you pull it off. It's as simple as that. But once Tiger told me that, it made me aware that obviously this is a very difficult golf course. I'm excited to play it.

Q. Would you be surprised if the winner on Sunday is under par?

JON RAHM: Yes.

Q. Shocked? How surprised?

JON RAHM: Well, again, when I played it, I was hitting 5- and 4-irons into the greens, so I would have been extremely surprised. But when Dustin was telling me some of the clubs he was hitting into some holes, I was kind of surprised.

I don't know; I can't speculate on what shots and all that. Knowing with the winning score last year being 14-under, or 13-, 14-under, I know they're going to make some extra effort to be over par, and knowing this golf course and the history, they have a reputation to maintain -- what did Hale win with, 6-, 7-over? 5-over was Ogilvy? I mean, not that I expect to, but hopefully I'm the one to shoot under par, but I wouldn't be surprised if it's along those lines.

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