

# U.S. Open Championship 2021

Tuesday, June 15, 2021

San Diego, California, USA

Torrey Pines Golf Course

## Jon Rahm

### Flash Interview



**THE MODERATOR:** Welcome back, everyone. We have world No. 3 Jon Rahm here in the interview area. Talk us through how much you've played this week and how the course is playing.

**JON RAHM:** I played the back nine yesterday. Still early in the week, obviously. I'll play the front nine today. But it's not a golf course that I haven't played before; that's the good news about it. Tee to green, it doesn't change.

A little bit more relaxed around here, just trying to get the touch around the greens, feel the speed of the greens, the firmness of the greens, and the thickness of the rough, which it is a little bit more severe than we're used to playing early in the year.

Overall, happy to be here and comfortable. I've played good here in the past, and hopefully I can keep up the good play.

**THE MODERATOR:** Obviously, you have played well here at the Farmers. Talk about those differences in a U.S. Open week here in June.

**JON RAHM:** The biggest difference besides the rough, obviously, it's a little bit thicker, and this thick blade grass that you have, you can actually get lucky and get some decent lies, or you can get some that it's hard to move five yards. So the discrepancy is big. It's going to happen. It's a U.S. Open. You're going to get good breaks and bad breaks.

Now, you add that to the fact that you have quite a few 500-yard par-4s, and you have a monster of a golf course.

But I think what's the bigger difference is how firm the greens are. When we play early in the year, usually you can hit anything at the pin. It's going to land and stop wherever it lands. That's why you can get some scoring opportunities, and you've seen some low ones in the past.

With this firmness, I don't think it's going to happen. You're not going to see that many of those 5-, 6-, 7-under rounds, but you've still got to go play it.

**Q. Jon, can you talk us through what that was like maybe Sunday, Monday, after the Memorial thing happened. When did you get out of there? When did you do the two negative tests that allowed you to leave?**

**JON RAHM:** Well, priority number one amongst all that happened was, obviously, letting the people I had been in contact with the two previous weeks, letting them know, making sure they were all okay, and then trying to get out of there and go home and at least be in a familiar place. Hoping I was going to -- just getting ready for the worst.

I tried to watch a little bit of Sunday. It was quite a good showdown, a great playoff, you know, how good of golf they played, that golf course is not easy.

Then after that, just isolated. I was a little bit scared because, even though I was feeling fine, I didn't want to give the virus to anybody in my house. I didn't want to possibly give it to our young son. Yeah, I think the hardest part out of all this was for just over ten days not being able to even spend any time with my little one.

Adding to that, my parents came into town, couldn't be around them. My mom is fully vaccinated, so I spent a little bit of time. My dad is in the process. I wasn't there when my parents met my son, and I hadn't seen my parents in over a year, almost a year and a half. Those are the hard parts about this virus in life.

Whatever happens on the golf course was absolutely secondary in my mind. For anybody wondering what was going through my mind, all that was going on because my parents landed Monday, Tuesday they met my son, and I wasn't there. That was truly, truly a hard thing.

Then the swab -- sorry, not the swab. The PCR I got done on Thursday was my first negative. Then I got my results Friday, got the other one on Friday, and Saturday morning I got my second negative. I was like, all right, at least I can go hit some balls and get ready starting a little bit earlier because otherwise today at 7:00 a.m. was my tenth day, and I would have had to have flown in this morning. I

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would have felt a little bit under-prepared. At least starting Saturday, I can get on a bit of a roll.

**Q. Just to clarify, your parents were in Arizona when you were still in Ohio?**

JON RAHM: No, my parents were in Spain. They flew in Monday.

**Q. Monday to?**

JON RAHM: To Scottsdale.

**Q. That's what I meant.**

JON RAHM: Yeah, the Monday night is when they arrived.

**Q. So you were still in Ohio when they met your son for the first time?**

JON RAHM: No, I was in Arizona, but I couldn't be around them.

**Q. Jon, I'm curious why you didn't get vaccinated earlier and probably could have avoided this whole situation.**

JON RAHM: Well, truth is I was vaccinated. I just wasn't out of that 14-day period. I had started the process, and unfortunately, that's how timing ended up being. Yeah, I was vaccinated. It's just I was still within those 14 days when I started COVID tracing protocol, and I had to stay in it.

**Q. What was the date you got vaccinated?**

JON RAHM: I don't know. Not early enough, that's all I can say. Looking back on it, yeah, I guess I wish I would have done it earlier, but thinking on scheduling purposes and having the PGA and defending Memorial, I was just -- to be honest, it wasn't in my mind. I'm not going to lie; I was trying to just get ready for a golf tournament. If I had done it in a few days earlier, probably we wouldn't be having these conversations right now. It is what it is. We move on.

**Q. This was obviously a big deal to you, but there was a real firestorm throughout the country on this. People were upset for you, they were upset about the rule, they were upset with how it was handled. Were you aware of all that that was going on, what a big deal this became?**

JON RAHM: I mean, I tried to hide as much as possible, but I think nowadays it's impossible. So, yeah, I was aware

of what was going on. And to all the people criticizing the PGA TOUR, they shouldn't. We are in a pandemic, and even though this virus has very different forms of attacking people, you never know what reaction you're going to get. So PGA TOUR did what they had to do. The CDC rules for a reason. There's players that missed the World Series last year. There's other athletes that have missed events.

Unfortunately, I had a really good showing, and I was pulled out of the tournament right before the final round, but, again, the PGA TOUR did what they had to do. I've heard a lot of different theories: I should have played alone; I shouldn't have -- that's nonsense. The rules are there, and it's clear.

I'm not going to lie, I was fully aware when I was in tracing protocol that that was a possibility. I knew that could happen. I was hoping it wouldn't. I was playing like it's not going to, but I support what the PGA TOUR did.

It could have been handled a little bit better possibly, but they did what they had to do.

**Q. I was going to ask you that. Were you okay with you being told as you came right off the green?**

JON RAHM: Well, I'm not going to lie. That's the second time I get put on the spot on national TV on the same golf course on the same hole. (Laughter).

For all those people wondering when I said, "Not again," that's exactly what I mean, not again. Last year I put my heart out talking about one of my family members passing, and I get told, Well, go sign your scorecard with a penalty stroke, with no warning.

Then this past year I put arguably the best performance of my life, and I get told again on live TV, Hey, you're not playing tomorrow. So it could have been handled a little bit better, yeah, but it still doesn't change the fact of what really happened. Because it was the second time I got put on the spot on the same course why I was a little bit more hurt, but yeah. Again, it's tough.

They don't want me to go by and start shaking all the patrons' hands and high-fiving and all that, so I understand that as well. Again, it happened. Luckily, everybody in my family and myself are okay. Luckily, I didn't really have any symptoms, and within what happened, this is the best case scenario.

**Q. Your confidence level, do you feel as if you're coming into this tournament with a win even though you didn't technically have a win, or do you feel at all a little behind having missed a week?**

JON RAHM: Well, when you don't hit a golf shot for just over a week or just about a week, it's tough leading into a major, especially a U.S. Open. I'm confident I can get in form quick enough. I still have two more days.

Yeah, I still have the memory of all those great golf shots I played, right? I'm going to choose to remember that. I've been playing really good golf all year. Two weeks ago, it's finally clicking all together like I was waiting for it to happen. Finally everything was firing on all cylinders. Not that I'm expecting to play that perfect again, but I know that I can play at a really high level. So I'm confident, yeah.

**Q. What would possess you to watch that final round that you weren't part of? It would seem like sick punishment.**

JON RAHM: No, as a fan of golf. It happens. These are circumstances that happen in life, and they were still competing for the event, and I'm still a student and avid fan of the game. So, yeah, I was watching. To be honest, I was kind of wondering how close they were going to get to 18-under at the same time. (Laughter).

Again, if they didn't, at least mental victory in my sense, right? I never was thinking what could have happened because I wasn't there physically playing. I don't know how it was playing on Sunday. But, yeah, I took it with a grain of salt. Just like a lot of -- probably like Rafa Nadal had to think back on losing his match with Djokovic. I had a bad thing happen. It is what it is.

**Q. The TOUR said at the time they were discussing your issue that a little north of 50 percent of players on TOUR have been vaccinated. What would you say to those other 50 percent that have not?**

JON RAHM: I mean, we live in a free country, so do as you please. I can tell you from experience that, if something happens, you're going to have to live with the consequences golf-wise.

Now, again, the country is going at a great pace of getting vaccinated. If we want to go back to having a normal life and normal TOUR events and try to go back to normality as early as possible, people should get vaccinated. I know if you're younger, you run less of a risk of having big problems from COVID, but truthfully we don't know the long-term effects of this virus, so I would encourage people to actually get it done.

**Q. One last thing. Now that you're under the definition of fully vaccinated --**

JON RAHM: I got it all. I had it, I got the antibodies, got the vaccination. I feel invincible at this point. (Laughter).

**Q. That's the question. Does that take any kind of pressure off you knowing this is something you shouldn't have to worry about again?**

JON RAHM: We still have to worry about it. Just because I may have it for less time and not really get ill, I can still be a carrier for somebody else. So we still need to be mindful of what's going on.

But yeah, I am a little bit more relaxed. If I happen to go to outdoor seating in a restaurant, I'll be a little bit less scared in that sense. It takes a little bit of weight off you being vaccinated. I'm not going to lie.

**Q. One, were you able to play at all indoors at your home?**

JON RAHM: I have a simulator, but that's just -- you can only do so much there. When you hit it indoors, the simulator is always going to kind of tend to help you, and the misses is never going to be as bad or doesn't look as bad. But you can only do that so much. After 30 minutes, maybe an hour of trying to play some golf courses, I just -- it gets a little bit repetitive because you can't really putt, you can't really chip. All you can do is hit tee shots and iron shots.

**Q. Also wanted to ask you about this place. Obviously very special to you. Can you talk about where on the course you proposed, why you chose this place, what is it about this place that you wanted to do it here?**

JON RAHM: Yeah, so it wasn't on the course. It was on the Torrey Pines hikes just past the North Course, just going down to the beach. Before we even met, this was Kelley and I's favorite city in the world. We'd always come here, I would say, at least once a month. Just we'd go to the Grand Del Mar. I'm a member there now. We go, we stay there, we have a really good time. We love the city.

She used to come with her parents pretty much one weekend a month. It was their vacation spot. She loves coming to La Jolla, and I love coming here and spending time with Dave Phillips, my instructor, I go to Callaway, and spend time with friends I have around here. It's a nice place to recharge our batteries.

It was only right that I proposed in our special place. Plus I promised her, I promised her it would be the most unexpected time for us to propose. She expected it a bunch of other times through her life, and I was like I'm

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going to do it when we're in sweat pants, okay? Don't expect this whole movie speech and me being in a tux and all that. I was able to do it in a really pretty spot, and it turned out with great pictures and being us.

That's who we are. Being in athletic clothes at home, relaxing, going on walks, hikes, whatever it is, and it turned out perfect. I'm pretty sure she is happy I did it the way I did.

**Q. Other than watching the final round telecast, how did you spend the quarantine? And do you feel fully prepared for this week?**

JON RAHM: I wish I was a little bit more prepared. I was hitting it pretty good a couple of weeks ago, but I feel like, as athletes, we're always wanting more. I feel like every time I go tee it up, I always think I could have done something more. I could have done this, I could have done that. Once you tee off Thursday, it doesn't matter. You go do a job.

Was it 13 years ago Tiger won on pretty much a broken knee without really being prepared? Once the gun goes off, it doesn't matter. So in that sense, I'm still confident.

What I did, I watched a lot of TV. Rick and Morty season 5 is coming up, so I was rewatching season 4. Just tried to really spend as much time in the present as possible.

It was really easy when you're laying in your bed to go back and forth, what could be in the future, what could have been in the past. A lot of meditation and mindful reading and trying to stay in the present, and within the weird part of saying this is trying to understand what that experience was for and trying to learn from it.

**Q. Just to clarify, after Saturday, did you take a test again, like Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and they were all positive until Thursday?**

JON RAHM: I took a test right after I got pulled off the golf course. It was positive again. So at that point, I was like, I'm going to wait a couple days. I think starting Tuesday I got tested every day. I was like, I'm just going to -- might as well, luck of the draw, I guess. Yeah, like I said, Friday morning I got my first negative. Saturday morning, I got my second one.

**Q. And those negatives didn't come for almost 24 hours. You had to take it Thursday and didn't get the result until Friday?**

JON RAHM: Yeah. Well, that's obviously pretty quick. We're used to the PGA TOUR having the lab and within

two hours you get your test, but when you're hiring other third parties... Luckily, we found a doctor that could come to the house, and I wouldn't have to drive and compromise anybody. That was pretty quick.

Once I got my first negative and I got my test done on Friday, I was like, you'd better hurry this up. I want to know tonight. I still found out the next morning. They can only do what they can do.

**Q. Were you allowed to go home to do all that? You were allowed to leave Ohio?**

JON RAHM: It's all up to who you're flying with, and I flew on a private jet ICU. It was basically an ambulance on air. So that's how we got it done. Right next to one of those tables that carry people that are actually -- you know, kind of sketchy, but I got home.

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