

U.S. Open Championship 2023

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The Los Angeles Country Club

Jon Rahm

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Please join me in welcoming our 2021 champion, Jon Rahm. Jon, U.S. Opens in Southern California, how do you like them?

JON RAHM: I like playing in California. I have a pretty good record, and I'm glad that this early in my career, I'm getting to play another U.S. Open here in this state. Magnificent golf course. It's a great venue.

Played a few years ago here, and the golf course has changed quite a bit since. Obviously a little more difficult than it was 10 years ago. But still a great golf course, great design, has the potential to be one of the best U.S. Opens we've seen.

Q. Talk a little bit more about the course and your game plan this week.

JON RAHM: Hard to say a game plan. It is a U.S. Open. Fairways and greens, hopefully two-putt and move on.

I think it's deceptively wide. Those fairways look bigger than they play. You still need to strike it really well tee to green to be able to give yourself some looks at birdie.

Like I said, it's a design that I like. It makes you think. It's very intricate green complexes. You've got to play the angles a little bit, and especially if you miss the greens, you're going to find yourself in some interesting spots to get up-and-down.

It's got everything. It's got all the ingredients to be a great week.

Q. I know you try to mostly not pay attention to the noise the last couple of years, but with what happened last week, is there a part of it that's almost a little bit freeing knowing that player opinion just isn't really that important to the future?

JON RAHM: I'm not sure I know how to answer that. I think to an extent, they value player opinion. They've certainly heard us throughout the whole process on some of the issues.

But we're certainly in a spot in time where there's a big question mark. Where we don't have the answers we would like. It's hard to say.

Q. You mentioned the golf course being different since the Pac-12s when you were here, the added length. Can you kind of expand on that, and particularly the two par-3s that are pretty long, how you like those and how you see yourself playing those?

JON RAHM: Well, Max Homa shot 9-under on this golf course. That's not happening right now. It's a big difference.

I think if I'm -- we played 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 13, 16, 17, and 18, so we have nine holes that we played from the up tees at minimum that I can remember.

We did play 7 once from the tee. We have set up possibly to play this way. I remember hitting 3-wood into that green. The length is obviously a factor.

16, 17, 18 played different.

11, I remember hitting irons into the green. That is obviously a big -- like I say, it's a big factor.

I don't remember ever hitting more than 8- or 7-iron into a par-4 no matter the wind. I remember hitting a 5-wood into the green on 14.

It's just clearly a much different golf course. The rough wasn't as high as it is right now. You could actually afford to miss a fairway and have confidence that that ball was going to be around the green area, not always on the green.

Even though maybe still being Pac-12s and some of the best collegiate golfers in the world, it's not set up for a U.S. Open. It's not like I can draw a lot of what I did that week into this week.

The only thing I can say is that I have really good



memories about it, and again, I enjoyed the design and I enjoyed the challenge back then. I think I'm going to as well this week.

Obviously the lengthy par-3s are not new. We've certainly played longer par-3s. The 8th hole at Oakmont was longer than this.

I think 7 plays somewhat fair. I did hit a good 3-wood yesterday and didn't even carry the front edge of the green.

11 is a little trickier. Everything rolls off that green, everything bounces away from that green except that little gap early on.

I don't know how many times we're going to play it on the back or not, but both extremely difficult holes.

But I think at the same time, they give you -- you have 15 which is possibly going to be 80 yards, 6 where you can drive the green or hit a 4-iron, lay up to a wedge, 1 not being the most complicated par-5 we've seen in a U.S. Open.

I think there's a bit of a give and take. There's got to be a balance. I don't think we're going to play every hole tipped out every day, either.

Q. Speaking of 15, have you had a chance this week to throw some balls up on that forward tee and hit that 78-, 80-yard shot? And what's the unique challenge to a hole that short for the world's best?

JON RAHM: I played it. I remember playing that hole 10 years ago and hitting a great shot. Landed a foot from the hole and going long into the rough. I forgot exactly the yardage, but it was a lob wedge for sure and it was playing downwind, which it's most likely going to play.

Very rarely are you going to have a hole that short where the best players in the world are going to be thinking about going 20 feet long left to use that slope to at least hit the green, and that's something beautiful. It's a hole that gives you a lot to think about.

I wish we saw more of them like that. I haven't played it this week. I will play the back nine today and probably hit that shot.

But it gives you options. You can try to be brave and hit the shot, or you can use that front side of the mound on the green to give yourself a birdie look. It wouldn't be the easiest birdie look, but yeah, it's fun.

The wind will dictate quite a bit. If it's windy as it was

yesterday it would be a really tough hole. If you're playing earlier in the day where it's a little bit less wind you can probably get some height and spin to be aggressive with it.

But if you don't pull it off, you're going to find yourself in a difficult spot.

Q. The 6th hole, you don't have any data on that hole and people have invoked 10 at Riviera as a reference point. What does your intuition tell you standing on that tee about how to play that hole?

JON RAHM: I'm not going to sit here and tell you what I'm going to do, because I've said before I'm not going to hit 3-wood or driver and then if I tee off on 10 and I'm feeling really confident in my swing, I absolutely will hit driver or 3-wood into that green.

It all depends. It can be circumstantial. It's depending on the wind and pin location, as well. That front wedge shot if you just put in on the fairway, it's about as easy of a wedge as you can find. Just throw it behind the pin and it comes right back to it.

If you hit a shot and try to hit the green you can pull it two yards left and find yourself in a really tough lie next to the bunker in that rough.

There will be people that go for it and make eagles, hit great shots, give themselves a lot of good looks at birdie, but I think it's also the way you're going to see the highest numbers. People that go for the green and put themselves in a difficult spot.

I think if you hit the lay-up to the spot you want to every day, which isn't the hardest lay-up, I think your scoring average will be lower than going for it every day.

That will be my belief just because you don't have much of a margin of error. If you miss right it's a bit of a tossup how good the lie is going to be for you to be able to hit it close.

Q. Last seven or eight months you've been on this great roll, a lot of high finishes, a lot of wins. Anything that you point to that's clicked in that's allowed you to keep it going, and would you say your game is at the same level as it was when you won the Masters?

JON RAHM: Well, I'd like to think so. My belief in myself is the same. I haven't played my best golf the last two starts. Actually I played really good at Memorial. Just couldn't make the putts I needed to to keep the rounds going.

But I still think I finished 16th in a really tough setup. Hit it really, really well. Obviously PGA was a tough one.

Yeah, my confidence level is very high. You have to have that belief in yourself as a competitor no matter what happens. You stick to the process -- that's basically what I think has happened this year. Haven't really changed. There's no magic formula. I've just stuck to working on the things that I have to work on, and when you do the little things properly, eventually scores come, and that's what happened to me this year. Late last year and early this year.

Q. A lot of you guys have talked about being clueless about last week's news and what the future holds going forward. How frustrating is that --

JON RAHM: Add me to that, by the way.

Q. What's the biggest thing that you would like to know or what's the biggest unanswered question to you?

JON RAHM: Well, there's a lot of not-answered questions. It's tough when it's the week before a major. Trying not to think about it as much as possible.

I think it gets to a point where you want to have faith in management, and I want to have faith that this is the best thing for all of us, but it's clear that that's not the consensus.

I think the general feeling is that a lot of people feel a bit of betrayal from management. I understand why they had to keep it so secret. I understand we couldn't make it through a PAC meeting with more than 10 minutes after people spilling the beans right away in some article by you guys already being out there. So I get it. I get the secrecy.

It's just not easy as a player that's been involved, like many others, to wake up one day and see this bombshell. That's why we're all in a bit of a state of limbo because we don't know what's going on and how much is finalized and how much they can talk about, either.

It's a state of uncertainty that we don't love, but at the end of the day, I'm not a business expert. Some of those guys on the board and involved in this are. So I'd like to think they're going to make a better decision than I would, but I don't know. We'll see. There's still too many questions to be answered.

Q. (No microphone.)

JON RAHM: I was at home taking care of the kids. I was just having my normal morning making coffee and breakfast, and basically texts just started flowing in. I

thought my phone was going to catch on fire at one point. There were so many questions that I just couldn't answer. It's basically what it was.

I think it was that day at one point I told Kelley I'm just going to throw my phone in the drawer and not look at it for the next four hours because I can't deal with this anymore.

Q. You always seem to find some fuel prior to a major. Is the chance of becoming the first Spaniard to win the U.S. Open twice your fuel for this week, or do you have something else in mind?

JON RAHM: Well, given I'm the only Spaniard to win this tournament, I am the only one who can do it twice. (Laughter.)

Obviously, yeah, it is very motivational. If we go that route, to keep adding to the Spanish list of major championships, it's a true honor. It was an honor to give Spain No. 10. It would be an honor to give No. 11.

If I can keep adding those that no player had previously won, it's obviously an added motivation but it's not something I'm going to be thinking about mid tournament. Still a job to do, and that's what I'm here to do. Yeah, it's added motivation.

Q. Alejandro del Ray is making his debut. Have you had a chance to speak with him?

JON RAHM: I've seen him a little bit but I haven't been able to spend a lot of time with him. It's a big accomplishment to qualify. It's a big deal. It's not easy, but now you've given yourself the opportunity.

He's been playing really good golf in Europe, and this could be a kick start to his career here in the U.S.

If you can come out here and play golf the way I know he can play, he can give himself a massive opportunity to put himself out there to the world and learn as a player.

Play good or bad, it will be a learning experience. It's really hard to get ready for a U.S. Open without having played one before.

But he has given himself an opportunity that I hope he can take advantage of because doing well in a major can take you a long ways.

Q. When you're gearing up for a U.S. Open this week, what are the top priorities that you want to make sure you get sorted out in your game right now?

JON RAHM: Everything. There's not really a part of your game in any major championship, let alone a U.S. Open, that can really be in doubt. You're going to need to access every single aspect of your game to win a championship like this.

I think it becomes more of a mental factor, not over doing it at home. You can never really replicate U.S. Open conditions.

I think it's just, like I said, doing the little things, just making sure -- following the checkpoints, the basics, so the fundamentals of your game are in good shape, and just getting out here and playing.

Q. And by fundamentals of your game, you just mean making sure you're practicing your putting a certain way, making sure --

JON RAHM: No, no. I mean more basic than that. When I mean fundamentals, I mean fundamentals. Just making sure your alignment is proper, making sure your stance over the ball is as comfortable as you can be, making sure -- again, alignment being a big one.

Just little things like that, ball position, this and that to make sure when you get here to this week you don't have to think about it too much.

I know it sounds simple, but it's those little things that can make a difference.

Q. There's been so much division in golf, which we all talk about, but there was another issue, too, that people were kind of taking sides, and that's the rollback or the proposed rollback of the golf ball. How do you think those discussions will be or should be going forward in midst of this other stuff?

JON RAHM: I have no idea. Obviously the USGA and the R&A want to make a change to the ball to somehow protect the game, which is fine. If they think that's the best decision, so be it.

It's funny to me because how many of the tee boxes on this golf course will become obsolete if they change the golf ball? At least half would be unusable for the next I don't know how many years.

They keep trying to protect from distance by adding distance to a golf course in a way where only long hitters are going to have a better chance to win. I don't know how else to really explain it. If they want to roll it back, then so be it. I don't really know what to say.

I think they're only going to, let's say, affect the shorter hitters a little bit more. I don't think the top players in the world will change.

I think you're going to have to go to forward tee boxes to be able to play some holes, and I don't think the scores would change that much, honestly.

I think it was the leading in distance TOUR distance 2004 or the early 2000s, and last year was pretty much the same number to a T.

I think as a general norm, we've become better athletes and more optimized to play this game, but I don't even know how to say. At the end of the day it's a decision, and we're going to have to deal with whatever they decide.

Q. Do you think they should stick with the schedule as all this other stuff is going on?

JON RAHM: I mean, they've got a part of it, so as long as they don't one day wake up and change it earlier, which I don't think the club manufacturers would be happy about, yeah, they can do whatever they want.

I just wish they really would take the PGA TOUR players' thought and advice into consideration, because one of the bigger benefits of golf is the fact that all amateurs and all professionals play under the exact same rules, and if you start changing that, it can be a slippery slope.

Again, if that's what they think is going to be best for the game, it could be. I don't really know.

Q. All the uncertainty being in the state of limbo, as you described, how do you not allow that to affect your game? How do you stay focused on it? You said you turned off your phone when you first heard for a couple hours, but what else do you do just to focus on your game, particularly this week?

JON RAHM: What I do? To be honest, I think a little bit in my case is perspective. No matter what happens, whether I agree with it or not, thanks to the PGA TOUR, they give me a platform to play golf at the highest level, and after taking advantage of that possibility, I'm in a situation where my family and my kids don't have to struggle financially ever, and I don't know how many generations I can help if I do it properly.

I'm in a very high state of privilege in this world. I can do what I want. I can do what I love for a living. I have a blast every single day even though I get mad on the golf course every once in a while.

When I start with that point of view, no matter what happens, I can only be thankful to what's going on. If things change, things change. I'm just -- I'll have to adapt to the situation and will have to make some decisions on what's going on forward, and I'll make some decisions.

At the end of the day I'm still very privileged, whether the PGA TOUR LIV Golf align or not or who plays and who likes who. It doesn't really matter.

I'm happy where I am in my life, and every day in the morning when I look at my kids, I'm even more blessed in that sense.

It's an easy way to forget about what's going on when I look at it that way. I can see where I came from in Spain, especially every time I see my parents I remember where which came from and where I'm at. To be honest, all those possible issues seem like a very, very small issue compared to other things in the world.

Yeah, I just consider myself very privileged, and if anything very thankful to be where I am.

Q. Do you think the agreement that's been announced in the golf world gives hope to your desire that the best 12 players from Europe would be able to represent the Ryder Cup team regardless of PGA TOUR, DP Tour?

JON RAHM: I have no idea. I have no idea. Again, we have no clue. The only thing I can say at this point is I have faith in Luke Donald, and I have faith that Luke is going to do the best and he's going to try to make the best decision for Team Europe, and that's all I can do.

At the end of the day he's the captain and I'm not. It's his ship to steer. I have faith in my captain and I'm hoping -- not hoping. I'm sure we're going to end up with the best team we can end up with.

Q. What's the one thing you do want to know?

JON RAHM: I don't really care, to be fair. I don't care at this point. Too much has gone on. I think like everybody we just want some answers and basically know what the future looks like, and that's about it. I just want to know how it's going to look like, and that's about it.

Like I said, I've gotten to the point where I don't care that much.

Q. It feels like a lot of past U.S. Open venues have been not a slog to play, but death by a million bogeys.

JON RAHM: But it's a U.S. Open.

Q. But a lot of guys are saying that there are some par-3.5s and 4.5s and they think there might be -- it's a little bit more fun. There might be some more birdies and bogeys. How would you compare the feeling and rhythm of playing this golf course versus a Winged Foot or a Torrey Pines in the past?

JON RAHM: Yeah, yeah, I would agree with that. There's a bit of everything. You start with -- if you hit perfect drives, let's say, in 1, 2 and 3, you're pretty much looking at birdie options.

And then you get kicked in the teeth with 5 and 4 and most likely 7, and possibly 9 depending on pin location.

So you get a bit of everything. That's the way to describe it. That's a really good way to describe it. There is certain flow to the golf course in a U.S. Open that we haven't seen before. That I haven't.

Maybe a course like Merion being a little shorter gives you a little bit, but this one definitely is a little bit different. You have par-4s where you're going to hit driver, wedge every day if you hit the fairway, no matter the wind.

And then you have holes like 13 that are going to play very long no matter what.

17 is going to play long.

16 is going to play long.

11 and 17 are going to play very long.

It gives a bit of everything, and it's fun. You have that diversity that you don't see.

And yes, we have two really long par-4s, but we just mentioned we have one that absolutely maxed out it is 135 yards, and that is if we're on the very edge of the tee box and it plays downwind.

Yeah, I think it's a bit different, and it's fun. You'll see a lot of birdies, and I think you also you see some high numbers come out of nowhere.

It's a bit like you would see in Riv. You don't have out of bounds lurking everywhere. You don't have water hazards lurking everywhere. You just use the golf course as it is, you have the contours to deal with, and you see a bit of everything happen. You see birdies happen, you see bogeys happen.

I think it's going to be really fun for us, especially those guys I play with, obviously, and I think it's going to really be fun for these spectators to see on TV because it's quite different to what we usually see.

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