

Sentry Tournament of Champions

Tuesday, January 3, 2023
Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Jon Rahm to the interview room. He's making his sixth start at the Sentry Tournament of Champions with two runner-up finishes.

Jon, welcome back to Kapalua. Could we get some comments on being here.

JON RAHM: Well, it's always great to be back. I've had some success here in the past and highlighted by the battle I had with Cam last year on the final round. I mean, those scores were pretty incredible. The three lowest scores ever on a PGA TOUR event were out here. So hoping to have another good showing this year and start the year off on a positive note.

THE MODERATOR: How have your holidays been and just talk about getting started here.

JON RAHM: It's been great. With two kiddos, it's been a lot of fun. Kupa's kind of getting an idea of what Christmas is and doing some of the fun things, so it was really, really cool to see it through his eyes a little bit and, oh, well, have the family time, the time off, that we all needed.

So in that sense, rested, came here a little early, enjoyed the islands of Hawaii, enjoyed Maui quite a bit for a few days before we got here to Kapalua this week and started work again.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. What constitutes a good year for you? I know you said last year you were proud of your year last year?

JON RAHM: Yeah, it's hard to say. I set my goals every year, right? And listen, I'm pretty ambitious, so I'm not always going to accomplish everything I set my mind out to. But in this sport, if not winning as much as you would like, you would take it as a bad year. It can be tough in a sport where the most accomplished athlete of all time won



30 percent of the time, right? That being Tiger.

So it's a little bit subjective, in my opinion. I think there's a lot of things you can do well as an athlete and as a player to consider a positive year. Obviously, you want to win events. That's there. The only thing I wish I didn't do last year that I wish I would have done is compete better in majors and give myself a better chance. So obviously that being a goal this year, hopefully get No. 2 and give Spain another major.

Q. When you look back at last year's battle with Cam and you said all those low scores, is that the best you've ever played without winning a tournament?

JON RAHM: It's the lowest I've ever shot without winning a tournament, that's for sure. I think last year was unique because we didn't have as much wind as we usually have here, which is the defense of this golf course, and then it was softer than in the past, so you had to be that aggressive.

It's hard to say because I've had weeks where I've played really, really well, but obviously, I didn't shoot that low. But because of the score, I'm going to have to say yes, it's definitely -- it doesn't happen when you go that low and not win.

Q. You played well last year, would you agree?

JON RAHM: Yes.

Q. Okay. So if you look at 2021 where you won at Torrey Pines and could have won at St. George's and I think you topped 10 in all four majors, if I'm not mistaken --

JON RAHM: Yes.

Q. And then this year I don't think you finished top 10 in any of them. How do you explain that or can you explain that?

JON RAHM: I was close at the U.S. Open. I was one back. I just had a bad final round. I don't think there's a



way to explain it. For people that may not believe it, I battled my swing most of the year. I wasn't as comfortable as I was the year prior and that showed.

Then when you go to major championship golf where you need to be better in every single way, those mistakes are going to show.

Q. When did the fight begin with your swing?

JON RAHM: I don't know. I really don't know. But it just didn't feel --

Q. Was it here?

JON RAHM: No. It just didn't feel as smooth as I would have liked. I still had an abundance of top 10s. I think I was close to 50 percent of the tournaments I teed it up on I ended up in the top 10, which is not bad. This year, I didn't give myself a chance to win as often as I would have liked.

Q. This past year?

JOHN RAHM: Yeah, sorry, this past season.

But I did in the fall. It seems like in the fall things got going a little bit better. I felt like for the most part I was playing better than scores were showing. Maybe once the PGA TOUR season was over I took some time off and reset and that's why I played well in the fall.

Q. I guess, in looking back, was there a time that you, that it felt like your swing wasn't where it wanted, that it was becoming a grind to make it feel comfortable? Because early on we were all talking about your putting.

JON RAHM: I'm never too far off, honestly. With the swing mechanics I have it's never a big, big change. That's why I can be consistent. And, yeah, well, everybody was talking about my putting because I could still hit fairways and greens, but nobody talked about how my proximity to the hole was much higher than it was in the past. Therefore, I'm not going to make as many putts, therefore my putting stats are going to be bad. That's why I kept saying a lot of times my putting felt good, I just didn't give myself the best chances.

Q. Can you talk about what it means to you to be back here on Maui and why you get so excited to come back here every year?

JON RAHM: Well, it's a massive bonus to be able to come to a field of, what is it, 39 players this week? 34? 39. Compete for the same amount of FedExCup points we

compete in the other week and a massive purse compared to the others, right?

I mean, it's a very, very, very extensive bonus to be able to -- exactly, only have to beat 38 players compared to any other event, right? And it's earned by having an amazing year. I think it's great that they're allowing the people that make it to the TOUR Championship to be here as well. Maybe change the name of the tournament since they haven't won a tournament. But I don't think the name matters too much. I think it's right to have the best players of the year here, and making it to East Lake should be an accomplishment. I think a player like Cam Young has earned it.

So it's only going to make this tournament better. Like I said, it's a massive bonus. We have a limited field of very -- it's an All Star field that, you know, you can take advantage and start the year on a good note.

Q. With all the chaos in the last year, kind of in the rear view mirror, do you feel like this year, arriving here, the schedule set, you know --

JON RAHM: Chaos in what sense?

Q. In all the noise around the golf world.

JON RAHM: Because I've had two kids in 15 months, so compared to that, I don't know if what's happened around golf is as comparable.

Q. Well, in the golf department then, do you feel like there's a sense of, I don't know if calm is the right word or feeling of turning a new page where you kind of know where you stand at this point?

JON RAHM: Yeah, I mean, I think we all know where we stand. There's still going to be players that choose to transition to LIV is my guess. But for a lot of us, I think we see the direction the PGA TOUR is going towards, right? I mean, they're making the necessary changes to adapt to the new age and I think it's better for everybody.

Q. What are you curious about this year, most curious about? Not so much how you play, but in the whole arena of golf?

JON RAHM: Curious? I haven't thought about that. It's going to be a different year, right? There's a lot more highlights in the calendar year, I would say, for the PGA TOUR, all those elevated events.

One thing I keep going back to (laughing), and it's probably only funny to me, but I think the Masters Champions

Dinner's going to be a little tense compared to how it's been in the past. So I keep thinking about it because I wish I could be there and just be able to see how things work out. Too bad the U.S. Open doesn't have one of those.

But, yeah, I think it's an exciting year. Obviously, we're all curious about how it's going to work out, but we're all excited to see what this year's going to, how it's going to unfold and how it's going to play out for everybody.

Q. Two things, if I could just kind of lean into those, and you touched on one of them already. But the majors are going to be the four events of the year where everybody probably comes together. How do you think the dynamics will be different Champions Dinner notwithstanding?

JON RAHM: I think it's going to be the same. I mean, I didn't feel a difference in any of the majors last year. If somebody has a problem with LIV players, they're just not going to deal with them and that's about it.

In my mind, like I've said it before, I respect their choice and the ones I was friends with before I'm still going to be friends with, right? It doesn't change the way I'm going to operate with them.

So I think a lot of, let's say, animosity, if there's any, might be created more by you guys than anything else. I don't think there's that much of a problem between players, at least in person, because if there is, they can avoid each other.

Q. Do you get any sense -- you wouldn't know how to answer this probably, but someone with LIV, a D.J. or a Brooks or someone like, I have to wonder if they wouldn't feel any more pressure representing a flag they're playing under, a league they're playing under, to perform in a major than they ordinarily would have if it was not this way.

JON RAHM: I mean, I don't know. I think you touched on two guys that I don't think really care much where they're playing.

Q. Bad examples.

JON RAHM: Yeah. So, I don't think they will be having extra pressure to be winning a major depending where they play. I think even though they're on teams, golf is an individual sport. So if they're playing majors, they're playing majors for themselves, not nobody else. That would be my guess.

Q. Ryder Cup. How do you think that will shake out?

JON RAHM: I have no idea.

Q. What do you hope happens?

JON RAHM: What I hope? I hope Europe wins. That's about that.

Listen, there's some people that are going to have to make some tough choices, right? A little bit of that is out of my reach. My guess is I hope the PGA of America and European Tour make a decision together. I don't think it would be smart to have one team allowing LIV players and one not to.

And besides that, even if they decide not to on that side, I think it's going to give an opportunity for a lot of great young players to show up and have the chance in Europe, right? It's just going to be an opportunity for all of them. We saw a younger U.S. team last Ryder Cup and they did what they did.

So I'm hoping these younger guys who have grown up watching the Ryder Cup and seeing their idols do what they do, let's say, it energizes the team a little bit in any manner and we show up there to win.

Q. On your note, that was your first losing Ryder Cup team?

JON RAHM: Yes.

Q. What was that like?

JON RAHM: Not fun, because even though -- it's funny because I had complete opposite experiences, right? Paris, I didn't play good at all. I won one point, but we won the Ryder Cup. And then in Whistling Straights, I only lost one match, played amazing golf all week, and we actually got decimated. So I have no -- it's mixed feelings about each one.

But yeah, I wouldn't know how to say it. It sucks to lose. We don't want to lose. It's a team effort, right, no matter what you do. So I would rather have a very bad personal record but have a win every single time.

Q. Did the losing feel worse than the winning felt good?

JON RAHM: It's pretty equal. It was pretty equal. It didn't feel good, but let's be honest, it was pretty apparent early that that loss was going to happen, so -- without saying anything bad with the team. We started with a

disadvantage. I played bad the first six holes and saw a whole lot of red early on, so it was going to be tough to make that comeback.

But it just doesn't feel good. You don't want to ever be on a golf course where everybody else is celebrating because you lost. It just doesn't feel good. Obviously, the winning feels really, really amazing. But I think as human beings a lot of times we tend to focus a bit more on the negative. But on that level, I would say they're equal.

Q. Knowing you're a soccer fan, we haven't really had any time to talk to you since the World Cup. Just as an athlete, do you take inspiration from watching a game and a performance like that, specifically from Messi?

JON RAHM: That final was incredible. I think I took more inspiration from Mbappé. He put the team on his back and tied a final that they had no business tying, let's be honest.

And Messi, I mean, I've been watching Messi play for so long that it's amazing that he can still surprise a lot of people. When the debate of greatest of all time is up in the air, he does what he did and carried Argentina to a World Cup final.

It's not my business to decide who is the best or who is not because I never saw Maradona play, but he's made a pretty good argument.

I don't know if we're going to see a final, I don't know if I'll see a final this good ever again in my lifetime. I hope I do, but I doubt it. The only way this could have been better if it was Messi and Ronaldo facing off and they each had a hat trick and things like that. Kylian being the next closest thing, because he's clearly the future of this sport.

I'm hoping Spain is in it though. I mean I'm hoping.

Q. They have a lot of good young players.

JON RAHM: Yeah, Spain always has a really good talented team, but they haven't been able to -- people don't know we've made it to the semi-finals once -- twice, sorry, the one time we won the World Cup. So it's a bit of the Spanish curse. Hoping that the next time we get to the semi-finals it's also a win.

THE MODERATOR: Jon, as always we appreciate your time. Best of luck this week.

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