

Sentry Tournament of Champions

Sunday, January 8, 2023
Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome in the winner of the 2023 Sentry Tournament of Champions, Jon Rahm. 8th career victory. Just take us through your day.

JON RAHM: (Laughing.) Bit of a crazy day. I'm not going to lie. I'm wearing black pants and the Sunday shirt that I usually wear because I was like, Oh, I don't usually like getting too close to Sundays in time. We're so far away, whatever, I'll just wear black. I didn't want to wear Navy every day. So I just put on the black ones, not that I even had hope, but I'm like we're going to need a small miracle. After bogeying 1, I was going to need somewhat of a larger miracle. It goes to say, you just got to do the little things properly.

It's a golf course where, yes, you can score on, but you have to hit the shots and take advantage of it. I started right after 1, obviously, with a great shot onto 2. Gave myself the easiest putt on that hole, made birdie.

Good par on 3.

Birdie on 4.

Missed a short eagle putt on 5.

Another great birdie on 6.

And just kept things going. I gave myself plenty of birdie opportunities. My iron game today was much better than it was the first three days and it showed.

And then it wasn't until, the second shot on 15, gave myself an eagle chance when I realized, if I make this putt, I'm one back. Finish, hopefully make two more birdies coming in, I'll definitely have a chance.

Little did I know that when I was walking down the fairway on 17, I was going to have a two-shot lead -- or a one-shot lead. Sorry.



THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Was there a board on 17 that you looked at?

JON RAHM: Yeah, there was one to the right. After I hit my second shot, I'm walking down thinking I need birdies, and that was the only point of looking at it because I was like, well, there's an outside chance. But first I saw, when they have kind of our player profile, it was me and Tom, and it said I was in first place and it didn't say T-1. And I kind of look at Adam, like, What's going on? Then they said, yeah, I had a one-shot lead and that changed everything. I told Adam, Hey, man, we're ahead by one -- because you need to change a bit of the mindset. You don't need to take an unnecessary risk at that point. But it was the board at 17.

Q. I think you were eight behind going into the back on the back nine. Have you ever been part of any shift quite as dramatic as that?

JON RAHM: I wasn't even paying attention at that point. I knew I was going to need an extremely low back nine. My objective was to get as close to 30-under as possible. That was what I had in mind. Collin was, I believe, at 27-under already before he even played nine. So I have to assume he's going to birdie the par-5s, so that puts him close to 30-under.

So I just kind of forgot about it for a second. Then I just started playing 10, made a couple good swings, made the putt. Another good swing on 11, made the putt, and then the birdies came in, and I realized after the birdie on 13 that I had a bit of a chance. But I've never really thought about how hard it was going to be. If I'm constantly thinking about how many back I am, it can get a little daunting for anybody.

So, again, like same thing I did on 2, I just took the approach of just trying to hit the best shot I could at each moment. It really helped out.

Q. I was going to ask you how big was it to bounce back at 2? Adam seemed to think that was huge.



JON RAHM: Yeah. He was smiling more than usual for a birdie. It's not the easiest hole, right, and to make a really good swing, because it was a quality swing. I was going in with just enough club to get there with a 7-iron and I hit it perfect, on a great line, and made the putt. He knew, right? I mean, just two good shots like that can change the entire day. Not that that make was going to be different, but obviously making that birdie after that bad start was great.

I always say, though, if you can play the first four holes on this golf course under par, I feel like you're gaining strokes. It's not the easiest start. And then from then on is when you can get birdies going. 5 through 9 you can make birdies, 10 through 12 you can make birdies, and then 14 on you can make birdies. I've seen that happen a million times. You rarely see somebody go 2- or 3-under through the first four. So I kind of went along with what I usually, the things you do.

Q. An obvious question, but after last year, playing so well, 33-under and not winning, I don't know if this makes up for it, but does it --

JON RAHM: It does. Yeah, it does. I'm not going to lie. Had I shot 60 under par in two starts here and not won either one of them, that would have been a hard pill to swallow. Something just doesn't register to say that, right, to do that well and lose both times.

So I really, it showed -- I had the image in my head right before my turn to hit the putt on 18 because I was thinking, man, I don't want to give him a chance to just chip in or make a putt or anything. I just really want to get this one in. And I did. So that definitely was in my mind. I'm like, I don't want to say 59-under and two years wasn't enough.

Q. You were almost slightly defensive at the end of last year, like, Hey, guys, I won various places, I had a really, really good year, but obviously Cameron is No. 1, Scotty did, Rory did. Like, I know you're a competitive guy. Does part of you feel like, I want to reclaim my spot at the top of the sport?

JON RAHM: Oh, I definitely do, yeah. And had they not changed the World Ranking points, I would have been pretty damn close right now. At this point I'm thinking will I pass Patrick Cantlay? Because since the playoffs, I have not missed a top 7. I've won three times, and I don't even get close to him. So I'm trying to understand what's going on.

But in my mind, I feel like since August I've been the best player in the world, I feel like, and I think a lot of us should feel like a lot of times we're the best. Earlier in the year

clearly Scottie was that player, then Rory was that player, and I feel like right now it's been me.

Anybody any given year can get a hot three, four months and get to that spot. It's the level of golf we're at nowadays. It is what it is. It's very difficult to stay up there and it requires a lot of golf.

But we're all working hard. I know everybody's putting in a lot of effort to try to stay there as long as possible. But to answer that, yes, I want to be back up there because it's something you want to do, obviously. But you need to play good and win tournaments, nobody's going to give it to you.

Q. I know you have deep ambitions to make a mark on this game. So how do you stay patient when you haven't won a major in X number of months?

JON RAHM: There's many ways to make a mark, right? I think, listen, we all want to break a lot of records, but you have to take it week by week. It is what it is. I think, what I'm going to say, what I can say, is I'm going to try my absolute hardest every day of the year to try to be the best golfer I can be. And that's all I can do, period. Whatever results that comes with, it will be. But all I can tell you I can do is exactly that, and that's what I'm going to do.

Q. You mentioned playing well since really the end of last year. I think you have three wins now in your last four starts. What has clicked on for you so much that you're playing so well?

JON RAHM: I mean, I think I've said it before a few times at the end of last year. It doesn't really feel that different to earlier in the year. It's just the results I felt like I could produce just hadn't come yet.

But if you look at numbers, I think the main difference is I have been a bit more accurate on my approach shots but mainly making putts. I got a lot more comfortable with my putting. And, again, the last four or five months my putting has been about as good as it's ever been.

Q. After last year's final round, the shoot-out, just the epic historical shoot-out, Shed asked about it, but coming in eight strokes behind starting today did you, was it in the back of your mind that, hey, maybe I can get this done today?

JON RAHM: Yes, yes. I thought I was going to, like I said earlier, have to get really close to 30-under.

And again, had the same guy, the same Collin that we had the first three days shown up, he would have been a

30-some under. There's very little we would have been able to do. A 59 on the golf course is tough, all right? Anywhere. But out here, 14-under's not easy to do.

You need a combination of both. Me having a really good day, which I did, and Collin not having his best. It kind of happened to where it overlapped a little bit where I started really kicking in my next gear and he made a few bogeys.

But he was bogey-free until, what, until 14? Which is insane. But I'm lucky the golf gods were on my side in that sense. You needed a little bit of help from Collin in this situation.

Q. Does this course owe you one from last year?

JON RAHM: No, the course didn't owe me anything. It's not the course ever. It's not like I had a moment where I got very unlucky and something. And even then it's not the course itself. The course is there and you play the way you're supposed to play.

Cam just beat me. He shot 34-under. What else am I going to do? It's not like I had a bad week.

Q. This was a little bit of the beginning of a new era on the PGA TOUR with this being the first designated event. Is there anything cool about that for you to win the first one and did it feel at all different or did it feel the same as last year?

JON RAHM: It didn't feel any different at all. Not really a difference. Just a different way to qualify for the tournament, but during COVID in 2021 we had the same people qualify for the tournament.

So it's a little, I wouldn't know what to say, right, it's not really any different. I think we might see a bigger difference in full field events more than this one. I think you'll see a difference in a couple others. But this one is so unique and it's got such a strong character with what it is, to me it didn't feel any different. It really shouldn't feel any different.

But it's, I'm going to say, obviously a great start for me for what's going to be a very different year.

Q. Do you feel bad for Collin?

JON RAHM: I don't know how to answer that without sounding very rude. As competitors, no, I want to win. That's all I can tell you.

I've been where he's been before. I've made a mess of a round before. Especially in amateur golf I've done it

before. I think we've all been there. You don't want to see that happen really ever. You want to beat everybody at their best. But if the best Collin had shown up today I wouldn't have won. That's all I can say. So I always wish the best for everybody, but at this moment it's something -- not that he needs to learn a lot more from golf, because we all know what he's capable of, but it's something he's going to learn a lot from.

Q. If you go from 12 through 18 on, what do you consider to be one of the better or the more important shots that you hit during that stretch?

JON RAHM: I think the tee shot on 15. Every other shot -- 12, I missed it a little right and ended up in a really good spot on the hole.

13, it's a pretty straightforward hole. Nothing special outstanding there.

But to put that drive on 15 where I did, I mean, it was a three quarter 8-iron on a par-5 from a flat lie. Which is the most important thing I can say about that. It's very easy to leave that on top and have a hanging lie, 4-iron left-to-right wind, can't miss right. If you go long left it's not the easiest shot, right.

So I kind of made a point of swinging hard at that one, knowing that if I hit a good one and on the right line it could get down there. Even if it went in the rough you have a chance with a shorter iron.

It ended up on an uphill, perfect number, perfect lie. I don't think I could have placed it any better. So I think that would be the most important one.

Q. Did you feel like you lost this tournament on Friday?

JON RAHM: No. We have four days for a reason. You have to complete all 72 holes last time I checked. So, yeah, that's golf.

Q. How hard is it to play with a big lead like that of six, seven, eight, nine strokes?

JON RAHM: I don't know if I've played with a lead like that on the PGA TOUR. I've done it on the European Tour I've been lucky.

Q. You would have at Memorial.

JON RAHM: Good point. I'll get back to you on that one. It's not easy. It's not easy.

I think that's the one advice I give everybody that asks about professional golf: No matter the lead, if in a regular course you have to expect somebody's going to come and shoot 64 or 65, out here you have to expect the same thing. Somebody's going to shoot a very low number.

And at one point Max was up there making those birdie. He didn't have the best finish. But you have to assume somebody's going to come in and shoot low and you're going to have to do it as well. That's all I can tell you.

It's also difficult coming in with a six-shot lead. At one point he was leading by eight or nine, so I don't blame him for being a little bit more conservative.

But again, on this golf course you just always have to go out for birdies. This is what it is. When you go off to make those birdies, sometimes mistakes happen. Not only for him, for everybody.

Q. You talked about your love for Maui so much. What is it specifically that you and your wife and your family has really taken to the islands that make you feel comfortable out here?

JON RAHM: I don't know. I wouldn't be able to tell you. I think we decided when it was our first time here to make this our week. Which means no family except for our kids is allowed to come. And I think it really worked out for us.

Especially the week before the tournament we come early, around the 27th usually. We always tell our families, I'm going to put my phone in the drawer, see ya. That being a bit of a metaphor, we're not going to do that. But you're not going to hear from me as much as I usually do. Because this is our time off. The calendar season is very long and I feel like Maui really embraces that mindset of, you're here on the islands, enjoy it, right. I love waking up early and seeing the sunrise here and enjoying the sunset. Just taking in the just chill atmosphere.

I still practice and play a lot of golf, but I'm still going to the pool afterward and enjoying. So I think when you're ready to come and lay down and have Mai Tais and Pina coladas I think the island is like, bring it on, embrace it. I think that's why it's like this and it's been really good to us as well.

Q. If you can go back in time to where you were when you won at Torrey Pines, the U.S. Open, to now, what's different about your game and how much better would you say you are if at all?

JON RAHM: You're picking a very specific week. I can tell you I was much more comfortable with my swing at the

U.S. Open than I have been in all the wins since. Not that I'm uncomfortable, I'm just saying I was very in command of my game that week and very, very comfortable. Especially on that golf course.

It's just experience. Living certain moments is always going to make you better. I think my short game has become a little bit better, a little bit sharper. Especially maybe from the 50 to 80 yard range I've improved in some things that made me a little bit better as well. Not that it's shots that you often see, but actually out here you need it quit a bit. So I think that part of my game have been a little bit better.

My putting I think might be a bit better as well, but if I get picky I'm going to find a lot of little things that I'm going to find better than I did back then.

At the end of the day I tee it up every week full confidence that I can win, no matter how I'm feeling.

Q. I'm confused about the blue pant thing. What was that?

JON RAHM: You want to know the honest truth?

Q. I do actually.

JON RAHM: I forgot almost all the belts I was supposed to bring. So I had a navy belt and a black belt. And I told Kelley, I'm not about to be a hot as hell all week wearing black pants and darker shirts, so navy it is.

Then I went to Sunday and I said, I do not want to wear navy pants again. So, because we're teeing off at 10 a.m., there goes the black pants.

And that's all I can tell you. I know it's a stupid answer to a stupid question, but that's the truth. I usually don't want to wear anything that's close to red with black on Sundays because of Tiger. That's his outfit.

But that's why I wear gray or navy or other things usually. I don't want to get close to him.

But, yeah, I just, I just didn't want to wear navy anymore. I forgot my belts, that's all it is. They actually, Travis Mathew shipped me this one so I had something else and it wasn't just navy. I know, you would not expect that. I also forgot socks. Yeah, I forgot a few things. (Laughing.)

Q. Not your game.

JON RAHM: I brought my clubs, that's kind of all I was thinking of. Brought my clubs, kid stuff, but I forgot a few of

my things.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate the time, Jon. Congrats on the win.

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