

The Memorial Tournament Presented By Nationwide

Wednesday, June 2, 2021

Dublin, Ohio, USA

Muirfield Village

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome Jon Rahm to the virtual interview room here at the Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide, our defending champion.

Thanks for joining us. Kind of a tale of two stories with your experience here. You missed the cut your first start here in 2017, you come back in your second start and you win the tournament. You've had a chance to see the course, just some thoughts on being back here and perhaps some of the stand out changes renovations that you've noticed.

JON RAHM: It's always great to come back where you've defended. Obviously very different atmosphere with crowds and people on the golf course. Especially around the 18th green. Obviously everything we heard last year was crickets, right? There was no applause and no cheers. So a little bit different atmosphere. It's always great.

I got to see the golf course, 18 hole pro-am today. I love the changes. It's -- Jack, I know he's always trying to make this a little bit more challenging for us and he's definitely succeeded on making the golf course more difficult. So I enjoy the changes, it's going to be a fun week and I feel like there is some advantage to people that have played here in the past, but with all the greens being redone and some of them being completely reconstructed, it's, I feel like kind of everybody starts from the same baseline, right?

At least on the greens. Off the tee, a lot of them still the same strategy. So I feel like it puts all of us on a more even ground.

But, again, when you come back to a place you defended or where you're defending it's always really good vibes, a lot of good memories out here.

DOUG MILNE: One last question and then we'll open it up and take a few questions. Your most recent of 10 Top-10s came at your most recent start at the PGA Championship. Just kind of how you're feeling about your game heading into the week?

the Memorial  Tournament

PRESENTED BY



JON RAHM: Well, it feels consistent, right? Yeah, I've been playing pretty good golf, it's just looking forward to being in the hunt on the weekend, if I'm not leading, that's what I'm looking forward to, that's what I'm here to do. I want to play my best, obviously I try my best every time, but I'm ready this year to have a better chance to win and actually not just creep up the top-10 on Sunday afternoon. I want to tee off being up there with a chance to win.

DOUG MILNE: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. What would be the ideal way to play the 5th hole, the par-5, with the change mostly in the green and the water, what did you do today and what did you think?

JON RAHM: Well the tee shot doesn't change. Still -- well like 250 to 260 shot. Today, with the wind, I hit a 5-wood. Might have been a little bit more than that. I do it in meters. So I hit my 235 club, which was a 5-wood, ended up in a perfect spot in the center of the fairway. Last year it would have been maybe a 4-iron into the green. Today it was a 5-wood to hopefully cover the front bunker, so...

Q. Does that green hold?

JON RAHM: It was just short. I feel like if you hit a nice high one you might be able to hold the back edge. Landing on the green you're not going to hold the front. Long right, if you're not in the bunker it's a severe penalty in that rough. So I feel like we're going to see a lot more people laying up. It feels like the theme of the renovations or changes on the par-5s was making them a little bit harder to hold, a little bit harder to hit into and I'm guessing Jack wanted to see a little less easy tap-in eagles or close eagles that you could in the past. So you might see a lot more layups and some wedges in. It's definitely a lot more dangerous than some of the holes. Especially 5. That second shot, that green's tiny from back there. So you really have to hit a good one.

Q. You mentioned hearing only crickets last year when you won, I guess it would be cicadas this year. How different was that winning and how much better would it be to win, to repeat with a crowd here?

JON RAHM: It's very different, especially because of the atmosphere that's created here on 18. It's a lot of people, it's an amphitheater and it's a special place. There's a lot

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

of history here. So it's a very unique moment, especially when you get to embrace Jack.

In my case it was such a sweet moment because I was able to get to No. 1 in the world, I was able to get a win after the COVID stop and it was a challenging week overall. It was in such hard conditions with the greens being as fast and firm as they were and as windy as it was. It was just very satisfying personally for what I did.

Coming down the stretch, having those fans out there and that atmosphere and then hopefully being able to shake Jack's hand if you can this year, if not, I'll be there to get a fist bump, I guess. Its very different and just to have the fans back and winning for them as well, I feel like it's always a lot more entertaining in both ways. Playing without fans was definitely weird, something to get used to.

Q. You were one of the guys who were waiting on Phil after he won the PGA a couple weeks ago. Just curious what you were thinking as that was unfolding and is there anything about him now that you sort of admire for being able to pull that off, given his struggles of late last year or year and a half?

JON RAHM: I love Phil. He's been a great mentor to me. And the Mickelson family is very close to me. They mean a lot. I'm not going to lie, with how windy it was out there and towards the end all I could say is, I cannot believe he's going to pull this off. Like I don't know if I told him this, but I will tell him straight up, if I would tell you like the last person I would put money on to win that week, Phil would be one of those. It would be down there. Just because of how long it is, how many drivers you need to hit and how windy it is.

Now at the same time I'm going to say, I played with him on Monday and he had a new driver that he was hitting really well, it was much more under control. And after Monday I could believe him putting on a good performance. But he hadn't been playing great golf and, but that shows you the greatness of a great champion, it doesn't matter. When he got himself in that position, after 36 holes, it was gold good old Phil. He got it going, at one point he had a big lead, and both Saturday and Sunday he was able to create a lead and defend it.

So it's unbelievable. I really admire -- and I think I've said it before in an interview -- that at the age of 50 he's been playing on the PGA TOUR for as long or longer than I've been alive. He still has that enthusiasm and that drive to become better and beat the best. And at his age, simply it hadn't happened. You had a couple years where like Tom Watson and Greg Norman went to the Open and had a chance, which I do believe The Open would be the one

event for somebody who is older to be able to win because you can think your way around the golf course. That place, with how long it was, at the age of 50, for Phil to be able to do what he did, it's unbelievable.

Playing with him a lot, knowing how he analyzes every shot and how he's trying to get better and the changes he made in his life to be healthier and be able to still grind like he does. I mean, again, I hope that in 25 plus years I still have the same enthusiasm and the same grit to become better and it's a mark of great champions and that's the reason why he's had the career he's had.

Q. Does his ability to needle and give guys grief give him an advantage when he's playing in one of those matches like he's going to do with Bryson and Tom Brady and those guys?

JON RAHM: It's a very filtered version of what I hear usually when I'm playing with him, I'm going to tell you that. It's very different. He can get a lot funnier than that, but obviously on public TV at prime time you can't be saying certain things.

In those instances, no, I don't think it's going to be a factor. Now, knowing that Bryson has won the one Open or the one major that Phil hasn't, I feel like Bryson could push that on him. But I'm sure he'll mention the PGA, he'll mention the green jackets, he'll mention something. He'll, for sure, will try to get under his skin a little bit. But I don't think in that match it's going to make much of a difference.

Now, when we're playing in private, without cameras and without people, he does get pretty funny. But we all know who he is and how he is, right? So it's not like it really affects our play.

Q. Did he ever tell you that story about making a wager on when you would get into the top-10 in the world?

JON RAHM: Oh, yeah.

Q. So like, so was he putting pressure on you to get, to make sure you got in the top-10?

JON RAHM: No, he never came and told me, Hey, I got this bet, you got to get it done. I heard from other people that that was a bet. And for somebody who just turned pro it's a huge boost of confidence. But I have to say, he had told me, I think it was shortly before he made that bet, he did look at me and said, Jon, you're top-10 player in the world right now. And I was still in college. He did tell me that. So I'm not surprised he made the bet and I know he made it with more than one person, so...



