

TOUR Championship

Wednesday, September 2, 2020

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

MICHAEL BALIKER: We're going to get started with Jon Rahm. Jon, obviously a pretty speechless finish there for a lot of us on Sunday. You enter this week second in the FedExCup standings, fourth appearance here at East Lake. Just talk about being back in Atlanta and the challenge that this golf course represents.

JON RAHM: Mm-hmm. Well, first of all, excited to be here. Excited to be somewhere inside the top 5 and so high up, right. It's the highest I've entered this week, so really looking forward to it; feeling good on the game.

I would say that this golf course is a challenge all throughout. There's not one category I would say that stands out. Every part of your game needs to be solid.

With those Bermuda fairways, Bermudagrass, mainly the Bermuda rough, if you can keep it in the fairway you'll be able to be a lot more aggressive to certain pins, and for the most part obviously have a lot more control.

It's usually you need to ball strike it good and you need your putting to be on point, as well. So it's kind of like last week. It's not one of those where you can somehow have a weak spot and win it. You have to play good all throughout. If you don't happen to hit it that good, that's how much better the putting and chipping needs to be.

It's a tough week. It's a tough challenge. Usually it's really hot and humid. It's easy to get tired, especially after how much golf we've played. It's a battle, but the good thing is everything that we've done until now doesn't matter, and it's a winner-take-all situation.

Objective is pretty clear.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Just going back to last week, given the unique format here, you went from -- you know, if you would have started this week ninth in the standings, you go from starting this tournament at 4-under par to now 8-under par, so you pick up four strokes starting Friday morning after the win at BMW.



TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP

Just talk about the unique format here this week and how huge that was.

JON RAHM: Yeah, you still need to play really well even though you start with a lead. It's as simple as that. There's a lot of people behind us, not too far behind. If I made up three strokes in one round, four strokes up, it's not that many. It's a nice little cushion, but at the same time, it was a goal.

When I started last week, especially with the 75 in the first round, I was like, Well, I think I was ninth in the standings at that point, ninth or eighth, somewhere there, and my goal was just to try to get into the top 5. That's all I had in mind.

I was watching especially on Saturday when I finished and I saw I would have gone a little bit higher up, and then on Sunday every time I kept making a birdie I was slowly moving up and moving up and moving up.

And then, well, I knew with how well Dustin was playing I wouldn't get the No. 1 spot, but obviously I was trying to finish as high as possible knowing that being in the top 5 is crucial. It's a big difference, especially -- it's always going to be a big difference.

You know if you're seventh, eighth, ninth it's the same score, so if you're in that area it doesn't really matter. But every time you can get a little bit closer it's obviously going to be not an easier path, but obviously a better spot to be in.

I'm glad it ended the way it did, and I'm glad to be in this situation right now.

Q. I hope you're well. You guys are obviously playing for a serious amount of money this week, \$15 million first prize, \$60 million total pot. In the context of everything that's happened in the world in the last six months, is that okay? Are you comfortable with that, or do you think golf has to be a little bit careful that it doesn't seem out of touch with the vast amounts of money that are involved?

JON RAHM: Well, I mean, we can't control what happens in the world, and I certainly can't control how much we play for. The truth is the PGA TOUR and many PGA TOUR

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

players do an outstanding job with the platform that we have to help communities all around the country. We play 40-plus weeks a year, and each week we help a community.

So no, I don't feel guilty. I myself have donated a lot throughout my four years on TOUR to survivors of sometimes natural disasters, or sometimes different people might need help, and I think that's where the PGA TOUR comes in. How much money have we donated throughout the year thanks to PGA TOUR event events and how many communities we've been able to help.

So I think that's a bigger picture than just how much money one player gets. And honestly, in my case, if I were to win, yeah, the money is great, but I think we're all here to try to be the best. That is much more enticing than anything else.

Now, with that said, \$15 million, well, I would comfortably say, hopefully if I manage it possibly my kids and possibly my grandkids and even possibly my greatgrandkids might have their way paid through college.

Again, it's a much bigger picture of the platform the PGA TOUR has and what we can do with it than the material meaning of it.

Q. The top three players in the World Rankings mirrored the FedExCup standings entering the TOUR Championship here. What is it about these Playoffs that's bringing out the best in your game?

JON RAHM: I don't know. I can't tell you, honestly. When we started these Playoffs I had one goal, and it was to do the opposite that I've done in the past.

Usually I start really strong in Boston, play good in the BMW, and then kind of slack off a little bit in East Lake just because maybe I'm tired or the heat or the golf course or usually after a full year, or simply just didn't happen to play good in this tournament.

But this year I've kind of flipped it. I started poorly in Boston, finished strong, finished really strong at the BMW, so hopefully I can have a solid week this week. I can only explain it personally, honestly. I think what's happened to a lot of us is after quarantine and after taking so long off, it just took a while to get everything moving properly, everything working the right way.

And there's also an adjustment period to everything that we have to do. You fly in, you get tested, then you go to the hotel or the house, hope you test negative, then you go back, get your lanyard, then get registered and get the

week started.

So I think there's a certain adjustment period, and it took me a while to get used to it. And even though I won Memorial I still had some weeks where I just felt a little off. I think also getting used to playing without spectators, it's a big thing.

So I think just having the best players in the world usually have the bigger crowds, and we slowly have been able to get used to that. I think that's why now we're all peaking at the right time. Just a theory.

Honestly I can't tell you what's in everybody's mind, but at least that's what's in mine.

Q. Just a scouting report on Winged Foot. It looked like you went there yesterday, and just your impressions of it and so forth.

JON RAHM: Well, I honestly went because it didn't seem like flying from Chicago to Phoenix, spending one night at home, and flying all the way to the East Coast and then fly back for five years and then fly back to New York, just didn't seem like the best thing to do for my body.

So yeah, we went. I had Kelly as my caddie for the day. I just wanted to see the golf course. At least get a feel of the layout, some of the tee shots, just so when I go in the U.S. Open it's not all brand new.

And I did play early in the morning and rainy, so the first eight holes were extremely, extremely long. That's all I can say. It was also softer than what they're expecting to have the U.S. Open, so I didn't spend much time putting or chipping around the greens just because they were a lot slower and softer and some shots were obviously a lot easier than they're going to be in the U.S. Open.

I was just trying to get an idea on the lines off the tees and just familiarity with the golf course. All I can say is it's a heck of a golf course. The greens kind of gave me an Oakmont vibe: extremely difficult, extremely undulated.

But I think all 16 out of the 18 greens are all sloped back to front. There's always a run-up on the front. At least it seems a little more fair than Oakmont might look.

You can hold all the greens, even if you don't hit a perfect shot. It's just a difficult course. It's long. It's narrow. It's undulated. You just need to play really good golf.

I'm not shocked that the winning score last time was 5-over par, and if it gets firm like some of the USGA guys told me they want it to be, I don't see how any of us shoot under

par, or if we shoot under par it would be somebody winning by a lot.

Q. The number of players kind of in the Player of the Year race, yourself, Dustin, Webb, J.T.; what would be your pick for Player of the Year?

JON RAHM: Well, we have J.T., Dustin, Webb, me, and Morikawa with two wins, right? And Brendon Todd. Morikawa does have a major; Dustin has a WGC. I mean, everybody has won great events.

I will say being as fair as possible, I think it comes to who -- if any one of us wins this week. That's what I would say. It seems like pretty much all those names I said are 1 through 6 in the FedExCup, so you like the chances of that.

So I think that's what it comes to, who gets a third, that elusive third win. Hopefully it's me, I hope. But yeah, if any of those names that I just said wins, I think they will be a deserving Player of the Year.

I know Brendon Todd has won twice, as well. I don't want to forget about that. I would say whoever wins out of who I've named would be a deserving Player of the Year.

Q. A couple questions about playing with Dustin again so soon after the playoff. Is that an exciting prospect for you, and do you think you bring out the best in each other?

JON RAHM: I think so. We've played together a lot, and I do think we bring out the best in each other. I mean, Dustin is a great guy to play with. He has a very similar game to mine. We actually see shots very similarly, shot shape and strategy.

I usually like playing practice rounds with him because I can learn a little bit. But he's fast. He's quiet. He's fun if he wants to talk. His caddie, A.J., is really fun, as well. It'll be a good environment.

I wouldn't be surprised if we both play good this week if we're playing together. I honestly don't think he's thinking about last week at all knowing him. He probably moved on as soon as that playoff was over, and I'm expecting him to come in with fireworks and come out strong.

Q. As a guy who's kind of an emotional player, what do you take away watching someone like him who is so low key outwardly on the course? Do you take anything away from that?

JON RAHM: No, because we're different people. I would never be able to do what he does, and I don't think he can

do what I do, meaning I wouldn't be able to play so nonchalant like he is. If I hit a bad shot you're going to be able to tell, and if I hit a good shot like I did on Sunday, you'll be able to tell, as well.

I don't know, and he also wouldn't be able to play with what goes on in my head. Obviously that steadiness has helped him be an extremely consistent player and win a lot.

If I had something to say obviously with what I do still maybe still take care of certain aspects of my mental work on the course, but I think I've done a really good job, especially in the Playoffs. Especially that Sunday. I did hit bad shots. I hit shots. I missed shots.

I probably hit one of the worst wedge shots I could hit on 11 from 82 yards to about 30 feet, straight into the wind. I didn't hit my best shot, but still I stayed focused on the task at hand and got it done.

I know there's going to be some setbacks in my future. I wish it was a perfect progressive curve all the time, but it's not going to be, so I'm aware of that. But I know I'm improving. If anything I can take from him it's that just perseverance and the stillness he has, which even under pressure he can maintain that composure and that coolness and get it done. Because what he did with a few holes to go, get that up-and-down on 17, hit that shot on 18 and make the putt, it's the mark of a true champion.

There's a lot to learn from him.

Q. Have you had a chance to watch what happened Sunday and the fireworks, your putt, everything that went into it? And if so, what were your emotions watching it?

JON RAHM: I still can't believe it. It's as simple as that. I played one of the most solid 18 holes I've played in a very long time, missed two fairways, missed one green, and had a lot of good birdie looks, a lot of good birdie looks. Just solid and calm and had a lot of fun out there.

For everything to finish the way it did, it's hard to believe. When I made that putt at Torrey Pines I never thought I would ever get a moment like that on the golf course, and luckily enough, I've been able to.

It's hard to explain, honestly. I can't. I think the one feeling I go back to is just the satisfaction of winning more than once on the PGA TOUR in one year, finally, after three of being close many times and only doing it once, being able to win multiple times this year.

It's a goal I had set up for myself and I'm really excited.



That's where my mind keeps going to. But it's hard to explain the emotions of the moment because -- my reaction says it all. That's all I can say. It's a pretty unique feeling. You dream of moments like that, and to have been able to do it, it's pretty cool.

Q. What does it say about the PGA TOUR that while other sports leagues have struggled - some of them have had work stoppages - what does it say about the PGA TOUR, the traveling circus around the United States has done so well since you've come back from the COVID-19 break? Who is that a testament to? How have you guys done it?

JON RAHM: I think it's a testament to everybody involved in the events, everyone on the PGA TOUR for supplying everything we need to make sure we're not putting ourselves at risk. And then, yes, we do have a bubble, but not everybody is staying at the same hotel. We're staying in houses. You can still go to restaurants. You've got to find food somehow.

I think it's a testament to all the players and caddies out there that have been as careful as possible to have so many individuals go in different places, different weeks, and still stay clean for so long.

We see other sports struggling with it, and we all keep our mindset even when we go home. I mean, me, myself, my life right now is basically a bedroom either in my house, a house on the road, or a hotel, golf course, airport.

That's what my life consists of. Me and my wife, Kelley, are doing that ever single week, and I think everybody is doing the same thing, even when we go home. Right?

You go home, I would like to hang out with my friends and I would like to do a lot of things and go to restaurants and have a good time and a weekend off, but I can't. You can't risk it, because I know I can test positive and indirectly put somebody else in danger.

So I don't want to do that. I think everybody, not only the 30 here, but the 150 that have shown up every single week have had that mindset. How many positives have we had, less than 10, something like that?

Q. Yeah. 11, I think.

JON RAHM: Yeah. Out of how many thousands of tests we've done. It's clear that if you do what you're supposed to do, sports can go on. At least on the athlete's part. Spectators it's a lot harder. There's a lot of masses. But sports could go on if the athletes are doing what they're supposed to do, and think we're a perfect example of it.

Q. Are you surprised that we got this far so far?

JON RAHM: Yes. I'm not going to lie, when I saw all these -- pretty much 20 percent of the tests were positive country-wide, almost worldwide, and with how many other sports were having trouble, I was certain, especially after Harbour Town, I was just keeping in mind, I'm like, nobody should be surprised if one week we show up and there's 30 positives. Nobody should.

And I'm shocked that we got seven one week, and I think that was Travelers after Harbour Town, and since then you have very few cases. Sometimes it's even false positives that test negative after the fact, as well.

Again, I think we can congratulate each other and everybody else for the good job we've done, because I am surprised we've been able to go on without any single problems.

Q. Justin Thomas last year talked about the two-shot lead starting the tournament, it affected him more than he thought it would. Just curious what your thoughts on the format last year was, if it affected you, and do you see it pursuing at all being possibly a help versus leading for the last four days basically?

JON RAHM: I couldn't hear part of that. You said the contrast of the --

Q. Yeah, the format. How did it affect you last year at all, just starting, just kind of pursuing. And then J.T. said the format affected him more than he thought it would. Do you think there's an advantage to pursuing versus being the leader going into the event, even though it's a small lead?

JON RAHM: Oh, there's a difference, yeah. You essentially have the pressure of the FedExCup on your shoulders four days in a row, even though you still need to play really good golf for four rounds.

It's in your mind. Right? We're constantly getting reminded, you're No. 1, you're No. 2, or your No. 3. I think if you're behind it almost helps just because you have -- you already know where the leader is at.

In the past with the old format and all the point differences and all that, you knew if you were top 5 you could win, but then you had all these millions of possible combinations if this person does this and this one does that -- it was a little more confusing for us and for the fans.

So I think there's more pressure on whoever is No. 1 this



way, but the objective and what you need to do is clear. Whatever score you're at is where you're going to finish. It's as simple as that. It hasn't affected me. Last year I came in I think I was in sixth. Started good the first day I was playing with Rory, who ended up winning by four, and after the first round I just didn't play very well, so I got what I deserved.

But at least like I said, you know where you stand and you know where you have to go. It's as simple as that. I think we all have the same goal when we came in, which is if you're not leading, or even if you're leading, try to have the lowest four-round total, and that will most likely guarantee you're going to win if you're up there.

I know that's what Rory did last year, that's what I'm going to try to do this year, and the main difference is -- the objective is clear. I think it's easy to understand for us, for the fans, and at the end of the day we're entertainers, so it's what's easiest to understand for everybody.

Q. East Lake was the boyhood home of Bobby Jones; how has this course stood the test of time?

JON RAHM: They've done a great job. I mean, I love all these traditional golf courses. If they're not 100, they're close to 100 years old, and it's fun. It's really fun. You can tell the traditional design for the most part. All the greens are narrow and then they open up in the back. Very sloped.

You can tell obviously many years ago when the greens weren't as fast they could put some dicey pin locations out here. Right now they have to be a little bit more careful.

And it's always a true testament of good golf course design when it stands the test of time. If we all started even par this week, usually, what, somewhere 12-, 13-, 14-under wins the tournament, and that is with absolute perfect greens.

Usually when you have greens this good, people are just blowing the roof off the place. It's a tough golf course. We do have some converted par-5s into par-4s like it is -- I think 14, the old 5, and still works. It's just a great golf course.

I can't say much bad about it. It's just such a good track design-wise. It keeps you on your toes on every single shot, and you need to think your way around. And even some holes that look easy, you think some holes like 3, 4, and 5 where you're like, Oh, just put it in the fairway, wedge it on the green -- well, not on 4, but the other two, and you make birdie, they're not the easiest. You need to be accurate on every single shot.

Q. Is there a hole that you think could be the turning point kind of like a 12 at Augusta that everybody is going to have to play well to win?

JON RAHM: There's a lot of them, yeah. I would say what I've done in the past, I haven't played 14, 15, 16 the best I would say, and obviously that's a key stretch of the golf course, because then 17 and 18 -- so if you get a good drive on 17 and 18, you're looking at possible birdies. 17 you have a wedge in, and on 18 it's a par-5. You could have up to maybe a 5-, 6-iron depending on the year.

You need to play those holes that are tough good. If you can play those three even par, I think you're gaining a stroke on the field.

But there's so many of them. You can say any single hole on the course, and you need to play good all of them. But in my case, I would say that stretch is one I need to probably do a little bit better on.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports