

TOUR Championship

Tuesday, August 31, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Jon Rahm to the virtual interview room here at the TOUR Championship at East Lake. You're entering the week No. 4 in the FedExCup standings, maybe just give us some opening comments on the status of your game. Obviously a little weather today at East Lake so maybe what your plan is for today and tomorrow heading into Thursday's opening round.

JON RAHM: No plans. Not right now, at least. Get through media first, get some food, and then we'll see what the weather does. Hopefully we get a break today to get some work done, just even if it's just hit some balls, hit some putts, and get the body moving, just make a couple swings. It doesn't need to be anything very detailed or very long. If I can get out and see some holes that would be great. If not, I know the course hasn't changed the last year.

So, yeah, excited. That's all I can say. Playing good golf. Playing good in the playoffs. So getting here in a good spot, a few shots back off the lead with the mission clear in mind. So looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: At this time we'll turn it over to questions.

Q. Rory McIlroy made some interesting comments last week about course setups, how a lot of TOUR setups are the same and how he likes that because you don't have to spend time preparing for new courses. He likes that. What is your feeling on that?

JON RAHM: I haven't really given it much thought. I can say that. It is true that both Liberty National and Caves Valley were set up very similar, I believe. A lot of it due to the fact that it's the time of year where there's not really dry in those areas. It can rain a lot. And both courses were similar type of grass and, you know, just played the same, really, I mean, just try to hit the short grass. It's going to plug in the fairway. Be aggressive because it's going to plug on the green, right? So I don't know, I like variety, to be honest. I think when you're trying to find the best



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players in the world you got to have variety in golf. That's one of the reasons why I love going to Europe and playing different golf and different golf courses just because I feel like as a player it challenges you to adapt yourself to the golf course and it's just one more challenge that we got to overcome as players.

So I don't mind it either way, but if I had to choose, I would like to go to different courses, extremely different courses every single time. That would be amazing. But when you're playing in similar parts of the country, it's going to be very difficult to accomplish that. So I guess the one benefit of this is when you're playing this many weeks in a row it's easier and better for the mind and body when you don't have to adjust too much, and I guess I can see both points. In my case, I like the diversity.

Q. Have you thought about what you would do with \$15,000,000 if you were to win it?

JON RAHM: Save it and invest it responsibly, unlike any other 27 year old ever said. I said it before, we get this question every time. I've been very fortunate that at my young age I make more money than I ever thought I could make. I've never done this for the money, but obviously, it's an amazing bonus and even already I can already afford a great life for my family and the future of my family.

So if I haven't bought anything extravagant yet, like, yeah, we live in a very nice house and we have some nice cars, but nothing out of the very ordinary, I can't really think of it, nothing that would like surprise anybody or raise any eyebrows, to be honest, nothing that's that special.

Q. What's your opinion of the staggered scoring system this week?

JON RAHM: Oh, how it goes? Well, I like it much better than the last one in the sense of that you know where you're standing and you know what you have to do. I'm not going to say too much because I know my words are going to be possibly, let's say, muddled to the extreme and almost make it sound about something different than what I feel, but I'm not the biggest supporter of the full format itself. What I do like is the fact that you understand what's going on and what's going to happen and who is on the lead and what you have to do to win, but I don't agree with every part of the format this week.

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Q. What is the worst thing a fan has ever said to you and at what point do fans step over the line?

JON RAHM: Oh, I've heard many things. Many things in Spanish that I don't want to translate so somebody learns something bad. Bad things about my mom, bad things about my wife. Nobody said anything about my son yet, but I can imagine that's coming in the Ryder Cup. I can't in good conscience say what some people have said. I don't know what goes through somebody's mind to say something like that, but I don't know. Some bad things.

But I got to say, that is 1 percent of all the public out there. Everybody else is great. They create a great atmosphere. There's just going to be the usual people that, whether they had a few too many drinks or they're getting influenced by their friends or they're just simply trying to be funny, they're going to say some things that are just maybe not nicest to hear.

But at the same time, as athletes, we're not the only ones that deal with it. Every other athlete in every other sport has to deal with it. In team sports, every time you have an away game, you have a whole stadium full of people yelling things at you. So I'm sure other sports have heard way worse things than I have on the golf course so far.

Q. How was the last round at BMW with Sergio? You spoke about the Sergio situation with the FedExCup cup, Ryder Cup a lot of pressure on both.

JON RAHM: I had a great time with Sergio. We're good friends and to play, to have two Spanish players together in that final group was fun, especially knowing that he had to play good to make it. And I think you can tell on that last bunker shot, I think he thought he had to make it, make that bunker shot on 18 to make it to this week. I wasn't sure. I had enough with my own stuff going on.

But he definitely dropped some crazy dimes that day of good golf. It's a great atmosphere. We had a lot of fun. And hoping he plays good this week and it will be great for him to start playing really good golf like he has headed to the Ryder Cup. I mean, I don't know if it's close, making it point-wise, or if he can qualify, but I mean, it's Sergio Garcia. It's the guy with the most amount of points in European team history. I would take a guess, bold claim here, and he might be a pick. He might, if he doesn't make it. That would be my guess.

Q. Having played one Ryder Cup, what did you learn about playing in it that you didn't know prior to that?

JON RAHM: Oh, it's tough to put it into words. I can say

that the atmosphere at that Ryder Cup has helped me better be ready for majors because you always think about a certain person or majors or certain moments, but that Ryder Cup is unlike any other and when each shot counts as much as it does and when you're playing for a whole country, and continent in our case, it's a very different sense, right? And having so many people around you wanting you to win and you wanting to do it for them, kind of helped me better prepare to really just focus on what I have to do, which at the end of the day, if I play my best golf and get my match done for myself, it's the best thing for everybody. So it kind of helped, let's say, focus and narrow that focus a little bit in certain moments and it's helped on my performance in majors a little bit just because I kind of learned from those mistakes I made at the Ryder Cup.

But God, it's very different. The feeling on the first tee is not even close to similar to what I felt in a regular event or even a major. It's very unique. Still I don't think I remember hitting the ball on that first one because I pretty much blacked out.

Q. I learned something recently reading a Spanish language article about you that I didn't know, which is that you're from the Basque country in Spain. I understand very little about that, just the basic stuff, so I wanted to put it to you: What role does where you come from play in your sense of self identity? Hopefully it's not too complex a question, but what is being from Basque country sort of mean to you?

JON RAHM: Oh, God, I feel like, God, I don't want to give a history lesson. Listen, the Basque country, it's, God, I don't know how to put the word, let's say, state in Spain, that it's a little different to the rest. We have our own language, our own traditions, and even certain tax law are a little bit different. So even though Spain is very diverse, there is a difference between Basque and Spanish people.

Now, historically, there has been some, let's say, friction between each other. At one point the Basque people had a terrorist team that did not do such great things in consequence of the dictatorship that wanted to completely abolish anything that was Basque, I mean, it was a fascist movement, it happened all over the country.

But it's tough because I'm not, for those who know about the history, I'm not anti-Spanish, obviously. I'm Basque as much as I'm Spanish. I represent Spain all over the world and it's unfortunate the fact that I have to keep saying that every time something like this comes up. But Basque people are very hardheaded, talking, very loyal, and very passionate, and that's kind of something that really just describes me really, really well. And I'm proud to be where



I'm from. I feel like it's a sense of family that is very unique and I'm proud to be a little bit different in that sense, growing up in the Basque culture and Basque language and a bit of everything, right? So it's a sense of pride more than anything. I get to call myself Basque, which is a cool thing, and I love it. But I feel like it's the same way as a person from Madrid gets to call himself a person from Madrid and is proud to be from Madrid. I feel like all of us get a sense of pride. To be from where we're from, it's just ours has a bit of a complicated history.

Q. What are your thoughts on Patrick Cantlay's game and how difficult will he be to track down here this week?

JON RAHM: I mean, last week is last week, and it's past. So I have hard time believing he's going to shoot 27 under this week, let's just say that, because it's not a golf course that usually gives up that many birdies. But I feel confident. This is a ball-striker's golf course and my ball striking has been very, very good, and I'm only four shots back, so it's only a one-shot difference each day, and we all know that four shots can be gone very, very quickly.

So if I get off to a fast start tomorrow, on Thursday, it will be a good start, get a couple birdies on, and we won't be too far away. So I'm confident in what can be done. Obviously Patrick has to worry about his own game, but I feel like I'm doing the right things and I'm giving myself a really good chance.

Q. How significant was your singles victory over Tiger at the Ryder Cup in propelling you to the success you've had since then?

JON RAHM: I don't know, I think it's a little bit of to what I answered before. There was a lot of mental strain going on for me for that week because I was not playing my best golf and I'm playing Tiger Woods on the Sunday, my first Sunday in the Ryder Cup, and even though we had a lead, I was nervous because you don't know what can happen if the first few matches are lost. I mean, the dynamic changes and you can happen what happened in 1999 at Brookline or what happened at Medinah, right, big change can happen very quickly.

So it was a lot of mental strength to just really focus and almost forget that I was playing Tiger Woods and just play my game and try to beat just a player in front of me, not thinking about who he was and what he's done.

Now, that has helped me in the sense of when I'm playing golf in big events, when it's easy to start thinking about different things, just focus on what you have to do, which is the most important thing. I believe Bobby Jones or Ben

Hogan or one of those great players of all time said the most important shot in golf is the next one and that is the most important thing is the next shot I hit, period. And it's helped me a couple of times draw from those memories and those experiences to get better at that. It's certainly helped at Torrey Pines this year.

Q. You spoke this summer some about having a club foot as a youngster. When did you realize that that was actually a good, good for a golf swing and not a hindrance?

JON RAHM: Well, listen, it's not like it's good for my golf swing. I realized that there's some things my body can do and certain things my body can't do. So I have the golf swing I have because of the club foot. It's not like I ever tried to just, I was too young to know what was going on. I mean, it's props to my teacher to realize that, Eduardo Celles, back in the day, to realize that I was always going to be a better golfer with a three-quarter swing. He didn't know why but he knew when I took it to parallel I was out of balance and I couldn't hit it straight and at three-quarters I could really hit it good and then I learned how to create power from there.

Now I played other sports that abilitated my ability or -- what's the word -- facilitated me to create more of that power from that short distance. For those who don't know, I've watched Jai Alai, the one thing with the big hook. I played the same sport with a wooden paddle, which if you see video, it's called pala, pa-l-a, they literally take it to hip height, maybe a little bit more, and hit it from there, which is very similar motion to what I do and very similar motion to a drill I used to do with Eduardo.

So it's not like it's an advantage, but I learned to use those, not limitations, those guidelines that your body's giving you to know what it should do and shouldn't do. Many people tried to get rid of the bowed wrist and I always resisted it because it never felt comfortable when I can barely move my hands that way. So there's certain things that I learned later on when I started going to TPI and Dave Phillips actually started talking with me about what was going on, but it's a whole sequence and chain of things that the one little thing with my ankle and my foot is, basically falls apart. So it's a really good thing, the more I learned, the more I've been able to workout in an appropriate manner to work at certain muscle groups and certain parts of my body to be able to swing better and stronger and more efficiently. So it's a whole thing that I think it all starts with the props to my teacher in Spain, Eduardo, that realized that I needed to have a three quarter swing, but I wouldn't say it's an advantage, it's just I learned from something that could have been taken as a negative and I think that's a lesson, even though if it's something I was born with

doesn't necessarily make it a bad thing.

Q. What age were you when you played this pala?

JON RAHM: Oh, God, I did a lot of sports, up until I was 14, which I think is at 14 when I started dedicated solely to golf. I don't know how many years, but I played in school, I played in -- I didn't compete much of it, but I did go to training. Golf took all my weekends away, so I didn't compete that on that. But I did play another version in school up until later on with a tennis racquet and then a rubber ball almost like a racquetball as well on the same court. So it's -- if you see me in person I can spell all the sports, it was very similar.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you very much.

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