

# The American Express

Wednesday, January 18, 2023

La Quinta, California, USA

PGA WEST Pete Dye Stadium Course

## Jon Rahm

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started. We would like to welcome the 2018 champion Jon Rahm to the interview room here at The American Express. Thank for joining us. Already off to great start this calendar year with the win in Hawaii. Just a few comments on how much that kind of sets the pace for 2023.

JON RAHM: I don't know how to say it. It's obviously very rewarding to done, but to get it done this early in the year it's nice. The only thing I could keep thinking of is, I mentioned how much I love that week, so I could already tell Kelley and the people that help us with traveling, Well, book the hotels for next year because we're for sure coming back.

It's always nice to get a good bunch of FedExCup points early in the year. I choose not to play much in the fall, only played once, so that's where you can rack up some points and maybe make this stretch of the year easier.

But to start 2023 with a win, let's just say it maximizes my opportunities to get as many wins as possible. It's a great start. I said it a few times too, I've seen a few players win that event and then go on a tear for a year. Like Cam Smith being the last one last year.

So I'm hoping it's one of those that can start properly and get a couple wins and hopefully a major in there.

THE MODERATOR: I mentioned the win here. You actually had top-15 finishes I think in your last three starts here. So obviously a place that I would imagine you're glad to be back to. Just some thoughts on being back here this week.

JON RAHM: Yeah. I'm thinking that last year's comments might come bite me in the ass. Although it was more venting off on the golf course.

I think for me it's obviously a great event and it's got a lot of history with Arnie's legacy here as well. I've loved it every time I've come here, despite what I said on the golf course last year. That's just a player letting out some frustration.



It's also a great way to get back into golf after Maui. Meaning, you are playing a golf course with a lot of uneven lies, a lot of crosswinds, it's very unusual golf to be playing in. It's very easy to compensate to basically make the best of the shot with the wind. You're playing very slow, grainy greens. It can take some time to adjust to maybe let's say PGA TOUR golf on a regular basis on the main lands.

So I think this is perfect week to kind of get some competition rounds in more normal circumstances. Usually the weather's beautiful here. You might get more or less wind on some days, but the golf courses are usually in absolute perfect condition. So you can basically make sure all your new equipment is proper. Make sure if you've been working on some changes in your swing you're testing it under pressure with some easier conditions. So I think it's a great tune-up for what the rest of the year could be.

Especially this year when you have so many big events coming up early in the year. I've always thought it's a great way to reaffirm what I've done until now. Especially going to a week like Torrey. I mean, it will be hard to go from playing the Plantation Course to then going to Torrey Pines. They're complete opposite golf courses.

So I'm glad you have an event like this one to basically settle in. Hopefully get another win like I did a few years ago and get the year started properly. Besides being a great event with a lot of history, it's a great way to test yourself and reaffirm what you've been doing.

THE MODERATOR: With that we'll open it up and take a few questions.

**Q. We've made a lot about the fact of the strength of field here this year. I think the PGA TOUR is saying it's the strongest field they have had here this century. Some of that is obviously guys like you have played here fairly consistently. But when you see something like that or you see five of the top seven in the world at a place, does that grab your attention?**

JON RAHM: Of course. You want to beat the best. And I'm glad people are coming. It's good that more players are trying more events. I think it's due to the some of the



new events going on during the year. The fact that we have all those big events that we have to play if we want to earn that PIP reward. That opens up to all those three, let's say lower events that you need to play, it opens peoples' eyes to maybe some events they haven't played in the past because your schedule changes a little bit. I know I'm one of those. It actually kind of tied me up later on the year. So this event really serves a lot of purpose in more than one way.

So I don't think I'm the only one thinking that. I know Patrick has been coming here. He almost won here a few years ago as well. So there's a lot of big names that always come. But it's good to see more players. Like I said, courses are always in perfect shape, perfect condition. It's a great, great way to come and tune-up everything you need.

**Q. In terms of those courses, you've been on I think the same rotation for a long time. Which starts at La Quinta, then goes to Nicklaus and then Stadium. When you think of those three courses, is that a good rotation for you to start with?**

JON RAHM: I wouldn't know what to tell you.

**Q. You don't know anything else.**

JON RAHM: The one thing I know is, I mean, if you're somewhere between 20- and 25-under and I'm pretty sure 70 percent of that is done in two of the courses. You got to -- I think the year I won I shot 16-under between La Quinta and Nicklaus.

**Q. You shot 62 the first round over there.**

JON RAHM: Yeah. Ended up at 20- or 21-under. So the Stadium Course, if the wind picks up, can show some teeth, that can happen. You need to shoot low on those other two courses, no matter how it goes.

But we have seen some people in the past -- if you stand on Stadium and have a good day and shoot 5-, 6-under you definitely have a bit of an advantage towards the rest going into some of the lower-scoring golf courses. I think it was Adam Hadwin who's Saturday round was at La Quinta and shot 59 to shoot up the leaderboard. That can happen. But again, I don't know anything else, so I can't really put my opinion on that.

**Q. When you transitioned from playing on the TOUR to winning on the TOUR was there a single factor that got you over the top and kind of kept you there?**

JON RAHM: No. Nothing. I play to win every single time.

So there's no -- I wouldn't know what to say to that. It's just the fact of getting it done. Getting the first win is obviously a huge bonus if you can do it early. I think I did it on my 16th, 17th start as a pro on the PGA TOUR. It's early in someone's career, so that gives you a lot of confidence.

But it's basically doing what you already believed you could do. At least in my case. So just more confidence moving forward. I didn't do anything different. From the first time I teed it up and in the future, first day on Thursday my intention is to win and that's never going to change.

**Q. But there wasn't any incremental change? The short game got better, the driver got more accurate, anything that really dialed in when you made that transition?**

JON RAHM: Transition from like to pro?

**Q. No, playing to winning on TOUR.**

JON RAHM: No, no, that's a mental state more than anything else. I've improved as a player in some aspects, but nothing that I've changed to have to win. I don't think -- no, I wouldn't be able to tell you. I don't know.

**Q. Being from San Diego you talked about Torrey Pines. You've always been so confident and comfortable there. After winning the U.S. Open does that make it even more so or does that change anything about playing at Torrey Pines?**

JON RAHM: That week it played so different to how it usually plays that I can't really draw that much from that. Aside from the fact that I know I can get it done there.

I mean, I've been able to win two tournaments there and every time I've teed it up at Torrey I've had a solid chance of winning the tournament. So, yeah, you can draw from that.

Obviously a lot of great players have had a golf course that they have been able to win a lot of times. Tiger did it multiple places. Arnie did it here. It's something that when you are comfortable on a golf course it's easier to play to an extent. I don't know. I know it suits my strengths. I know it suits my game really, really well. So I know that if I play well I'm going to have perfect chance of winning.

I wouldn't know. I don't know how to explain. It's a special feeling, obviously. But after winning the U.S. Open obviously it gives me more confidence.

**Q. Last year in the tournament it went to playoff. Couple guys who hadn't won on TOUR. You were right**



**in the mix. I know it came down -- it was getting dark. It was dark when they finished the playoff. What do you remember about the ending of that tournament last year?**

JON RAHM: Well, I remember not make being birdie on 18 when I needed to. I remember making a few mistakes during the day that could have allowed me to have a better chance. It was great to see Luke List -- Luke List was -- I think my first PGA TOUR member round was with Luke List at the then Safeway Open. Both of the players in the playoff are guys with immense talent. It was good to see one of them get their first win.

Plus that unique situation with their tee shots ending up in the same spot and having to do a weird drop and the whole situation. And then Luke hitting it to a foot. On what could be considered an easy shot, but it's gotten the best of some people in the past. I've definitely seen a few spin it back in the water. So it was great to see him get it done.

And it was great for Will to then go on and draw from the experience from a playoff and get it done in Memphis. I don't know, for some reason that event always gives you a thrilling ending. I've had the luck of being part of a few of them in both sides. Because the year Marc Leishman won I had a chance to tie him again for a playoff and didn't make the putt. So I've been on both sides of those endings, but, yeah, for some reason Torrey always brings the excitement. And that speaks to the greatness of the golf course and tournament.

**Q. Sort of random, but the promotions already begun for the Netflix series that's coming. Did you have any part in that and how interested are you to watch it?**

JON RAHM: No, I'm not going to be in the documentary. I doubt it. The only thing I said that could be used that I was okay with, because I wasn't a part of it, is when they were taping Tony Finau's foundation event in Utah which I was a part of. Obviously I want to support Tony as much as I can. He's a good friend of mine. So I'm not going to be having them cut out something that's important.

I'll be interested in watching it, yeah. I think my whole mindset was I wasn't really interested on it the first year and I would like to see what kind of product they're putting out there before I think about it. It's as simple as that.

**Q. Callaway's drivers won the first two events of the TOUR season. You obviously won with it at Sentry. Curious to know what have you seen from the new product that in your opinion makes it better than the previous?**

JON RAHM: What I've been saying, because performance-wise it feels on par with the first few drivers. I've loved every single driver I've had from Callaway. It's the strongest part of my game. So if anything can make it better I'm going to try to make it better. I've loved every single one.

But this driver, this Paradym driver, being a different look to what Callaway's done in the past, I can't shake the fact -- well, not shake. I can't help myself but to talk about how good it feels at impact. I don't get caught up on the sound or other things, assuming the performance is good. The impact through the ball even when I mishit it is such a good feeling and I don't know why. I wouldn't know how to explain it. But that is something that it's a positive added to the driver on top of obviously all the great things.

I can't really get into the engineering and technology that goes into it, but I can imagine it's very, very hard to have a product that really works, especially for somebody like me with how good I've driven it the last two years, and have to come up with something that is improving in any kind of way.

It just almost feels like, with the impact being so good, the only logical conclusion to me is that the sweet spot is getting bigger and bigger. Therefore your average distance is going to be higher and you're going to be a little bit straighter. That's all I can say.

But besides being an aesthetically really beautiful driver I don't know what it is with the impact. I don't know what the hell they have done, but it feels amazing.

**Q. You've always said you liked playing in the southwest. Phoenix, here, San Diego. That's a front-loaded schedule for you to start 2023. Has it been an issue in putting together a schedule this year because of the designated tournaments or has it just been minor tweaks?**

JON RAHM: It hasn't been an issue, no. I mean, they kind of -- how do I say it? In the past we've had a lot of freedom on what we wanted to play. And we still do. The only reason for us to want to play all of this is the PIP reward, let's be honest. And the fact that they're bigger events and bigger purses. We all want that.

So it's similar to the Rolex Series events in Europe. They're basically giving you all these big events. It's a lot easier to work around it.

I chose to play only once in the fall so now I need to play 19 events this year. I'm playing all these elevated ones, I had to add two more. So it was a very simple way to

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decide. I think I'm going to get it done by playing here and Torrey Pines. Which, to think of Torrey Pines as a lesser event to me is mind blowing. But it's, in a weird way, it made it easier, because the decision was done for us. Is it everything I would have done in the past? No. But I welcome the change. Change can be really, really good. So I'm looking forward to playing some of the events.

One of my favorite courses in tournaments has always been Travelers. I just haven't been able to go because it's always after the Open and that time of year I would be going to Europe and playing Irish Open and Scottish Open -- or Spanish Open sometimes using that date. So this time I will be going to play. So we'll see how it goes.

The RBC Heritage, I think my wife Kelley loved that event more than I did. She had such a good time in Hilton Head island. I didn't play bad, but I think I have some unfinished business on that golf course. Again, unbelievable quality golf course with a lot of history.

So I'm getting to play two amazingly good events that maybe in the past I wouldn't have thanks to this situation.

So again, I welcome the change. And in a simple way, giving up some of that freedom was nice. Because it is less of a headache thinking of what to do and what not to do. It was very, very easy to figure out what to play.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Jon. Thank you for your time hope to see you right back here Sunday afternoon.

JON RAHM: Let's hope so.

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