

# Honda Classic

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Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Resort

## Rickie Fowler

### Press Conference



DOUG MILNE: We'd like to welcome the 2017 Honda Classic champion, Rickie Fowler. Rickie, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. Quick little anecdote, I got a chuckle outside when you were signing autographs and the woman said, "welcome to Jupiter," and your comment was, "well, I've actually been here for about 13 years now." Just some thoughts on being back here at the Honda Classic and obviously kind of a home game for you.

RICKIE FOWLER: It is. After being on the road for about five and a half weeks, it's nice to be sleeping in my own bed. I've always enjoyed this event, one, being at home. Like you talked about, I've been down here for 12, almost 13 years now, and I enjoy the golf course from playing junior events here and then on to playing the Honda. It's right in front of you. It tells you what you need to do. It's a definite challenge, and like I said, I've always enjoyed the challenge. Nice to be at home but playing a tournament this week.

DOUG MILNE: Just an update on wife, baby, about three months old now.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, she's just over three months. Once she got to double digits or 10 weeks I started going in month talk. I can't get through as far as the quick math doesn't really add up when people say, she's 37 weeks or -- just give me months or whatever. I guess she'd be 13 or 14 weeks. But she's just over three months.

**Q. How has fatherhood kind of put things in perspective? You're going through a time now that you're probably not happy with with the way things have gone the last couple years, but does that put things in perspective and show what priorities are when you go through tough times?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I feel like I've always been good at looking at things as far as either glass half full or understanding there's a lot more to life than just playing golf and what happens out here. It makes things a lot easier when you're playing well, but playing poor golf doesn't mean that you're unhappy or things at home are

bad or anything like that.

Things are awesome. Wife and little one, enjoying that. It's definitely a big change. I have to be a little more efficient with time and how it's spent, when and how and where, but definitely have enjoyed it. It was a big -- it was very nice to be able to have them on the road for those five and a half weeks with all of us being together. It's not easy traveling with a little one, hopping around houses to hotels and different stuff like that.

Yeah, just going through a learning process of doing things a little bit differently now, and talking about the golf, yeah, definitely not where we've wanted to be, but there's at least been some highlights here and there to keep pulling us along.

I'm excited about this week. I'm starting to feel a little more comfortable with some stuff. A couple weeks ago had to work on some big grip changes, getting into a very weak position, needed to strengthen that and get away or into a better spot. So that was more of a mental battle, trusting that and moving forward.

Yeah, like I said earlier, it's nice to be home sleeping in your own bed and teeing it up at a place where I've had success.

**Q. Brooks was saying he likes a course that challenges you and is more around par than you're winning at 20-under, 25. Where do you stand on that difficult course where you're sort of grinding more than everyone is birdieing every hole?**

RICKIE FOWLER: I would much prefer the grind and scores not being as low. Typically Riv is not a course that scores are that low, and it's not like it played that easy. But Joaquin decided to drive it really well, hit his irons nicely, make some putts and get up-and-down when he missed greens, and that's how you win at Riv.

The same thing can happen at a course like this. But typically it's not a golf course where guys really run away and shoot very low. Sometimes you'll see someone get off to a hot start for two days, but typically it doesn't really run



much on the weekends or the score doesn't really keep going further under par.

It's just a good test. It tests you off the tee. Second shots or approach shots, it's not like you have a bunch of scoring opportunities with par-5s. It'll wear you down if you kind of get going the wrong direction.

Like Brooks was talking about, when you take it on the right way, it's a fun challenge. It tests you in kind of all aspects of your game, especially when you have the standard 10- to 15-mile-an-hour wind, it's all you want.

**Q. Brooks was asked earlier, do you think what happened last week was a death blow for the Saudi golf league, and he made the point because that money is not going anywhere, there's no reason they can't just kick the can down the road, reform, et cetera. I wanted your thoughts on that; do you think he's right? Do you think this is something we might be hearing about for the next two years or whatever? What's your perspective on that?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I mean, I've known those guys for quite a while. I've played with Maj and Yasir in the pro-am over in Abu Dhabi. They love golf. They're golf nerds kind of like all of us.

No, I don't see it going away. They're not scared about the situation. It's been interesting to kind of learn the ins and outs of both sides, but yeah, it has been an interesting week or so these last five to seven days.

**Q. Do you think some kind of more extreme punishment from this side of things, as in like if you were going to sign this contract we're going to ban you for life or something like that, do you think that could have an effect of putting an end to the flirtations and dalliances that keep springing up?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Yes and no. I've always looked at having competition as a good thing. For me that's always how I got better through say junior golf, through college golf and even out here playing against the best players in the world.

Ultimately I think that if everything kind of goes the right way, I think everyone comes out in a better place. Like I said, I think competition is a good thing, and in business, whatever it may be, you're trying to always -- if you're trying to be the best, you want to find ways that you can be better than your competitors. It goes through sport, business, tours, whatever it may be.

I just hope that everything kind of continues to either head

the right way or not the wrong way, and we can all end up in a better place in the future.

**Q. Can I ask what you mean by the right way.**

RICKIE FOWLER: Do I think the PGA TOUR is the best place to play currently? Yes. Do I think it could get better? Yes.

**Q. You mentioned grip changes and all that fun stuff that you have to be working on. Can you talk about from your perspective how challenging and frustrating at times it is when you've played a certain way so successfully for so long? I know you made a putter change recently. To have to rethink in a way the way you go about it, it must be daunting yet satisfying once you figure things out or start to see signs that you're figuring things out.**

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, the putter thing was more of a new look just to try and change the mojo a little bit and ultimately something where I wasn't going to have to think as much, just kind of step up, hit it and know it was going to start online. There's always little changes here and there when you're trying to continue to get better. Nothing ever really stays in the same spot for very long. It's kind of a pendulum. You're trying to stay as close to center as possible and not get too far off.

My left-hand grip was getting a little too weak for where I need to be to kind of swing and play the way I want to play. So making a decent adjustment there, just a minor one, is enough to feel awkward, and it was a fairly big adjustment. It was, like I said, more of a mental battle to go ahead and trust that the ball was actually going to go straight and not 40 yards left.

**Q. You've talked about the noise in the last seven to ten days. Is there a sense of relief at all tomorrow when you can go out there and just do what you guys do and play golf for four days and not really kind of worry about the noise?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, in a way. I mean, it's around. Like we talked about, I don't necessarily think it's going away. But at the same time, yeah, Thursday through Sunday is typically our -- as players, where you just get to go do what you love to do and go play and compete.

As far as the fans' perspective or people watching on TV, whatever it may be, that's all they see, so they may not necessarily see the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesdays or kind of ins and outs of what goes on and travel and all of that. But Thursday to Sunday is in a way kind of the time you get to relax and just go play.

**Q. How could the PGA TOUR be better? You said you wanted it to improve. Is that increased prize funds? What is it?**

RICKIE FOWLER: No, it doesn't necessarily have to do with money. I won't go into details in here, but stuff has been mentioned. I've met with Jay at times, we're going to get together, and he's sitting down and meeting with players continuously over the weeks, and yeah, do I think it can be better? Yes, but at the same time I do believe that it is still the best place to play currently.

**Q. How has it been being part of the Netflix docuseries? Have you enjoyed the experience?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Yes, I have. We're in very early stages. It's been fun to kind of be involved over the years to see it finally come and really happen. It was kind of a -- it wasn't necessarily our idea or anything like that, but to kind of be involved with some of the people that are ultimately doing it now. I've only done a couple things so far since they've only been out since San Diego, did some stuff at Scottsdale, but I do -- I think and I hope that it's going to bring some more eyes to the game of golf, and very similar to what it's done with F1 in the U.S. F1 has been very big worldwide. I've always been an F1 fan and follower growing up in motorsports, so to have people in the last few years start to have a serious interest in following F1, I'm like, guys, this has been around forever. But I'm glad they're finding out about it now.

Hopefully it has a similar impact with the guys out here and the game of golf.

**Q. When was the first one you got and what did it feel like when you got a letter from Arnie?**

RICKIE FOWLER: I actually don't remember the first. I got multiple letters from him. I remember getting to spend time with him back at Sunnehanna when I played there, not being far from Latrobe, because Sam, his grandson, would play there, as well. Got to be around him a little bit. I won a junior event at Bay Hill through the AJGA. It was the HP Boys. I think that was back in maybe '06, I believe.

So I've known Arnie, I would say, at least -- I want to say '06 might have been the first time I got to spend time around him. So the first one wasn't a letter, it would have been a congrats at Bay Hill when I won there as a junior golfer.

Yeah, to have the relationship with the tournament, his foundation and ultimately with him over the years has been awesome. We definitely miss him.

**Q. But that letter, the first one you got, what did it feel like? Was his logo on the envelope? What did it feel like when you opened it up and read it?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Almost a sense of like you've made it or kind of -- you get that validation, from guys like Arnie or Jack, someone I got to know and spend a decent amount of time with down here in south Florida.

Yeah, the letters from Arnie were definitely special. Like I said, I don't remember exactly when the first one was, but to me the times that I got to spend with him and be around, one of my greatest memories with him was playing in the same group at the Seminole pro-member, which is this upcoming Monday, and got to play with him. I still remember one shot he hit, he had about 60 or 70 yards out of a fairway bunker and hit this little nipped wedge out of there. Still had good hands.

**Q. Do you know what year that was?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Not exactly. My guess would have been about '12.

**Q. You've handled what some people call the most terrifying shot at TPC Sawgrass during THE PLAYERS Championship very well, obviously. To you what's the second scariest tee shot at Sawgrass and why?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Hmm. Second scariest, I mean, probably I'd say 17 --

**Q. That's the scariest --**

RICKIE FOWLER: I thought we were going 18. I'd almost say that 18 may be the -- it's a toss-up. 18 is a harder tee shot. 17 may be more scary because it's fairly easy. I mean, as far as when you look at it, the hole is not very far, and you start trying to get a little cute towards the pin and there's water very close. If you sat there with no pin on the green and your only job was to hit a ball on the green, TOUR players are going to do that pretty much every time unless there's serious conditions.

If you were to stand on 18 tee and your only job was to hit it in the fairway, that's still not an easy thing to do, standing on that tee.

It's obviously a great design around this golf course, and to have kind of the two shots that can make or break your round be right there at the end, it's just a great place.

**Q. What makes 18 so tough standing on that tee?**

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, because you want to turn it, but the bulkhead kind of makes you think that you can cover a bit more than you can. You start going over any bit of water and the cover, every couple feet gets another 20 yards or so just because of the angle that it runs on. The trees on the right come in pretty quickly.

The further you hit it, the narrower it gets. Yeah, you can hit something shorter, kind of straight out and take your medicine in a way, but now you've got at least a mid to long iron into a green that's built more for a 9-iron. And even to that front section, even if you're trying to go to a right pin, you get working on that and you can have a ball that lands on the green that goes in the water.

You kind of have to decide where you're going to try and take on the hole. If you hit a good drive there with driver or 3-wood, it now becomes a hole that you can play aggressively from there. It's just a good hole. Wherever you're willing to take kind of that risk, you can either make it easier or harder.

**Q. Jordan had a dip in his career, and your friendship with him, the way he's rebounded and come back very well, have you ever had talked to him about that and what it took to come back?**

RICKIE FOWLER: No, we all talk about it. Jordan and I stay in houses a lot together, same with J.T., Cantlay, as well, Dufner. We all talk about different stuff and how guys are doing, especially when Jordan and I were -- I was kind of going in as he was starting to come out. It's part of golf. In a way it's part of life, as well. Everyone that's played at a high level has gone through the ups and downs. There's no one that's ever stayed at the top. It's part of it.

I'm clawing my way out. I would have liked it to have happened a little sooner than it has. But being there with your friends that have gone through it or going through it together, I know they have my back. I've always had their back. It makes it a lot easier when you have people on your side.

**Q. You seem really well liked out here, but drive to survive, there's always a feud going on. If you were to have one fake feud with another player out here, who would it be?**

RICKIE FOWLER: I'm going to pick Harry Higgs. He came over for dinner last night. Well, I invited him, but I think it would be fun.

**Q. You should play that out next time they interview you.**

RICKIE FOWLER: We could.

Or Joel. Joel has been pretty big on there so far.

Yeah, there's so many great guys out here. It's going to be fun to kind of see their personalities come through and people get to see people away from what they just see Thursday through Sunday and just tournament golf and what the camera shows.

Like I said, there's a lot of amazing people, plenty of characters, plenty of personalities. I'm sure that'll all kind of come through as time goes.

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