

U.S. Open Championship 2021

Sunday, June 20, 2021

San Diego, California, USA

Torrey Pines Golf Course

Jon Rahm

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Please join me in welcoming the champion of the 121st U.S. Open, Jon Rahm. Jon, how does that sound?

JON RAHM: Sounds good. I don't know how else to say it. I'm still a little bit on golf mode, right? I feel like, when I'm in that mode, it takes me a while to get out of it. It probably won't happen tonight. It might happen tomorrow. I don't know, at some point it will hit me. I'm still thinking there might be a playoff. I've been scarred before.

It's incredible that I'm sitting next to this trophy. A couple weeks ago, I watched my good friend Phil win it. Not this one, but win the PGA, and I took a lot of inspiration from that. I've been close before, and I just knew on a Sunday, the way I have been playing the last few majors, I just had to be close. I knew I could get it done. I'm keeping that good Sunday mojo going. Man, I got it done in a fashion that apparently can only happen to me at Torrey Pines.

THE MODERATOR: While you're in golf mode, talk about those last two putts. Did you know what kind of score you needed to post, and what were you seeing on those putts?

JON RAHM: When I missed my putt on 14, I told Adam, it was a good putt. The one on 13 was slightly pushed. The one on 14 was a good putt. It's just poa annua greens happen. It didn't roll as truthfully as it could have rolled. And I told him, two 4s and two 3s on the last four holes wins the tournament, and that's what I set out to do and play four really good holes.

Not that I was really thinking about it on 17, but last time I won here, I finished birdie-eagle, and I knew I could finish strong again. I knew history could get close to repeating itself. I was aware hitting that putt. I stayed patient all day. I hadn't made many long putts all week. I made one on Thursday on 14, but that's the kind of putts I like. I've made a couple of long left-to-righters in the past in some clutch moments, and I was able to get two more on the last two holes.

THE MODERATOR: People talk a lot about where they win their U.S. Open, and for you to win it here on your first

Father's Day, is that just icing on the cake?

JON RAHM: Yes. If you follow golf, I feel like you've heard it a million times how much I love this place. It's been my favorite city for a long time. It was my wife's favorite city before we ever met, and she used to come stay at this Hilton before they knew what golf was pretty much.

Getting my first PGA TOUR win here the way I did with my dad watching, I was really happy my dad was here at that time. As a father on my first Father's Day with my dad here, to get this one done the way I did, on top of that, you add the fact that we got engaged here, as well, and I have a very happy life. I can say I'm extremely happy off the golf course, but this one might steal the show for a couple of days. This one is very, very incredible, very hard to believe, that this story can round up and end up so good. It almost feels like it's a movie that's about to end and I'm going to wake up soon.

With the setback I had a couple of weeks ago, to end up like this, it's incredible. I do love Torrey Pines, and Torrey Pines loves me.

Q. How aware were you of the star-studded leaderboard, of what was happening around you, and how did you keep your composure on the back nine?

JON RAHM: I'm not going to lie. I was trying not to look at the leaderboards, but the crowd was not cooperating. They were telling me exactly what was going on.

So I decided to embrace it. You see all those great names, and to myself I thought whoever wins this one is going to be the one who won a U.S. Open with a star-packed leaderboard. I just -- after I thought that, I went about my business. That was about the 10th hole. I knew I had to survive the next two holes and hopefully give myself a chance on the next five. I did.

It was something I knew I could do, and I was just focusing on each shot, and I ended up getting it done.

Q. You mentioned Phil a minute ago. He had as much if not more talent than you when he turned pro. It took

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

him until he was 34 to win his first major. I know you're 26. You're still young. Is there any part of you, this being such a funny game, that's not pressing, but thinking more and more about it as you came to each major?

JON RAHM: No. It's funny how it's very easy to think, oh, well, only majors count, like it's easy to win a major golf tournament. I mean, it's not easy. That's why only a select group of people do it.

I feel like coming in here without having practiced much relaxed me a little bit. I thought, you know what, in case I play bad, I have an excuse. I have a bailout in case. I can convince myself, hey, I had COVID.

But I feel like it relaxed me a little bit, and ever since the Sunday at the PGA, I felt a bit of a shift on the golf course mentally. I still had that grit, but almost like each miss bothered me less. I couldn't tell you why. I believe it's because I really set out myself to be an example for my son that he would be proud of, and I've done some stuff in the past on the golf course that I'm not proud of, and I wish I could eliminate it.

But I've accepted it. I'm not saying it's going to be smooth sailing until the end, but I feel like that Sunday of the PGA changed things a little bit. My mental game was really good, and it was the same thing at Memorial. Mentally, I was really, really well, and that's what allowed me to play such good golf.

It followed into this week. In the past I've gotten frustrated in the U.S. Open. I've made a lot of birdies and a ton of bogeys and double bogeys, and I was able to kind of switch it up this week and actually made more birdies than bogeys and get it done.

Q. Knowing what you needed to do on those final few holes, how did you stay so calm?

JON RAHM: I mean, I might have looked calm. I was not calm. I wish people could see our heart rate when we're playing in those moments because that was tense. It's going. But you practice to let your body basically take over, right? That's what I did.

I think the fact that I stayed patient and hopeful, and I believed that something good was coming my way is what helped. I never lost hope for a second. I kept hitting good shots. I kept giving myself chances, and even when I had that lip-out on 15 where you can get a little bit desperate, I just kept hitting good shots. I almost made birdie on 16 and two ended up dropping at the end.

My mindset was the same on the first putt on Thursday to the last one on 18. Situation does change a little bit, but routine and really staying in the present is what helps.

Q. I understand after the disappointment at the Memorial, I believe in the scorer's tent, you got a phone call from somebody that provided some advice on sort of how to handle it. Can you maybe expand on that, who was it from, and kind of what they said.

JON RAHM: I had a few phone calls. I had a few. The first person who called me that wasn't family, it was right away when I was in the isolation trailer, was Pádraig Harrington, and he told me a story in which he was leading by five after 54 holes, signed the wrong scorecard, and got disqualified. He said he got a lot more from that instance, he learned a lot more than he would ever learn from the win.

Nick Faldo texted me the next morning and told me a story of how he was winning a tournament. He was leading by six with six holes to go and got disqualified, as well, and how he learned from that and got a win the week after on I think it was the Million Dollar Shootout in South Africa, I believe. I might be wrong, but it was a big shootout.

I believed from the biggest setbacks we can get some of the biggest breakthroughs, and that's why I stay so positive. That's why I kept telling Kelley, when she was devastated about what happened and my family and everybody around me, something good is going to come. I don't know what, but something good is going to come, and I felt it today out there on the golf course.

I had in mind Pádraig and Nick when I was out there on the golf course a couple times knowing that they won shortly after, and I knew today was my day.

Q. Can you walk us through the putt on 18, and when did you know it was going in?

JON RAHM: Well, I'm a feel player, so I could tell you if we go where I was the spot I was looking at, but I don't know how far left of the hole it was. I think it was three, four feet left of the hole. I stayed positive. I watched Lee Westwood hit that putt to tie -- to try to tie Rocco a couple of years ago on 18, and I knew at the end it snaps hard right at the end. I know it does. It doesn't really look like it, but it does. That's why Tiger's putt took so long to end up breaking left the same year.

So I was aware of that, I trusted my read, and as soon as I made contact, I looked up and saw where the ball was going. It was exactly the speed and line I visualized, and I told myself, that's in. If you could see my thoughts with ten

feet to go, in my mind, I'm like that's in the hole, and it went in.

Q. Now that you're at this point, can you describe what the process has been like of getting your temperament to match your talent?

JON RAHM: I've said it before. I know it's hard to believe, but there's been a steady progress. Like everything in life is setbacks, but I feel like from the setbacks, some good moments have come. I believe becoming a dad was always going to help me because before, I could always have the excuse that getting mad helped me out, helped me win golf tournaments, but right now I'm a role model to my son. I'm going to be, as I am to many kids out there.

Now I understand what I can do, and I know I can perform at my best without showing my frustration so much. I made that deal with myself after the third round of the PGA. I wasn't happy with how I ended, and I could have handled it better, and I vowed to myself to be a better role model for my son.

He won't remember any of this because he's only ten weeks old, but I do. Hopefully in the future, he can grow up to be someone who's proud of his dad. I hope I can provide that example.

Q. Can you describe this morning, right when you wake up, where your mind starts going.

JON RAHM: I got woken up by crows. I don't know why. That's what I was thinking, I was thinking, man, those birds.

No, I did the same routine. For people that follow this - and I'm going to shock a few people - I woke up excited because I could watch a match, a Call of Duty tournament which is eSports that was going on. A team that I follow, which is OpTic Chicago, had just played the night before, and I knew I could watch it. It's about an hour and a half, so I had a busy morning.

I went downstairs, got my water, my coffee, and the chef was making breakfast, and I was watching my Call of Duty event, simple as that. Kelley came down with the baby, spent some dad time, and I got ready. I know it's shocking for some people, but that's what I was doing.

Q. Was there a journalist that you mentioned during the awards ceremony? If so, who?

JON RAHM: I mentioned a guy, a good friend of mine, his name was José Manuel Cortizas, Corti. This journalist, he basically did basketball in the city I'm from, in Bilbao, for a newspaper. He followed basketball. And the owner, or the

city of the newspaper said, hey, start following this golfer who's doing pretty good things. Without ever hesitating, he jumped on a plane and started following me around the world.

He had never stepped foot on a golf course, and he had no idea what was going on. I think his first year was my first pro year, and unfortunately, that journalist passed away a couple months ago due to COVID. It was very quick too. He was in good health. From when he got it to the ICU to when he passed, it was extremely quick. He would have loved to be here. He had just started to pick up golf a little bit.

He held me to a really high standard, always told me when I was doing the wrong things, always told me when I was doing right. He was somebody I was proud of. He took a leap of faith to start following somebody and do your job but do something completely different around the world, something you know nothing about.

At the same time, he has, I believe, around a 20-year-old daughter that now has no dad, and it happened extremely quick. It's just sad. He was a great friend, a great family friend.

This right here is definitely for him because he would have loved more than anybody else to be here covering this.

Q. The more I listen to you, of your times or chances at a major, is this the least amount of pressure you've felt?

JON RAHM: Yes, definitely. Just because it felt like such a fairy tale story that I knew it was going to have a happy ending. I could just tell, just going down the fairway after that first tee shot, that second shot, and that birdie, I knew there was something special in the air. I could just feel it. I just knew it.

I couldn't have told you in the moment I felt something special. That's why I played as aggressive as I did because it was like, man, this is my day; everything's going to go right. I felt like that helped me become. I just knew that I could do it and believed it.

Q. Seven pars on the back nine until the end.

JON RAHM: Pars are almost like birdies on a U.S. Open, especially on 11 and 12.

Q. Speaking of aggressive, what club did you have in on 1 that you took right at the flag?

JON RAHM: 8-iron. Yeah, I was not trying to go at that

pin. I was aiming at the TV tower, and it was just a three-quarter 8-iron, knowing that my natural shot is a fade. It's basically a straight shot with the feel of a fade, and it ended up fading more than I wanted. Ideally, that ball would have been 15 feet long right, but because I faded a little bit too much, it ended up being perfect distance.

Q. What did it mean to have Phil there on the driving range when you found out to celebrate?

JON RAHM: It's pretty unique that just a month ago, or just a little bit less ago, I was there watching him win, and I was like, man, this is so cool. I was part of an amazing moment in history for him and for the history of golf really, and for him to be there, he probably was home and came over just to see what could happen. He told me he was going to be watching. He was on the putting green when I was getting ready to go to the tee and wished me good luck.

For him to stay and come and congratulate me -- I know he's going to talk to me at some point again because he hasn't had much time. Just the fact that he came, it shows we're really good friends. We're extremely competitive; don't get me wrong. We're extremely competitive, but when it comes time, we're really happy for each other. I couldn't have been happier for him when he won it. He made history and proved a lot of people wrong.

In my little way, I made Spanish history and hopefully proved a lot of people wrong as well.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports