

LIV Golf Riyadh

Friday, 7 February, 2025

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Riyadh Golf Club, Saudi Arabia

Legion XIII

Jon Rahm

Tom McKibben

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Let's welcome the captain of Legion XIII, Jon Rahm, and the newest addition to LIV Golf, Tom McKibben. Tom, what a way to show up for your first round of golf with LIV. You had an incredible day. I believe you had a bogey-free round of 7-under, including an eagle. Can you tell us a little bit about your round.

TOM MCKIBBIN: Yeah, very, very solid. As you said, bogey-free. Kept the ball in front of me and out of the waste area most of the time. I just really enjoyed it. It was something different, under the lights and the music, and it was a pretty awesome first day.

Q. Jon, you also had a great round of 5-under today. First I want to hear about your round but then I want to hear about how proud you are of Tom.

JON RAHM: I mean, as it stands right now, I'm dragging the team a little bit with a 5-under. It's an incredible round by all of us, to have two 6-unders, myself and Tom playing this good. I was very aware of his talent. I hadn't seen it on the golf course live yet, but Monday and Tuesday it was very apparent how good at golf he is and how high his ceiling really is.

Not to put a lot of pressure on him because this week was his first LIV week; he'd never seen the warm-up, never been part of a shotgun, the music, and especially being at night under the lights, it's something new for all of us.

I wouldn't have been surprised or blamed him if he didn't have a good day, and he comes in and takes advantage of the opportunity. Thrilled it how great he's playing and thrilled with how well Caleb played today. Very happy that he's starting the year off strong.

I myself played good. Made some mistakes along the way but fixed most of them. Very happy with my round. If anything I would just say the last four holes not taking advantage of any of them was maybe the mistake. But

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yeah, thrilled with how I played, and hopefully I can just keep cleaning up those mistakes and keep playing better throughout the week.

Q. Tom, everything was new for you today, new warm-up routine, shotgun start, under the lights, playing on a team. How did all of that factor into your day? Did you have nerves on the first tee? Tell us everything.

TOM MCKIBBIN: Yeah, it was obviously very different, the warm-up. I've never experienced before. It was definitely a different experience.

I wouldn't really say I was too nervous. I was probably more anxious and not sure about how it was going to go, especially with playing at night, something that none of us have never really experienced.

But I think sort of being able to get that out of the way today and know what's coming for the next couple of days is good. As I said, it was something very different but very pleased that it didn't affect me too much.

Q. What was your favorite part of the LIV experience?

TOM MCKIBBIN: I really liked the music. I think the music was super cool, and then that halftime show standing on the 4th tee watching that was pretty awesome. I think all of us in the group really, really enjoyed that.

Q. A little birdie told me that you might live in Dubai, which might have some lighted golf courses that you might have practiced on to prepare for this week. Can you tell us about that?

TOM MCKIBBIN: Yeah, where I play back in Dubai at Trump, there's a fully night golf course, and it hangs under the lights. So last week I pretty much spent every day up there playing under the lights, trying to get used to what it would maybe feel like this week.

Q. How do you think that helped you prepare for this week and why you shot so low?

ADRIAN MERONK: Maybe. It wasn't really that much of a shock when I came here. I sort of knew what to expect

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and sort of knew where I maybe struggled or was able to improve on quickly. Just sort of knowing that from last week. Yeah, definitely I'd say it didn't make me feel too unfamiliar with it.

Q. Jon, tell us about your first experience playing a professional round of golf under the lights. How would you summarize it for us?

JON RAHM: I would say I would have practiced a little bit at home before I came here, so it wasn't entirely new having -- it was just a par-3 course. So the longest shot was about 180 yards. Definitely a little different when you're hitting tee shots that far distance where you can almost kind of lose sight of the ball a little bit.

But for the most part, we've had enough days, three practice days to get used to it, and I actually thought it was extremely fun. Just looking behind you on the TV and seeing -- not right now, but seeing the highlights of how it looks from the top is extremely cool. It's so unique, and I've been looking forward to it for a long time, and in my mind it hasn't disappointed. It's a very unusual experience, but it was extremely fun.

I hope this is something that we can continue to do and continue to improve on because I think we have something here.

Q. Your team you alluded to, everyone played well today. You shot 24 under. You guys stormed on to the scene and made a statement for your first round at LIV. What do you have to do to keep the momentum going this weekend, and do you think everyone is looking at you guys as a major threat now?

JON RAHM: Well, more of the same, more birdies, no bogeys. It's simple and complicated at the same time, right. I wouldn't expect the spectators out there to think we're going to play every single round like this. I wish. It's just not going to happen.

But I think with the new format of all four rounds counting, I do think it suits a team like ours. I think we're consistently really good players, and I'm hoping what's on paper, it also shows on the golf course.

Q. Were you surprised that the scores were so low, not just on your team but overall for the field? More than half the field had one bogey or less.

JON RAHM: Yes and no. I can see it. There's not a lot of rough out there. To hit it in the desert there's some holes where you can do it, but for the most part, it needs to be quite an errant tee shot, and it's not the longest golf course

and the greens are receptive. No rougher, soft greens is usually a recipe for really low scores, no matter any other conditions. If you add the fact that we really didn't have any wind, yeah, you should expect low scores like that.

If we start getting maybe some wind or some speed and firmness for the greens, I think you can see the golf course show some teeth, but besides that, it's a week that I think we were all fully aware that you're going to have to go low.

Q. You said on the broadcast that you were a bit surprised that you were the only team that went after Tom.

JON RAHM: Yeah. He expressed his interest to join LIV, and as far as I know, there wasn't any teams trying to out-bid anybody. I don't know if that was the case or if it was him saying I don't want to go anywhere else or what the situation, but I thought he would be a prize player. I'm happy we got him.

Q. Tom, was it only going to be Legion XIII?

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, I think so, yeah. That's the only ones I spoke to. Yeah, I'm very, very happy I'm here. So thanks. Thanks, Jon.

Q. You said that there were never any nerves, but did you look at the leaderboard or were you thinking about what the other guys were doing? That's part of the experience out here is obviously you're curious about the other guys on the team, too.

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, there's leaderboards out there most holes. I definitely showed great interest in the team scores. I seen that we were at the top most of the day, and I just wanted to try and keep making birdies. I seen everyone else was making birdies, then when I joined the team, Jon said just never give up and always try and shoot the best scores possible. So I was always trying to fight to shoot one less score than I maybe would have if I had just sort of dropped a little concentration or something, so always trying to push until the end.

Q. You were determined to beat Jon today?

TOM McKIBBIN: Probably a little bit, but just trying to go out there and shoot the best score I could. I certainly didn't want to be last on the scoring.

Q. I would like to hear from you guys about your experience overall. I know you touched on it, but I want to hear about your first day overall.

JON RAHM: Riyadh overall? I had never been here before, so some players had. Very pleasantly surprised. I didn't realize how big and developed the city was and how much there is to do.

Unfortunately with this different schedule in the tournament, we don't have the free afternoons we usually have to go and explore, and in the mornings you don't always go have the option to go sightsee because things are not usually that open.

I haven't seen as much of the city as I would like. I did convince him to go watch a football game on Monday, so at least we got to see Ronaldo and see the local team and see him win. But besides that we haven't really left the hotel too much because we have to be here most of the afternoon. Hopefully next time when we have a better lay of the land, we can experience the city a little bit more, maybe venture out to some restaurants.

But overall it's been great. The hospitality has been great.

The only thing I would say that everybody would say is that I wish the traffic was a little less, a little bit more consistent at least so we knew how long it would take to get to the golf course, but besides that, it's been a pleasant week.

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, very similar to what Jon said. I had never been here before and somewhere I was very excited to come to. Again, haven't really got to venture out too much. We went to the football game on Monday night, which was a lot of fun and really cool to watch that. But no, everyone has been super welcoming and very nice, and I look forward to coming back a lot more in the future.

Q. I would love to hear from you about your thoughts on the team side of things, the competition, in terms of how you guys are going to see it through, and who do you think is going to pose the most threat as a team?

TOM McKIBBIN: We've only played one round -- I've only ever played one round of team golf like this, and something that I thought was pretty cool, and always trying to shoot the best score possible. Looking at the leaderboard and seeing the guys going well, as well, definitely motivated me to go lower.

Yeah, as to who, I think we'll be close -- I don't know who else is up there so I'm not too sure, but I feel like any of those teams can go out and have a day like we have had today. I think we'll have to try and keep making more birdies and no bogeys.

JON RAHM: I think a very large number of players that are playing LIV Golf, it's because of the team aspect of things.

That's what I've found the most enticing and the most entertaining. I think being part of a team almost my whole life, even including in golf, I thought it was really fun. Some of my most fond memories in golf were related to a team sport and not always necessarily related to a win. It was something that for me was very special, and it has been so far last year and so far this beginning of the year, which is only going to get better once Tom gets to know all of us and we get to know him a little bit better.

Then the opposition, it's always hard to say. It's very early. We had a fantastic day today. I hope we can keep this level of golf. But anybody out there can be a danger, and I think I could start naming off almost every team and give you a reason why I think they're really, really going to be a challenge. I'm not going to name any names right now, but I would think anybody has a chance to win any given day.

Q. John, in terms of joining LIV, ever since you've joined, you've been putting on a great show, great performances. How do you feel overall ever since joining and becoming part of the LIV league?

JON RAHM: It's been a lot of fun. Obviously not the easiest transition, right. For me, luckily I gave myself enough time compared to other players to deal with the possible media backlash and then get focused on the season. We had a lot of work to do getting the team together, getting a team ready, an idea, a model behind what we wanted to name everything.

But once the season started, it was just golf, and it's been a lot of fun.

I think especially in the U.S. where I play most of my golf, it's going more towards a more relaxed atmosphere, a little bit louder, music on the golf carts, music on the ranges. People are having drinks. It wasn't entirely too different to what I had experienced, and I think it's a very fun atmosphere, not only for us but when the spectators come it's very different. They have the music out there. They can be a little bit more engaged with all of us, and I think it's what makes it so, so special, and so far season 2 is starting off in a great way, as well.

I had a lot of fun today besides golf. I thought it was quite unique. Very intriguing to be out there under the lights and to see how it is. It hasn't disappointed. It's been a lot of fun.

Q. I know a lot of people say that golf isn't a sport; obviously it is. But what would you tell these people? What do you think makes golf a sport?

JON RAHM: Have you ever thought about that?



TOM MCKIBBIN: Not really, no, I guess.

JON RAHM: We're prime examples of peak male athleticism right here.

TOM MCKIBBIN: I don't know, maybe it isn't a sport. I don't know.

I guess that we probably just train very hard like other athletes. We try and look after ourselves the best we can, and we're always sort of looking for that 1 percent to get better. I think golfers are never really satisfied and we're always trying to push to get better.

I think for people like us, there's a lot of hard work and a lot of training that goes into it, which to me would make that a sport maybe. If you just play once a week and walk around, maybe not.

But I think there's a lot of hard work that goes in there and a lot of hours to say it's not a sport.

JON RAHM: I mean, I think he touched a lot of points there, but it's also a level of skill and athleticism you need to have to be able to move your body in a certain way to hit a golf ball for 300 yards accurately. I think there's a lot of moving parts that go into the game of golf. You need to have some -- you need to have either a very good understanding of your body, a very good understanding what your hands are doing at all times, hand-eye coordination is very needed because unlike other sports the ball is not moving, so it's all up to what you're doing. What you're doing is completely deterministic of what the ball is going to do.

All of that needs to be developed within a reputation. Maybe we're not running, maybe we're not jumping, maybe you don't need to physically do all those things very well, but there's certain turns, turn rotations, certain sequences, hand movements that you need to be very precise at to be able to accomplish what we're accomplishing.

Maybe we're not doing the same physical effort in a sport, but mentally I would put it up there with a lot of them, and maybe the smaller physical -- like more detailed physical skills, as well. There's a lot that goes into it.

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