

LIV Golf Miami

Wednesday, 3 April, 2024

Miami, Florida, USA

Trump National Doral

Phil Mickelson

Jon Rahm

Bubba Watson

Press Conference



MIAMI 2024

Just simply having to execute those shots in competition setting before you go to a major can be really beneficial.

THE MODERATOR: So we have 13 LIV players that are playing next week, last year, first, second, third, and fourth place were Jon Rahm, Phil Mickelson, Brooks Koepka and Patrick Reed, all LIV Golf players this year. What do you guys think the odds a LIV player winning this year?

JON RAHM: That is a very hard question to answer. But you know, there is quite a few major champions in LIV, and there is a few that are Major Champion quality golfers. So just pure numbers, if you go with math, wouldn't be the highest, but I'm confident that one of us can get it done this year.

BUBBA WATSON: About 13 percent. Yes, I mean, there's some great golf being played out here, some great golf being played on the other tours, and so it's going to be a battle but you know, at the end of the day, that's individual. So we are pulling for our friends no matter where they play but it's going to be a battle and hopefully it is a LIV player because I'm one of those that's up there at the top and hopefully I'm in that top five or challenging on Sunday.

Q. Phil, you obviously had an awesome year last year at Augusta. How are you feeling heading into this this year?

PHIL MICKELSON: I obviously love the place. It's a course where I feel I don't have to be perfect. When I go through the gates and drive down Magnolia Lane, I relax a little bit because if we miss it on the right side of the hole, given the pin placement, if we miss in the correct side we can still salvage par utilizing our short games.

We have shots -- like the shot Bubba hit in the playoff where you hook the wedge on ten to eight, ten feet, you can still be creative and recover at Augusta, which is why I think it's so fun to watch is the recovery shots there are so exciting because the trees are high enough where you have a swing, as opposed to take an unplayable lie and wedging out.

I think that adds to a lot of the drama of Augusta, and you also then don't have to be perfect. So if you hit a bad shot, you can still recover if it's in the right spot, given the pin.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, guys. So there is a collective six green jackets up here this morning. So it's safe to say we have our panel of Augusta experts. How are you guys utilizing LIV Miami this week to prepare for next week?

PHIL MICKELSON: This is a great place to get ready for Augusta. It gives you an opportunity to get momentum if you play well but also gives you a chance to play every shot you're going to need into Augusta. Now Augusta has more undulation and elevation changes, but Miami forces you to hit a lot of long irons, mid-irons, short irons. There's trouble on every hole. You have to miss it on the correct side and strategically gets you ready for all the shots, challenges, physically and mentally that we are going to face next week.

BUBBA WATSON: Yeah, what he said. It's perfect for managing your golf ball. That's what you have to do at Augusta, and put the ball in the right spots, and like he said, there's difficulty on every hole out here, with the wind up, the wind gets swirling sometimes. There's a lot of things you can take from this and learn from and try to manage it, and what you need to work on going into next week as well.

Q. This is your first time playing at Doral. What are you hoping to get out of this week in preparation for Augusta?

JON RAHM: Well, I haven't seen the course, yet. Not much I can say in that regard. I've seen this tournament here many times on TV, and I know how much of a challenge it can be. I think having a high-quality golf course, a high-quality challenging golf course before a major can be a great thing to get yourself ready and maybe work on some of the shots that you may need the week after like they were mentioning.



So if you play it strategically and know how to play it and know where to go, you don't have to be perfect.

Q. Last year it was such a strange couple of days for you guys, at one point, you were five behind Brooks, and coming back and having to play so many extra holes on Sunday. Just what do you recall from that? What's your biggest takeaway from that victory?

JON RAHM: I think the most you're referring to, I think it was on 7 when they called it. I will was four back. Five minutes into the next day, I was two back. It's very hard to say because with the stop page and all the weather, it was a very different Sunday. It was very much about dealing with the elements and going about your own business. You had to think about it's the end of the third round and focus on finishing strong and then playing well the rest of the 18 holes, right.

So in my mind, I had to really separate those two days, put yourself in position, and then Sunday round, in the afternoon, try to get it done.

My biggest takeaway, it's hard. I keep going back to some of the up-and-downs that I made. I mean, Phil was mentioning it. It is a golf course that where you are allowed to miss -- I know he's explaining it way too easily, in the right spots. But if you're in certain spots you might get those up-and-downs.

There's two moments: The up-and-down on 6 to get the lead for the first time, and the second shot on 14 from the trees, which like he explained, you have room. You still have to execute, and there's trouble lurking everywhere. But hitting that shot to four feet and hitting that birdie putt to take the four-shot lead with two to play were the two keys to the tournament in my mind.

Q. It was a lifetime ago obviously but it seemed to me that Doral week in the past, was that week where guys would take that Tuesday trip to Augusta and try to sneak a round in or something like that. Was Doral the start of your Masters thinking? Was that when you started to lock in on what was coming in that 2004, 2005, 2006 run? Was that when your mindset changed to it's Masters season?

PHIL MICKELSON: I would actually think that it started earlier than that. I would think it would start in the off-season and the off-season was a chance to get equipment that might perform well at Augusta and start hitting the shots that might perform well.

I remember January of '04, I started working with Dave

Pelz and we started doing some wedge work and precision iron work, and I remember coming down the stretch on 14, having to, I was trailing Ernie at the time in '04 and I needed to make birdie, and I hit what I call a Pelz wedge, taking a little bit off a wedge shot, one of the shots he started working with me three months prior to that tournament, and I executed it there, knocked it close and made birdie.

I think the preparation in our mind really starts before then as far as setup. One year I won with two drivers. One year I won with one driver. I've never won with zero drivers but I did win the British with zero drivers. Point it, you start thinking ahead, how can I get best give golf bag makeup ready for Augusta, and you start that in the off-season.

And then I started preparation in January, working on those shots, and then was able to pull it off during the tournament.

Q. Rory yesterday said he doesn't believe golf in its current state is sustainable. Do you agree with him, and do you think that the circuits need to be reunited?

PHIL MICKELSON: Go ahead, Jon (laughter).

JON RAHM: I think I agree with that statement, yeah. Every time I get asked a question like this, I say the same thing. I think there's room for both. It's as simple as that. I think we have the opportunity to end up with an even better product for the spectators and the fans of the game, a little bit more variety doesn't really hurt anybody. So I think -- I think properly done, we can end up with a much better product that can take golf to the next level worldwide, and I'm hoping that's what ends up happening.

PHIL MICKELSON: I agree with that. I think in the end, we are in a transitional state where we now have competition and that's leading to a lot of disruption and change but it's also in the end product going to make golf more global where the best players travel more.

I don't know how it's going to end out, exactly, or what it's going to look like. I'm putting my trust in Yasir and where the game is headed more globally. But at some point when it gets ironed out, I think it's going to be in a much better place where we bring the best players from the world, and it's going to open up more opportunities for manufacturing, course design, for players in different parts of the world to be inspired and enter the game. I think it's going to be in a much better place.

But right now, we are in the disruption phase, so we are in the middle of the process, and when it's all said and done, it's going to be a lot brighter. But while we go through it,



it's challenging. But we'll get there.

Q. The majors are the majors, but with the few times the best players get together at one tournament, has that added a little bit more to the majors in the current state of golf?

PHIL MICKELSON: Bubba?

BUBBA WATSON: What was it? I blacked out there. (Laughter).

You know, yes, majors are the majors. I mean, everybody wants to win those. It's not about who is there. Yeah, people can say, we want the best fields, we want this. I want trophies. Whoever is there, I want to win. I want to win this week, right. I want to lift the trophy.

Playing my club championships at courses I'm members at, I lift the trophy and make fun of the members I beat. Competition is competition. That's why we are here this week. Doesn't matter who is in the field. You just want to win.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the major schedule this year. Obviously besides the success at Augusta, you've had runner-up finishes at the other three venues this year. How does this major schedule this season set up for you?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think it's awesome. Like I can't wait for the next four months. Starting today, the next four months of golf are exciting with the four majors and some of our best LIV events, here in Miami, at Doral, one of the best courses in the world and then going to Adelaide, which was one of the most exciting experiences I've had in golf, one of the coolest atmospheres.

So going to Valhalla where I was a shot shy, and going to Troon where I played really well and just got beat by Stenson and Pinehurst where I had a very emotional experience, I can't believe it was 25 years ago but it's a course where short game can shine there with the crown greens and so forth. I feel like they are courses that give me an opportunity to have the some good finishes if I perform well.

Q. I think this is the first time since 2017 that you've played the week before Augusta. Have you changed any of your approach this week?

JON RAHM: Is that true, '17? The process has been the same. At the end of the day, it's how you take advantage of the situation and how you prepare leading into this week. I actually was glad to have a tournament this week

because going into Augusta defending is really the first major championship I'm depending on the venue. Being at home this week could have been a little more challenging trying to control those thoughts. But having competition, you just, you know, you're here to do your job and it's great practise towards next week. I think in any way, it's going to help.

Q. It's been 20 years since your first Masters victory. What comes immediately to mind? Is there a moment or memory, and how much did it help to get the narrative about success in major championships vanish that day?

PHIL MICKELSON: I think that first of all, the photographer did not get me at the apex and didn't do it justice.

BUBBA WATSON: The slopes.

PHIL MICKELSON: But I thought that for 20 years and tried to recreate it and I thought well maybe he did get me at the apex. When you ask me what I think about -- every time I look back at that moment, I think of my grandfather or I see me jumping or see that putt roll in where it goes around the hole and lips in, I think of my grandfather who passed away January of that year and told me that this was going to be my first major and I just -- I'm getting chills thinking about it now because I think about him every time that I see that putt, and I think that he gave that ball a little nudge in. So that was, you know, not a moment that I see that picture or that moment, do I not think of him.

Q. (Off mic.)

PHIL MICKELSON: It was a relief. I had said for a while going in that if I win -- once I win one, I'll win a bunch. I don't know if six a bunch but it's more than one, and that win validated kind of what I was doing as being right. I just wasn't quite putting it together those weeks. I was making a few too many mistakes but I still needed to play the same way. I needed to be true to myself and the way I play but I also needed to be more strategic at times.

And so that win there, you know, was a relief, and it gave me a lot of confidence that I could do this more often.

Q. When you did your conference call for the Masters a couple weeks ago, you clearly had put a lot of thought into the menu. You wore a tie, which normally people don't do that for the media. But obviously you cared a lot and I wonder if you can just speak to that and how much it has meant to you to be the Masters Champion, how much you reflect on it, and if it's kind of weighing on you or if you're thinking about it a lot

going into next week?

JON RAHM: I put -- I wouldn't say a lot of thought because I think for a long time I knew the idea of what menu I was going to serve if I were to win. I wanted to showcase a little of where I come from and to be fair, Chef José Andres was a lot of help but like a good head chef, he took over immediately. So you know, he did a lot of that.

But the main thing why it was so emotional was that exactly. Like one of my grandma's dishes was going to be served at the Champions Dinner and it's just a little bit of me and where I come from, which is similar to maybe José -- Ollie and Seve, maybe not Seve, even though we grew up close to each other, there's certain differences.

It's just an honor to be able to do that, right. It's a tradition unlike any other like many things that week. To be part of that select group of people that won that tournament and wear that green jacket with pride and be in charge of the menu is quite incredible. Definitely one of the highlights of the week but for some reason definitely something I'm nervous about. I have no idea why. But it does seem a little daunting having to stand up in front of that group and give a speech even though I know every single one of them has been in my position, some of them more than once. I don't know, just seems -- you're going to be in that room with the legends of the game, still active and nonactive, and that's something really cool to be able to say and be able to share.

Q. Have any of you guys been to Augusta this spring and if so, can you just talk about what it was like, any changes, anything, or was it just a fun round or was it more to try to learn something?

JON RAHM: I've been there, yeah. I wanted to go back at least once before Masters week. I didn't want the first time back at Augusta National to be tournament week, right. I wanted to get a lot of those emotions out of the way, and also see the golf course, see if they have done any changes. You know, pretty quickly when the score guy came out, I got a million texts saying that it was 35 yards longer. Well, we're going to see what they added and what they changed.

It's a bit of both, right. I'm trying to see the golf course and learn a few new things and learn what they have changed and just trying to have fun. I was able to -- a member who hosted me, I was able to bring one of my best friend and share that experience with them. It was a bit of both. In my mind, it was getting to experience those emotions of being back, going to the Champions Locker Room and seeing my name up there, etc.

Q. When was that?

JON RAHM: That was last week.

Q. Phil, can you gone?

PHIL MICKELSON: I was supposed to go last week and something came up and I didn't. So I have not been there. I'll get there Sunday night and play a little bit more on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, than I normally do.

Q. Bubba, have you?

BUBBA WATSON: No.

Q. This is most likely for Phil I think. Obviously you've got a great record at Augusta, three wins, 12 Top 5s, I think 16 Top 10s. Obviously you've kind of accumulated a lot of proprietary information. Is that something at this point in your career you're willing to impart on some of the younger players like Jon or others, or are you still kind of like holding back some of that information? And Jon, probably a follow-up would be if you are trying to extract some of that information from Phil.

PHIL MICKELSON: So I'm happy to share information. There's little tidbits that this putt does this or that putt does that or you want to be over here. It's pretty easy to figure out but as you play it over the years, you learn where you can be aggressive and where not to. It's actually different for myself and Bubba than a right-handed player because there are shot dispersion and so forth.

I'll give you one example you wouldn't think of, like No. 10, when the pin is on the right, front right or even back right. When the pin is back right, if you go in that bunker and a right-handed player comes in there and opens the face on a sand wedge and hits a nice, high, soft shot with little cut spin, it cuts back into the slope, checks up quick. Pretty easy up-and-down. I've been in practice rounds where I've seen guys throw it up there two feet, no problem. But for a left-handed player if you go in that bunker and you open up that face and hit the ball out with cut spin, it's working with right-to-left green and the ball doesn't stop.

The best I can do is maybe eight feet, and ten feet is a pretty good shot, and so that bunker is much more penalizing for me than it would be for right handed players. So I have to be more cautious there.

But then another example would be 12 where it sits along our shot dispersion for a lefty. So if we aim over the bunker and we pull it a little bit, it goes longer right and we can get to to that back right pin. If we come out of it, it

goes short left and still catches the green.

So 12 is a hole where we get aggressive, Bubba and I, we're thinking 2 and we are getting after wherever the pin is, where a right-handed player, where it sits opposite their shot dispersion, they have to be a little bit more cautious on that shot.

So it plays different for each player, and it's not like that on every hole and every shot, and so there's stuff that transcends. For instance, when the pin is back left on 2, you can pretty much miss it anywhere except for the front part of the left bunker. You can get up-and-down almost anywhere except for that one little area, and I don't really care for the right bunker.

So if you hit those shots around the green to that back pin, and you know what it does, it's pretty easy up-and-down. So that's stuff that will transcend left-handed, right-handed player, whatnot, and I'm happy to share stuff like that. But there's little subtleties and nuances that allow that course to play different for Bubba and myself than Jon, and they can be aggressive on certain spots where we have to be a little bit more careful and vice versa.

JON RAHM: Yeah, I do. And I've played a lot of rounds with Phil and I've never heard him say the word, "No, I don't want to share that" or "I don't know." He's been really receptive and very willing to share that information. He's told me exactly what he's saying right now many times, and many other different things that can help you manage yourself around Augusta National.

I've gotten the opportunity to be with him in a non-tournament week and spend some time where we play 18 in the morning, and then go in the afternoon and go hit some chip shots in some spots that -- in true Phil Mickelson fashion are ridiculous. Others, you may not think you can end up there, but you can end up there.

The truth is, everywhere we went, he himself said, "I've been here before, and I've seen somebody be there before," right, and so it happens. If you've seen it, and you've seen that shot be executed, at least you know it's possible. So it gives you a little bit of an edge in that sense, right.

But at the end of the day, it's what he said, it's managing your game. I think Augusta is a golf course that you can learn to play your own way, and you can choose when to be aggressive or not based on how you feel comfortable, but like I said there's a lot of shots that may benefit him and vice versa.

One he didn't mention is the Sunday pin on 16. If I aim at

the middle and pull it, I might cover the bunker and get close. If I come out of it, it might end up in the bunker or the water. You still see things a little differently.

Q. You said it's the disruption phase, and around Twitter you joked that it's move 6 out of 37 or something. How much of the past few years has gone how you expected in golf, and where do you want it to go? Is it on that path?

PHIL MICKELSON: So I knew the first two years were going to be interesting. And how it all plays out, where it ends up, I don't know exactly. I just know that in the end, it's going to be a more global sport and there's going to be more opportunities. We already have 52 more playing opportunities or 54, for players. That's 54 more job opportunities that we didn't have before, and they are on a more global scale.

So we are bringing high-end, world-class professional golf to parts of the world to open up opportunities in those countries, and getting young kids to see it firsthand, the way we did, when we went to our local tour event and saw the pros for the first time and got inspired. So I don't know exactly where it's going to end up but I know it's going to end up in a more global environment.

One of the challenging things about golf that we don't talk about is that pretty much everybody here, we all watch football. We enjoy watching NFL but we don't play it. I don't play football. I don't go tackle on the weekend and nobody here does but we all watch it.

Golf, a lot of our viewers, almost all, a huge percentage of them, they all play golf, and how do we get golf to people that don't play golf. Like that's one of the challenges that's quietly being addressed with ideas and so forth, and I think there's going to be some things that will appeal in the end to people that don't necessarily play that want to watch and be interested in the game. Those are some areas that are being addressed quietly, haven't been discussed yet, but those are small parts that I think in the end we are going to have some ideas.

We are already here at LIV targeting a younger audience by decades, and that's a good thing, is we want to keep the younger generation interested in the game and not just keep losing fans. We want to keep gaining new ones as we lose some to age.

Q. The two years you won at Augusta, you finished tied for second here a few weeks before. Other than that coincidence, or was it a coincidence, and other than that, was this any connection between how you played here and how you played there?



BUBBA WATSON: It's a great question. I don't remember. It's more just playing good golf. You're playing good golf at the right time. I mean, look at NC State right now, right. They weren't in the tournament and now they have won nine in a row or whatever they have won.

It's just playing right at the right time and playing well at the right time. Seems like your misses go in the right spots and feels like the next week your misses go in the wrong spots. It's worked out in my favor over those couple years and those couple moments. I don't like to share my stuff.

Q. Question for Jon. Compared to a year ago, how do you come into this? Do you feel fresher? Do you feel sharper? Do you feel in any way different, and do you feel different? A lot has happened to you over this year. Do you feel a different person in some ways as well?

JON RAHM: No, I don't feel different as a person at all. I don't think I should, right. It's a little different. I won a lot early on last year and then I went on a bit of a month or so where I didn't play my best. Went to Bay Hill, played poorly. Went into Match Play, played poorly. I feel different in that sense.

At that time I knew I was capable of playing really good, right. Obviously I had done it all year but that month was a bit of a slump, which in a weird way helped going into that Masters. I was an overwhelming favorite, but Scottie was still more of a favorite than I was.

This year I feel like I have been playing really good golf but not over that hump of winning yet. I'm confident now, and I'm equally confident on my game pretty much any given day of the year. I think that's how any competitor should be. But this is that difference of how I've been playing the last few months. I'm comfortable. A little fresher, if anything, going into these next few weeks, so looking forward to it.

Q. My first time at a LIV event, having a great time so far, Bubba, Phil, earlier this morning, I interviewed Peter Uihlein and Brendan Steele and they both had glowing things to say about you as team captains. What has the team concept added to the LIV Golf?

PHIL MICKELSON: Go ahead.

BUBBA WATSON: He said nice things about me or Phil?

PHIL MICKELSON: Bubba, you've done a phenomenal job.

Q. Peter said you were an inspiration, and Brendan said that, Phil, he's known you for years and you've had a tremendous influence on him as a golfer.

PHIL MICKELSON: I'm going to let Bubba answer this. Because what he's done, seeing the energy and the way Matt Wolff carries himself, he's done an incredible job of taking an incredible talent and given him an environment that he's thriving in. He's had great team success for a while. Why don't you answer this one?

BUBBA WATSON: Team golf, it's college golf all over again right. We love team sports. We pull for the Ryder Cup and Presidents Cup. So team golf, to me, is where the future is. It's fun. Being a part of that, and like Phil just said, I love Matthew Wolff. I've known him for about five years, roughly. We are very similar in the way we think, the way we do things and the way we process things. So or me to share my experiences in life, he's not there yet and he's still 21 years away from being where I'm at now.

Obviously a team atmosphere is appealing to me. I get to talk to people and hang out. I think it gets very lonely. It's kind of what Anthony Kim said yesterday. You feel very lonely, even though there might be a million people around. Individual golf does that to me and obviously to Anthony Kim it did that and I think Wolff as well.

I think being able to be part of a team and spend time with some other golfers, people trying to do the same things, you can bump ideas off each other. This is a joy to my heart and mind and to my own family because they see the joy I'm having in this, and it's been a blessing to my family being able to come out here and spend time with some guys and shoot the breeze but try to play competitive golf and try to win, and having a young guy like Peter, Thomas, and Wolff, it's inspiring me. I've been working harder in the gym, eating better, trying to do things right where I can get better. Now I've just got to figure out how to putt. It's been a blast to come out here and be a part of this, and this is the dream that we all saw and wanted to be a part of.

You see in the paper and reading it is one thing, but actually coming out here living it and seeing the growth over the years, and the growth of people around us, buying into, it I think you're going to enjoy this week, too. Competition is real. There's a different element, not just the individual. It's the team aspect where on Sunday all four-balls count now and it's a lot of drama out there on a Sunday.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports