

LIV Golf Chicago

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Bolingbrook Golf Club

Jon Rahm

Legion XIII

Joaquín Niemann

Torque GC

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Let's welcome the captain of Legion XIII, Jon Rahm, and the captain of Torque GC, Joaquin Niemann. These are the only two players who are mathematically eligible to win the 2024 individual championship at the end of this week with only a three-point difference between the two. Welcome, guys.

Jon, this is obviously your first season on LIV, and you have one win and finished inside the top 10 of every event that you've played. Did you have this as a goal heading into this year, and are you surprised by your performance?

JON RAHM: Yeah, this was the goal, to have a chance to win and hopefully win. Joaquin has played fantastic all year, so to just being in this position means I've done pretty well myself.

Expectations are hard. Was it the goal? Yes. You never know how you're going to play. So I'm very happy that in the second half of the season I've played a little bit better than I did early on, even though I still played pretty good golf early. I'm happy to be in this position, and very excited to start the week. This is going to be a special one for one of us, too.

Q. Joaquín, you started out the year really strong with two wins, one in Mexico, one in Jeddah and then you had the round of 59. How do you feel your game is now compared to the beginning of the season?

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Yeah, it's been pretty good. The start of the season the first half I would say, yeah, I played amazing, winning two tournaments at the start. Then the last part, I haven't been the best, but I feel like it's getting there, and to be in this position the last tournament is pretty special.

Q. Is there an extra set of nerves this week teeing it up? Do you guys feel like there's a lot at stake?



JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Yeah, there is obviously a big goal for the season this week. One of my goals was to win the season, and yeah, it's all come down to the last week.

There's a little extra pressure, which I feel like is nice. It's part of the sport and being competitive.

For me, yeah, it fuels me in a good way to get better, to work harder, and to be more ready for that position.

JON RAHM: I agree with what he said. Yeah, I think you would be lying to yourself if you said there's nothing extra. We're all aware it's the last event, and for the two of us, obviously we both want to win. Anybody wants to win.

I also believe that being able to be in this position and having those extra nerves is a privilege. We're the only two in the entire league that are going to be feeling like that this week, so yeah, you have to embrace it and compete and still try to win but knowing there's a lot more at stake if that doesn't happen.

Q. I don't know if you guys are aware, but you guys each get a championship ring if you win, which is obviously unique to golf. It's prevalent in other sports. I'm going to read you some information about the ring that you guys would get to take home. It has 5.78 carats of white diamonds, has 1.2 carats of natural green emeralds, has green glow-in-the-dark UV enamel detailing, has a concealed ball marker with an embossed QR code. The QR code permalinks to the video reel of your winning moment so the winner can relive and share their victory anytime that they wish, and it also has one carat of black diamonds, 14 carat gold weight of 84.8 grams. How cool would it be to take this home?

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Yeah, that's pretty cool. Probably my wife won't be happy knowing that my ring would have more -- (laughter).

No, I feel it's pretty special. It's a little different than other trophies, so it would be pretty cool to have an extra ring.

JON RAHM: I'm trying to picture what it looks like right now, and I can't get that in my mind. It's a lot. It's definitely



a lot. But honestly, who cares what it is as long as you're the one that has it. That's, I think, what most of us will be thinking.

Q. I'm sure your kids will love scanning the QR code and watching your winning moment.

JON RAHM: They're too young right now. I try to keep a lot of that part of my life away from them right now. They're still too young.

Q. Obviously we talked about the individual championship, but this event also determines the top 24 players in the lock zone which get locked into your teams for the next year, and also the players in the DZ, which is the drop zone, that get relegated out of the league, so there's a lot at stake not only for you guys but for some of the players on your team who are at risk for relegation. I'm curious what type of questions or conversations you guys are having as a team in the locker room together this week as we get into the final event.

JON RAHM: I personally am never going to be the guy that would approach the player and start asking questions. I understand, especially during the week, already being here, I don't want to add to whatever he may be feeling, so if there's any questions or advise that he needs, I'll be there, I'll support him in any way, but I feel like if I went up to him right now, it would just be adding on to the moment. Obviously they're aware of what they need to do. They're aware of what they need to finish at to get out of that relegation zone.

This late in the season, I leave it up to them, and maybe if I need they're a little nervous I'll try to calm them down in different ways, but I try to let them be the ones that come to me if they have any questions.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Yeah, I feel the same way, and I feel the same way -- obviously they're going to have a little extra pressure, but I think it all comes down to them. They all know where they're chasing, the way they work every day. Obviously it's not a great situation to be in, but just like Jon said, I'm not going to be there and asking, hey, you're in this situation, you've got to do something. They all know what they're doing. They're all trying to get better.

On our team, we're all trying to help each other, so is there anything we can do to help and help them get better, we're going to do it. We're all here, and they all know that, and we're here to get better, and I feel pretty confident that Mito's game is getting better. He's getting a lot confident, we see with his new putter technique. He's going to be all right.

Q. On the topic of relegation, when you look at the standings, there are currently several captains that are at risk for relegation, which is new for LIV Golf. Amongst the players, is there a different vibe this week given what's at stake across the board?

JON RAHM: I don't know, you might be asking the wrong two players. Yeah, I think our mind is on something else. Especially torque, I don't know how close they are to clinching the third spot to having a bye in Dallas. We're probably thinking about other things other than that.

I have mixed feelings about the topic of captains and relegancy. There's a lot of ways to look at it. You're a captain, maybe you should have some sort of safety net, but at the same time if you are a captain you're supposed to be a leader, maybe play better.

I'm not sure if I've made up my mind yet, but I do -- in this sport, sports in general, you try to feel like you earn everything you accomplish, and if you don't play well enough, things are not going to usually go your way.

We know at least in many leagues and in Europe where you don't play good, you get relegated. There is an element of excitement to that, as well, that even a captain can have a bad year and just not be there, so it's not as safe and comfortable as people might make it sound.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Yeah, I think it's a situation where I do feel like if you're a captain, you're always trying to bring the best for the team, and I think being a captain means that you're just wanting everything and you want the team that is playing the best. It could be the case that if he's not playing good enough, you might find someone else to do better and still try to support the team. But yeah, there could be different ways, but it's a tough position to be on it, and I feel like in golf, we're always trying to -- we're always competing and trying to be in a better position and trying to win.

That's a different situation, and I don't think anybody would like to be there, so yeah, what they have to do is just work harder, play better, or yeah, just find a way to improve.

Q. As captains, have you guys started thinking about the off-season and what that could look like for your team in 2025? Obviously certain players will be free a little, there's the possibility of recruitment, there's player pathways through LIV Golf Promotions. Have you thought about that as the trade window opens after Dallas?

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: I mean, for me, my team is looking

pretty solid. I like how is my setup. I feel like we obviously haven't played our best as a team during the season. We still obviously are two weeks from the end, and we still can make something happen. I feel like Dallas is the main week, and we've got to play good.

There's a lot at stake this week to get that bye, but if not, there's still also a big chance for us to win.

There's a lot of golf to play, and for us, obviously, it's a good way to prepare ourselves and try to improve, but yeah, I'm pretty excited to see what's going to happen on the other teams.

JON RAHM: I've given it a little bit of thought, but not a lot. My mind right now past Dallas is more preoccupied with the birth of my daughter than anything else. I know Jeff has been thinking about it and the possibilities. I haven't, obviously. A lot depends on what happens this week because if Kieran doesn't have a good week then yeah, we're going to have to think about some possible moves. You never know. You never know what may happen.

I am intrigued, as well, as my first off-season, and trade world experience for LIV Golf, I am interested in seeing what may happen. I've heard rumors of different interests from teams in different players, some of my players, which with the year we've had, I hope they don't want to go anywhere. So yeah, I'm definitely looking forward to seeing what happens.

Q. Is this the biggest sports showdown between your two countries since the 2014 World Cup?

JON RAHM: I don't even know -- the 2014 World Cup didn't fare very well for us. I can't remember many sporting events where Chile and Spain actually get to go at each other. I don't know if it would fulfill that high a caliber, but we're certainly excited for it. It's not really the countries behind it like it would be in the World Cup, but I guess the situation is very good for Hispanic golf in general, the fact that you have two Spanish-speaking men competing for the title I think says a lot. I think we can inspire a lot of people, both in Latin America and in Spain.

Q. Joaco, you were 15 at the time.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: I was trying to -- I didn't get the question.

Q. When is the first time you guys met? Do you recall that? I think you guys played the 2017 U.S. Open, might have been the first tournament you were in the same field.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: 2017, no. I played U.S. Open in 2017 but I was an amateur. I think the first time we played together might be here.

JON RAHM: Paired together? No, we played a practice round at Augusta for sure with Sergio. I don't know if we were paired in a tournament together before. It's hard to remember. That 2017, that was Erin Hills --

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Too many golf rounds.

JON RAHM: Yeah, I couldn't pinpoint exactly when the first time we were paired together in a tournament round. It might have been the first round of Mayakoba. That I can remember at least.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: I remember we played in Shadow Creek --

JON RAHM: We played Shadow? I played so bad I deleted that.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: You were a little pissed, I remember that. (Laughter).

JON RAHM: I think my basic level on the golf course no matter what is a little pissed and then it just goes up from there.

Shadow, yeah, maybe Shadow.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: That was a few years ago.

Q. Jon, what would a season-long title mean in how you personally view your season and maybe how others will view your season this year?

JON RAHM: I can't get too concerned about what others think, to be fair. It's hard to answer this question because I always say if I do get it done on Sunday, ask me then, because right now it's all hypothetical. Obviously it would be a great accomplishment to come in in my first season and win it. It is the goal, but it's not easy to do, especially with how great players like Joaco have played.

Even just getting to this point, it's been a good year. I think overall, what I felt like I've played and maybe what I've read on the media of how I've been playing hasn't matched what I was feeling. I think I was playing better golf than I was given credit for.

I think in the second half of the season from the U.S. Open on, I think how I've played and what's been spoken of is matched, in the sense of my game has been at the same level people have been talking about.



It's a bit of two tales, but I've been comfortable. It hasn't been my best year, but this summer has been really good to me, and hopefully I can keep it going towards the end of the season.

Q. Joaco, you guys as you mentioned still have a chance to move into that third spot and earn a bye. How much have you guys talked about it this week, and how important is it to get that bye?

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Yeah, we know it's important. I think there's a few things that have to happen, us winning and then a few other teams not doing that great. So yeah, there's a lot that needs to happen. But we're still pretty -- feel pretty good knowing that worst case scenario we've got to play an extra day, match play against another team, which I feel like is a pretty good format for us. We've got a really strong -- we've got four strong players for match play.

I feel like I look at it that way. If we make it through, we make it through, and if not, we're just going to have to have more fun doing one more day.

It will be fun, whatever comes.

Q. Obviously you guys are still in your 20s, still evolving as golfers. What's the thing that you feel like you've improved on the most this season?

JON RAHM: I mean, I've got two months of being in my 20s left, so --

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Right question, right time.

JON RAHM: I was thinking about that. What was the second half of the question?

Q. What was the thing you feel like you've improved on the most, evolved as a golfer this season?

JON RAHM: This season? There's so many aspects to look at. There's obviously some changes when you come to LIV Golf to adapt to, but -- and a lot as a captain.

It's hard to say one without disclosing too much of what I do, of what I would like to share. There's just some things mentally that I think I've started to improve throughout the season, and probably the reason why I've been closer to winning in the last three, four events in general.

It's almost like either too broad an answer that I can give you or way too specific where I don't want to dive into the details too much. It's hard to answer that.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: For me, I feel like there's been a big change since I came to LIV Golf, especially because of my team. I feel like being able to listen a little more and try to understand what other people do things better, and being able to have three other guys there that do really good stuff during the day, and not just golf, in general, being able to learn that and try to apply it into my life, it's been really helpful, and yeah, it's helped me to grow a lot the last two years.

I feel like looking at it that way has been great, being around a good team.

Q. Historically when you guys achieve a win in your career, how do you process that? Is there a prize awaiting for you, something that you treat yourself? Is it raise the trophy, set it back down and grind tomorrow morning? Is there something to that, when you achieve a win in your career, what follows that for you?

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: I mean, I try to look at it the way that winning a golf tournament, winning a trophy is just a trophy. I feel like for us, we've got a long career and we try to improve every day, try to improve every aspect of our game and of our life, and winning a golf tournament, I feel like obviously brings a lot of attention. You do what you expect to do.

But I feel like it's a good learning point to see what kind of stuff you're doing right, what kind of stuff you're not doing right, and it's a good process to learn a lot.

But yeah, I try to look at it in the way that it's just a trophy. I feel like there's a few times before that I won and I feel like I made it, and it's not that way. I still need to recover the next day. I need to sleep the next day. I need to get up and work again and do everything again.

Yeah, I feel like winning is just a name. It doesn't change anything.

JON RAHM: I mean, I agree with what he said. It's very, very gratifying and satisfying to see everything you worked for happen and get that win. But I feel like in golf, unlike many other sports, for the most part there's always a next week. One of us can win the tournament and the season title this week, and you can't overexert yourself because next week you have the Team championship.

I feel like in golf there's always a next win coming, which is kind of a blessing and a curse at the same time. What I've done in the past if you accomplish something big, you almost have to postpone it until you have time and then celebrate it because one of the best advice I ever got was

from Rafa Nadal and it was after winning the Masters and it was make sure you enjoy this moment, make sure you celebrate it because you don't really know when it's going to come again.

Now, when he told me that, I don't know if he was aware the I was playing the week after in Hilton Head, but the week after we had one or two weeks off, then you can let yourself celebrate it.

It's almost like you can pick your spots, enjoy what you've accomplished, but like I said, win or lose the next day you wake up and start all over again; the grind doesn't really stop. That's what I think can separate golf.

But you can see in other sports where Kobe was famous for it. He might have been the only one, but win or lose an NBA title, take two weeks off and start all over again. We don't usually have that long of an off-season in golf, but I personally have tried to share and enjoy those wins with the people around me.

Q. You referenced this a little bit a while ago, a couple minutes ago, but does your recent play, going back to your win, the Open, the Olympics, the close call, Greenbrier, is it comparable to that stretch last year when you won four times, including the Masters?

JON RAHM: I would like to say yes, but no, because I did win four times, including the Masters. Had I won three of those events and the Olympics and the Open, maybe I could have compared it. But no. I've enjoyed -- that month of golf was really, really enjoyable. It almost started in Valderrama, to play good, finish top 10 in a tough week, seventh at The Open, win JCB and almost win at the Olympics and then Greenbrier, it's been -- kind of what we were just talking about, seeing what I've been working for this year happen finally, so it's been really enjoyable for me to do. A couple of painful moments in between. But it's what you compete for. It's what you practice for is to put yourself in those situations.

Golf level game-wise, yeah, maybe I've been close to what I did last year early in the year, but still I would say it's maybe a little bit below that.

Q. Also, you mentioned your wife is going to have a baby. Can you tell us where things stand with, I guess, the Spanish Open coming up, the Ryder Cup, meeting those commitments? Can you tell us where all that is? Are you going to try to play the three more that you need or are you trying to work out something?

JON RAHM: Still talking to the DP World Tour. I intend to play in Spain.

Q. It's my understanding you're supposed to have to enter by tomorrow --

JON RAHM: Noon in -- well, I'm entered into the tournament. We entered a long time ago. Whether they let me play or not is a different thing. I'm not a big fan of the fines. I think I've been outspoken about that. I don't intend to pay the fines, and we keep trying to have a discussion with them about how we can make this happen.

I've said many times, I don't go to the Spanish Open for the glory or anything else. I think it's my duty to Spanish golf to be there, and I also want to play in Sotogrande.

At that point, it would almost be doing not only me but Spanish golf a disservice by not letting me play, so yeah, that's why we're trying to talk to them and make that happen. I would also love to play the Dunhill. I have a good friend who asked me to play, and Johan has been a great, great ambassador for the game of golf. I would love to be able to play all those events.

Q. The other event you mentioned, is that the other Spain event?

JON RAHM: Yeah, Sotogrande is the town next to Valderrama, so that's the Andalucía Open or Masters I think is the name, and yeah, I would go Madrid, so Open España, Dunhill, week off, Sotogrande, and I want to play all. I think I might be entered into both of them. We entered those events, and I want to play. That's my intent is to play.

Q. Not to dive too far into this, but how is Kelley doing and how does that impact this at all?

JON RAHM: She's doing really good. She's doing really good. There was a dark moment there with the pregnancy. When I say moment, it was every bit of two months, and I feel like we're coming out of that right now. We're towards the end. Because of the issues we've had, they probably won't let her go a lot past 38 weeks, but she keeps doing better and better, so they keep changing what her deadline is.

I think right now, most likely if the baby doesn't come early, we might try to induce right after Dallas. It could be a case where I go home, deliver the baby, and then fly Tuesday or Wednesday to Madrid. So I could have a case of flying Thursday morning and teeing off Thursday afternoon, could have a case of flying Wednesday afternoon and teeing off Thursday morning. I'd say right now we have that going on, but if the baby comes early we'll see what happens. I probably would still try to go back home and

spend some time with them before I'm gone for the other weeks.

Q. Is it your understanding you have to play those four, three more, because the Olympics counted?

JON RAHM: Yeah, the Olympics counts so it's those three. I don't know the regulations. I know if you play your country's Open it counts as two. If you don't play your country's Open event you need to play one more, I believe. I could be wrong.

It's usually not an issue because I usually play enough and I want to play them. But yeah, I think it's not only that I have to play those three, but I want to play those events. They're fun. My last experience at the Dunhill I didn't play good, so maybe I'll get a little bit of redemption, even though being the fourth week in a row after having a baby might be a little much, for Scottish weather especially and Carnoustie. But still looking forward to some really fun golf ahead.

Q. About the Rafa Nadal advice, I imagine you get a flurry of texts the night you win the Masters and you almost don't even get a chance to look at your phone, but then you drive to Hilton Head very quickly, you have to do media immediately. I'm curious, how does Rafa's advice break through all of that noise? Is it obvious because he's Rafa Nadal --

JON RAHM: Yes. There's certain names like obviously you're going to get a lot of friends and family and the immediate family obviously phone calls. My dad was there, but phone calls with my mother and other part of the family. I don't even need to respond to the texts really.

But then there's a lot of them that maybe know you're not going to be able to answer at that moment, but the second you see a name like Rafa Nadal come by and his was a voice message, I don't know what I was doing but instantly the second I saw it I listened to it right away. There's names like that one like a Michael Phelps, Larry Fitzgerald, other great athletes that if they send you a text, you want to listen to it because not only might they be talking from experience, they might give you some good advice in general.

I mentioned that you pick your moments trying to respond to all those people. You're getting hundreds and hundreds of messages, and depending how social you like to be, it might be more, and if you go into social media it might be even more, which I stay away from that.

But it's something that you welcome, but it gets to a point where you can't really respond to a personalized message

for everyone. It gets really blunt to a lot of friends where you just say "thank you" and move on to the next.

Q. The discussion about unity in pro golf, men's pro golf, I think there's a bit of an acceptance that it's going to be decided in boardrooms, but I was curious when you have this match between Bryson, Scottie, Rory and Brooks and things of that nature, are there things as a player on the LIV side that you guys have done or would be interested in doing in kind of getting closer to unity?

JON RAHM: I'm not sure if I understand the question. Ever since I joined, and I believe before, I felt like we should do what we can to -- we have an opportunity to create a new stage for golf in the world of sports that could be better than what we had before, and I feel like we should take advantage of this situation. Yeah, if there's anything that we could do, that needs to be done, and I'd be happy to do it. Had I been asked to go play in that match, I don't know the date, but I would have tried to do it because at that time I will be going to Spain, so December can be tricky, but I would have tried to make it and be a part of it. If there's ever anything like that in the future, yeah, I wouldn't mind.

I think we could do some special things having both tours, with the League and the Tour, and what I keep saying is an even better product for the spectators to watch and something very, very special.

Now, you do need the smarter people behind closed doors to decide what that looks like. I don't know what the loss is. I don't know what could be possible or could not be possible. But I think if they put their minds together, they can come up with something very special, and that's been my thought all along.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Yeah, I'm not against anybody unifying and growing the game. I don't think there's much I have to say. I feel like just whatever comes that I can do to help grow the game and try to unify and have more people interested in the game, I'll be here happy to do it and try to help out.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the battle everyone has asked. What do you think about the battleground out there? How is the course, and how does it suit your game?

JON RAHM: I haven't seen all 18 holes, so I can't give you a complete -- I've only seen the front nine yesterday and I believe it was a different wind than we're going to play. It's in fantastic condition. It was, from what I hear, a few days ago and they tried to get it under control yesterday.

Small greens. Maybe not the longest overall, not the narrowest fairways, so it does seem like approach game is going to be very important this week.

Like I said, overall the message would be small greens but they're not flat, so they play even smaller than they are. It could be a week where if your ball-striking is on and your irons are on, you could have a very low one, and the opposite where if you're missing greens it could be a very long week, as well. I think it could be disruptively difficult for people just looking at it on paper without seeing it in person.

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: Yeah, just what Jon said. I feel the same way. I always like playing golf in the northeast. They always this time of year have great conditions like they have here right now. For us, obviously there's always different type of golf courses and what their defense from the golf course are for us, for me. It's always nice to play good conditions, and that's what we have this week. Yeah, whatever the challenge of the golf course brings, it will be a good challenge, and yeah, I also haven't seen the front nine yet, so I'm pretty interested to see what it is, but I'm pretty sure it's similar to -- I had kind of like an idea about seeing the back nine. It will be a nice challenge.

Q. If I can ask you guys, Jon, you played, I think, 37 rounds on LIV Golf this season and had just two rounds where you failed to break par. Joaquín, you had a 59 and I thought you had a great 6-under in the UK where Jon was winning and you needed to keep track of him in that tournament. Can you both tell me about any round that really stood out for you guys during the season, or will it be a case of Sunday's round being the best round of the season --

JOAQUIN NIEMANN: For me, obviously the best round of the season was the 59 at Mayakoba, for sure. But yeah, it's hard to beat that.

But looking back, yeah, I had a few good finishes on Sunday, which looking back to JCB where Jon won, I was one shot behind, where I was pretty far back on Sunday, and I knew I needed to do something because obviously Jon had a great chance to win, and the way he was playing, it was pretty possible to happen.

Yeah, sometimes it gives some -- it kind of reminds you that every shot counts. You see now I'm just three points behind, and that's only probably one shot. It just reminds you how important it is to stay present, to focus and give all your 100 percent on every shot because you never know what it could finish.

Looking back, there's good Sunday rounds, and I feel like I had a few good finishes to a few kind of poor starts on the first two days. It's nice to see them, and it will be nice to start with a 59, I guess.

JON RAHM: Were you asking what we think our personal best round is or in general? If it's in general, it's 59, obviously.

Mine, it has to be that 8-under at JCB. I didn't expect to see a score that low on that course to be honest, and to do it myself, I was surprised. There's been stretches -- I think it was the second round at Greenbrier I was 10-under, 8-under on the last 10 holes. That stretch of golf was pretty good.

But if I had to go based on those 18 holes, yeah, I think that opening round at JCB was probably my best for the year.

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