

Sentry Tournament of Champions

Tuesday, January 4, 2022
Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome Jon Rahm to the interview room here at the Sentry Tournament of Champions. He's making his fifth start at this event, most recently finished tied for 7th last year and he made his debut here in 2018 with a runner-up finish. Jon, welcome back to Kapalua, if we can get some thoughts on being here.

JON RAHM: Thank you. It's always great to be here being at the Sentry Tournament of Champions, it means you've done a good job, you've won a tournament and you've had a great year. So happy to be here, it's always a tournament I look forward to. I've done well on this course, so hopefully I can add up to those stats and give myself a chance to win on Sunday.

JOHN BUSH: Speaking of stats, 15, top-10 finishes here last year.

JON RAHM: I'm going to say 16 with an asterisk. I'm pretty sure I would have finished top 10 that week, you know. So let's say 16.

JOHN BUSH: Exactly. But what a year. 16 top 10s, just talk a little bit about the season that you had.

JON RAHM: Yeah, you know, if you asked me when I was switching manufacturers that I was going to have this year, I mean, I would believe you, but I was prepared for the first few months to be a bit of a struggle. Changing everything right away, new golf ball, I was confident but still trying to be realistic that it could happen.

And, yeah, well, all the hard work I put on in December paid off and started right out the gate playing great golf and having chances to win and obviously despite what happened the week of Memorial, everything kind of clicking in together and having the summer that I had. So I'm hoping I can have another quality year this year and hopefully win multiple times.



JOHN BUSH: Starting 2022 here at Kapalua, really strong field. Talk about that, the strong field and having fans back here after they were not here last year.

JON RAHM: Well, you have all the champions of the year, at least most of them, and you're competing against winners. Not that you're not throughout the year, but even though it's a smaller field it's very competitive because of that, you're playing against the best who have won. So it's always a task to win here and it would be a great honor to be able to win.

Then having fans is great. It's a tough golf course to get people out to, just because, if you make it to the 5th green out here, that means you're in great shape, because this slope is no joke.

But there are some holes, like 8 green where they always have some stands, 9, 18, a couple of the holes where they create a certain atmosphere. And you miss it, not having fans, you do miss it.

So I'm glad we're back in Maui and I'm glad we have spectators and I'm glad Maui can show their support of the PGA TOUR and us and enjoy the week.

JOHN BUSH: All right. Questions, please?

Q. How will you judge success this year given how good last year was? Do you need -- are you looking to beat it, looking to do something similar, what are your parameters?

JON RAHM: My goal is to beat it. My goal is always to do better each year. But, you know, it's hard to say. Because I've had such a consistent year and had one win, but I could tell you right now I would gladly take a bit more of inconsistency but have more than one win. So it all depends on how you categorize it. And I could tell you at the end of the year how I think about it.

On the sport we play on, it's hard to only count wins as successes just because it's a sport where winning is -- we all lack in that department except one man (laughing).



You can't just think about a second place as a loss, right? So it's kind of hard to tell you ahead of time, but obviously my goal in my mind I'm having a better year.

Q. Do you enjoy having the No. 1 target on your back, etcetera? Like is it something you focus on? Obviously you want to be No. 1, do you enjoy the challenge of people coming at you?

JON RAHM: Yeah. Well, it's still something you got to earn, right? Meaning, I'm No. 1 because of how I played in the past, so if I want to stay here I got to keep playing at the level and trying to get better.

At the end of the day, I focus on myself, right? I try to improve my game and improve my level of golf. If I can do that and play the way I know I can play, everything else should take care of itself. I'm not thinking constantly, Oh, he's No. 2 or he's coming for me, I need to do this or that. No, I'm trying to play the best that I can and hopefully win a tournament.

Q. How do you feel? Relaxed? You've had some time that you needed?

JON RAHM: I feel great. Yeah. I'm happy. Mind and body are rested, I'm ready to go for the year.

Q. New driver, right? Do you want to talk us through the new stuff?

JON RAHM: New driver. New woods that I'm still getting into, it's a process to get everything approved, but really liking it so far. It's the difference between using it at home and using it in competition, obviously, but I like it. I like the look of it, having a mat-black driver I'm a very big fan of mat colors, I always try to have a mat-black car and it's something that I love. Plus being able to see the carbon fiber throughout it, as a Formula 1 fan it's something that I really enjoy, it looks really slick, it looks good.

What I like so far that I've experienced with it, with the numbers at least on Trackman is the consistency. My spin rate seems to be a little bit more consistent with the misses. Obviously the better the miss can be, obviously the better it's going to be for me. So that's what I'm looking forward to. So far I've enjoyed it, I've hit it well and hope it translates.

Q. Talk about the golf fatigue after the Ryder Cup and what would have happened had you kept playing after that?

JON RAHM: I think, I mean it's a bit of a backstory for that, right? It all started for me when we restarted after COVID.

It was from June of 2020, right, it was a lot of golf to be played, I ended up getting two wins, played really good golf in majors, finished the Masters in November. And then right away, when everybody has time off, I basically flip, change manufacturers and work harder than I've ever worked, right?

I did not want changing clubs to really be an excuse, so I did a lot of work with that, played great during the year and then from Memorial on happens what happens, right? I get my moments with COVID, became a dad, won a U.S. Open, played amazing golf and then played a great Ryder Cup.

So when that Ryder Cup was over, I was drained for the previous year and a half. Not only the last four months but the previous year and a half.

And after I went to Spain and finished playing, I just, I needed a break. Not only for me but also for my family. We all endured it together and I just wanted the time to be a dad and be a husband and just be there for my wife and my son.

I'm really glad I did it because since he was born we had help at night and Kelley had help, but I wasn't that help, because I was competing and I had to sleep to be able to compete.

So as soon as I got back home I told her, you know, I want to be more involved, obviously I want to help out and for those two months I really, really, really enjoyed having to wake up a couple times a night and take care of my son. Be able to be there in the morning, give him a bath in the morning, feed him, give him a bath at night, just enjoy the simple things of parenthood and knowing that basically once he starts going to school I'm pretty much going to miss 50 percent of his life. I really wanted to cherish those moments.

I know I'm not going to regret any time I decide to spend more time with my family and that was what that decision was based on and I couldn't be happier that I made that decision.

Q. During that time how much golf did you play or practice?

JON RAHM: I took the first two weeks off, completely off of golf. I still went to the gym and worked out just because it's more of a mental thing. Then I slowly just started playing some games with my friend and then practicing. But the first month wasn't very intense. I was there, wanted to be there with my family.

Q. Did you watch any golf and did you see what Tiger and his son did and what were your thoughts on that?

JON RAHM: Of course I watched. I'm a golf nut. Unless it's commercials, I'm watching golf, that's just for sure.

It was really cool to see. It was really, really cool to see Tiger Woods like we did a couple years ago when they played that event -- or last year, sorry. Just how cool it is to have that father/son experience. Not only the fact that Tiger came back from the car crash and is able to hit golf shots again and it looks like he will be playing on TOUR again, obviously not full-time but he will be out here, which is wonderful for all of us.

Just to see that connection between father and son and how they were playing golf, right? Just to see how much of Tiger is in Charlie, it's so cool to see. It's just inspiring for other fathers out there, hopefully I can be there in the future and be playing with Kupa and contending for that event.

I can't really explain it any other words than saying I'm happy for him, happy for both of them. I'm happy that he has that connection with his son, I'm happy that they're enjoying it as much as they are and hoping the best future for Charlie, he's got a lot of talent. Certainly a lot more talent than I did at the age of 12. So if he keeps working hard, which I'm sure he will, I wouldn't doubt one second we'll see him maybe one day sitting here.

Q. Watching you the last couple years up here, my impression is that come Thursday morning your ball striking has been just fine, but it's taken you awhile to sort of get used to the greens and get into really what you should do on the greens. First of all is that an accurate assessment would you say?

JON RAHM: Yeah, I struggle with the greens here, not only the greens, the wind. It's just so windy. I don't know if you can really appreciate how windy it can get on the golf course on the broadcast. When you have 20, 30 mile-an-hour winds, gusting higher than that, the ball's going to do some funny things. It's tough. Some people do really good at adjusting, I've struggled with it.

It's also the first event of the year, we all can be a little bit rusty, but, yeah, you're absolutely right, it's usually the department in this course that I've lacked on. But even though it's been my weakest point, I'm still up there on the leaderboard on Sunday, so hopefully I can keep doing what I've done tee to green and take care of my putting and have a better chance on Sunday.

Q. Are you going to do anything differently in terms of

preparation the next couple days?

JON RAHM: I think as you come from Arizona and we have greens are rolling 12, 13, there's not that much wind. Then you get here, because of the wind these greens are to be slower, it's a bit of an adjustment period, right? I'm not the only one who struggles, I would say most people who don't have a good week I would probably think that the putting might be the No. 1 contributing factor to the difference between the winner to somebody who is in 15th place. I could be completely wrong, but I wouldn't be surprised.

No, nothing different. A lot of times it's more mental than physical, right. Just mentally just letting go and feeling the shot and trusting the wind and the break.

Q. For players who want to play as consistently well as you have the past few years, what's the biggest challenge?

JON RAHM: Have a bowed wrist (laughing.) No, I'm just kidding. I think what I've spoken about before, know yourself, know your swing, know your body, know what you're capable of, know why you swing the way you do.

And once you know that you'll be able to come out with basically the three things you need to do to have a consistent swing or at least a consistent ball flight.

There's a checklist on my swing that I can always go back to if I'm not hitting it well. I don't need my instructor there all the time because he's going to tell me one of those three things pretty much in just a different way. So having the checklist I think is really important. Maybe setup, maybe a feel, maybe a look, something on your swing that you like to have. There's got to be something you need to have that, when you're not hitting it well, you can fall back on to have a consistent, at least a ball flight or a shot that you can at least predict the outcome of more or less.

With that said, there's a lot of things that go into it. If one day you wake up, usually you draw the ball, but the ball's not drawing, maybe try not to hit draws, right? Always try to play a shot that you know you can play. Golf is not a hitting contest, it's posting the best score you can pose. Doesn't matter how it looks, it's just competing and getting the lowest round out there.

JOHN BUSH: Certainly working well for you. Keep it going in 2022. Thanks, Jon.

JON RAHM: Thank you.

