

THE PLAYERS Championship

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

HALEY PETERSON: Good morning, everyone. We would like to welcome World No. 1 Jon Rahm to the media center here at THE PLAYERS Championship. Jon making your fifth appearance here. What's it like to be back, and thoughts going into the week?

JON RAHM: Always happy to be back. Happy that I'm getting over certain worldwide situations, we're back in this room and things are starting to go a little bit back to normal. Really happy in that sense with what we went through a couple years ago, precisely this week.

When it comes to the course and the tournament, I think it's a week that a lot of us look forward to. It's a course that I've played well in the past. It's a challenging golf course, and it's one that I enjoy. I for the most part enjoy Pete Dye designs. I enjoy the challenge that he gives us as players, and you know, it's a golf course worthy of this tournament and a champion that should be really proud when they're hoisting the trophy on Sunday because you truly are the best player in the world when you win this week.

Q. As World No. 1, this weekend four other golfers can overtake you as World No. 1. Do you feel like you're chased this weekend?

JON RAHM: I had no idea until right now, so...

Q. Sorry.

JON RAHM: You should ask if I want to know those things or not (smiling).

No. No. Even if you're No. 1, you've still got to perform every week. I'm chasing people myself, as well, so no, I don't feel like I'm being chased.

Q. Rory said that he kind of treated yesterday as a mental health day after the brutality of Bay Hill weekend. Curious if you felt the same and how you decompressed yesterday.

JON RAHM: No, not really. You know, I might be



somebody who gets a little intense on the golf course, but within one hour of that last putt going in, I've completely forgotten.

The golf course setup is what it is. You have to deal with it, but when it's over, it's over. I won't -- I'm okay, typically I say within an hour. Right now it's pretty much until I get to hold Kupa, however long that is. It could be 30 seconds, it could be 30 minutes. I didn't really spend any extra energy more than I needed to on the golf course.

Yesterday for us was a travel day. It was the first time for me in a car ride two and a half hours with a baby, so I was more worried about that than the course.

Q. Your results in this event have improved throughout the years. If you could have one part of your game that's really clicking and firing on all cylinders, what's the most important part this week?

JON RAHM: Oh, this is one of the hardest weeks to decide on just one because every part of your game needs to be good. It's demanding off the tee. It's demanding on the approach shots. If you miss the green, you'd better be in the right spot. It's depending all throughout. That's what makes it such a great golf course.

But if I had to pick one, I would probably say short game. Mainly because I'm a pretty good ball striker, so even if I'm not at my best, I still know I'm at a good level.

So if I'm getting those up-and-downs, that means you're going to be making quite a few birdies on par-5s, and there's a lot of holes where if you just put it in the fairway, you're going to have a short iron in, so birdies going to be coming in. If you can eliminate a lot of those mistakes that can happen here very easily, you can see yourself contend on Sunday.

Q. Knowing last week was your first time playing at Bay Hill, with how difficult that course played and how much of a mental grind last week was, will that impact your decisions on whether to play that event going forward?

JON RAHM: I liked it. I enjoyed the golf course. I enjoyed the design and I enjoyed the challenge.



I've heard different reviews through a lot of players. My main thing was I didn't expect -- and I was warned about this. I didn't expect the golf course to change as much as it did from Wednesday to Thursday, because Wednesday pro-am day it was playing soft. The greens weren't firm, they weren't that fast, and then I show up Thursday to the second green and it's brown. I missed it 25 feet right of the pin and I could not stop that ball within 10 feet of the hole. I was surprised.

I think knowledge about the course and the setup would have helped me a little bit, but it is what it is. Going forward I'll be back. Yeah, I liked it. As a family we liked it. There's a lot of things to do for my wife and baby out there, and if I'm enjoying the golf course, it seems like it's a week that I'll probably go back to.

Q. Was it more frustrating to play on what seems like a putting contest or on greens that barely have any grass on them?

JON RAHM: I'd rather play at Bay Hill every single week of the year than a golf course that challenges you in no other way than putting. We're trying to be the best players in the world. We're playing at Arnold Palmer's place; it's Arnold Palmer's legacy. I think he would like us to suffer a little bit, and I have nothing to complain about honestly.

The only thing I would say is if they're going to have the greens that firm, maybe have them that firm by Tuesday so we can get ready and we know.

But it seemed like the only one in the field that wasn't prepared for that was me. Everybody knew what to expect.

Yeah, if it was up to me, we would see more of that every single week rather than a setup with no rough and having to shoot 25-under.

Q. Tiger going into the Hall of Fame tomorrow, can you speak a little bit to what he meant to you as an influence even though you're obviously quite a bit younger, and can you imagine yourself one day, do you think about that going into Hall of Fame?

JON RAHM: I feel like there's a few things to accomplish before you have a Hall of Fame-worthy career. I feel like I've done two of them, which is being No. 1 in the world and winning a major, but I actually have no idea what the criteria is to be in the Hall of Fame. I have no idea. But yeah, it would be an honor to be inducted into it.

I feel like if I'm not mistaken, I have no idea, I think only two

Spanish players have been inducted in it. I'm assuming Sergio might be, as well, so I could be the fourth, which it would be a true honor.

And what can I say about Tiger that we haven't said already? He inspired a whole generation. Besides entertaining all of us for 20 years and doing unbelievable things, he inspired the generation of players that you're seeing today.

You have at the top of the world a lot of 20-some-year-olds and early 30-year-olds that grew up watching him and trying to copy him, and I think that's why the level of the game is as high as it is right now.

You know, aside from everything that he did, I think it's a testament to what he was able to accomplish and how many people he was able to inspire.

Q. I know what I like about Pete Dye golf courses; I like them because they're visually interesting. But what do you like about them when you're playing it?

JON RAHM: So I think they are fair. And when I say that, it's when you hit a good shot, you get rewarded. If you see a lot of his designs, let's take the 18th hole, for example, even though you have a hard cut edge of water on the left side, it's not too tilted towards the left. Or let's say the 16th green on the right side, it's actually sloped towards the center of the green, so if you hit a good shot that's going on that line, most likely it's going to stay on the green. You're not going to get a ball that lands in the center of the green and just rolls off into nothing. That's what I like about it.

He does a great job at making deceptive tee shots that are intimidating but then play wider than you think. There's a lot of movement to the golf course, right. If you have a shot that requires a left-to-right shape off the tee, the next shot is going to be most likely a draw, and if it's a draw off the tee then most likely you will need a fade. You need to be in extreme command of your golf ball. That's what I like about it.

He makes what I call functional golf courses that are really esthetically pleasing. There's a lot of times there's architects that can make a golf course that's beautiful but doesn't play as good as it looks, and I think Pete Dye, up there with Alister MacKenzie and some of the great ones can accomplish both.

Q. You were saying how much you're able now once you finish a round, probably because of Kapa, probably because of another baby soon again, you're able to forget about it and be present and kind of not bring any trauma or whatever from the round. Does it



help you now approach any new tournament like THE PLAYERS this week, like a completely new tournament and being in the moment and not having anything from the past that bothers you?

JON RAHM: Yeah, I mean, like I said, even before being a dad, it's something that as soon as I was done playing, pretty quickly I would get over it, but now it's even quicker. I'm even better at not bringing that home. What I learned, kids are so attuned to what you're feeling that if I come home all frustrated for no reason, he will get frustrated, then mom gets frustrated and that's not a good afternoon.

I've become even better. Plus when I see him, it's just now that he's been walking for a while, he looks at me and runs up to me, I can't help but to smile, and the second I smile, I forget about it. Even though I'm not really too worried about it -- like last week I wasn't too worried about the setup. If anything I'd be worried about what I could have done better, but the setup is what it is, we all have to play it, and a lot of people did great.

Q. As a dad, as a European, what goes through your mind when you're watching what's going on in Ukraine?

JON RAHM: It's hard. It's hard to see, honestly. I think I saw some news that they might be targeting or not, but they're bombing schools in Ukraine, which to me is absolutely ludicrous. I don't know what goes through a human being's mind to be doing that at this day and age really. I don't know. I can't rationalize it in my head, but it's happening, and hopefully they can find a solution soon.

But it's sad, honestly. It's really sad. Those people in Ukraine right now need help because through no fault of their own they're going through what they're going through.

Luckily the PGA TOUR and some of the golf industries are working on something to support that, which I think a lot of us might jump on, but hoping they can find at least a way to maneuver it because it's a lot of innocent people that shouldn't be going through this.

Nobody should, but -- I really am at a loss for words every time I think about it because I can't believe it honestly. I have a hard time believing what goes through Putin's mind to be doing this.

Q. You talked about how last week the course changed so much from Wednesday to Thursday, getting firmer. With the forecast that it looks like this week, it's going to go from probably firmer to softer. For you, which is an easier adjustment, a golf course that's getting firmer throughout the week or a golf

course that's getting softer throughout the week?

JON RAHM: Well, an extreme change all of a sudden, it's hard either way. So I don't know -- I wouldn't know because we don't experience the change to firm that quickly that often. At least I haven't. Usually there's a process, and you can see it going on and you can see it maybe on the weekend getting firmer.

But I feel like a lot of us have had a lot more experience on a thunderstorm coming in and softening up the golf course, so I feel like that'll make it easier for all of us, but an extreme change like that is hard either way. But if I had to guess I think going into softer conditions should be an easier change.

Q. There have been a number of players from Spain who had broad shoulders that you are now standing on, Seve Ballesteros and of course Sergio and José María Olazábal and a number of others. How do you feel about your role as a Spanish player, and what can you say about the number of top world-class players that have come out of Spain? And even including women like Carlota Ciganda and others, of course.

JON RAHM: Yeah, it's an honor to be in this situation. Obviously it only happens when you're playing good golf, right, so I'm not actively thinking about it all the time. I'm just worried about doing the best I can on the golf course, and hopefully that way, like many players have done before, inspire some players coming up.

I don't know why I think Seve obviously did a lot of it. There's a lot of talented players in Spain, and there's a lot of talented players in Spain you never see.

I don't know why a lot of times they can't make the jump into the professional ranks, but for a country that only has about 300,000 golfers, there sure has been a lot of success. I don't know what it is, but -- it's there, I just don't know what it is, because especially most of the kids that grow up in Spain, even myself at one point, all we want to do is play football, be soccer players.

I honestly can't give you an answer. If I had to say, a lot of it was because of Seve. I think Seve opened the gates for so many of us and transformed the way people look at golf.

Q. And Jack and Tiger --

JON RAHM: Yeah, exactly. It used to be such a little sport in Spain like everywhere else in the world, but just in the '70s and '80s he changed it for all of us, so a lot of those people that started playing golf the next generation such and myself and Sergio and others started doing it, as well.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I don't know why exactly, but we seem to have a bit of a talent for this sport.

Q. When you were younger, can you give me a list in order of which golf tournaments you couldn't wait to watch and where did THE PLAYERS fit on that?

JON RAHM: My curfew was 9:30, so I didn't get to watch much. That was my thing. I can't tell you how many -- and my parents were strict with it. The only time I could miss it was to watch the first half of a soccer game that started at 9:00 p.m. so I could get almost to 10:00 to watch our soccer team. That was the only time I could miss it.

I remember when Tiger made the chip-in in '05 I begged my parents to stay up. Nope, you're going to school tomorrow; you can't stay up.

I didn't really watch that much when I was in the U.S. I watched the Open Championship a lot.

On the weekends I would watch a little bit more Saturday, but not that much honestly. It's tough to even remember it just because of that. I had to be to sleep so early I didn't have the time to do it. There was a nine-hour time difference, six-hour difference with Florida, so it was 3:00 p.m. here and they were barely getting started.

But THE PLAYERS has always been a great event. Obviously I watched the majors, a lot of the European events and the WGCs. All the big events are big worldwide, so obviously this one was very high up there, even though I never got to watch it finish live.

Q. Do you still go to bed at 9:30?

JON RAHM: Yes, pretty much. It kind of went to -- in college, I don't think there was one night in college and my last year of high school I went to bed before midnight, and then as I transitioned and turned pro it just got a little bit earlier, a little bit earlier, a little bit earlier. As a father now when Kupa goes to bed at 7:00, I'm ready to go to bed, as well. Yeah, it's pretty much now 9:30 even so now.

Q. Was it a big deal, though, when Sergio won this tournament to you?

JON RAHM: Heck yeah. I remember watching that one on Monday. But I watched it. Yeah, it was a big deal. Because he had been so close for so many majors, and he won -- was it '07 or '08? So Carnoustie had already happened, and it's something that I think obviously he needed because this is pretty much a major win, quality-wise, field-wise. It's like winning a major. With the

final round he had when his putter was on fire and winning in that playoff was very remarkable, so I remember watching that and the whole country was happy for him because it was a big one.

Q. I won't quote you the stats, but are you doing anything special to try to work on short game, some of the putting struggles that you've had?

JON RAHM: No, I know the stats, don't worry. I don't need to know that it's not going well.

Yeah, I'm working on some stuff. I've been working on changing some things, and sometimes things get worse, apparently. Stats are not everything. There's certain things I've gotten a lot better, but it's a combination of things. My ball-striking has been so good, as well, that if I miss two greens a round and don't get up-and-down on one of them because I left myself in a bad spot, the stats are not going to show that it's really good. So yeah, I'm working on things.

Q. I was interested this something you just said that stats aren't everything. What is your process for looking at stats after a tournament, whether it's a bad tournament or a good tournament? Is it case by case?

JON RAHM: Well a lot of what we have is related to the rest of the field, so personally could be getting better, but if the field has a good week in whatever it is, in putting, it might not show as such.

If you're working on technique, like I said, you might be having -- working on certain feels and certain things that might be getting better, but it doesn't necessarily show in the numbers. But it feels better to you, if you know what I mean.

It's hard to explain.

Q. You don't need to see the stats to feel like you're improving?

JON RAHM: No, not at all. You don't need to.

HALEY PETERSON: That's all the questions we have. Jon, thank you for taking the time to speak with us, and we wish you the best of luck this week.

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