

# WM Phoenix Open

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Scottsdale, Arizona, USA

TPC Scottsdale

## José Luis Ballester Barrio

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will get started. We'd like to welcome José Luis Ballester here to the interview room at the WM Phoenix Open. Playing on a sponsor exemption this week, senior at Arizona State. How would you characterize the experience of being out here at this event as a competitor for the first couple of days as a practice round?

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: I mean, it's awesome. I remember being here supporting Preston in his freshman year, and I saw how wild it is outside. Was also here my sophomore year and having the opportunity to live that experience in my final season at ASU is going to be really cool.

**Q. Talk a little bit about you're No. 2 in the PGA TOUR University ranking. How much is that on your mind in terms of positioning yourself trying to go for that No. 1 spot here as we get toward the end of the collegiate season?**

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: Obviously it's in my mind. I didn't start that well at the beginning of the year. I think I was ninth, but played good in the fall and kind of moved myself to the top of the rankings. But I've checked the rankings, and it's going to be really, really tight this year.

Obviously there's a good opportunity to put myself in the first pod and see how I do in the next tournaments, but I know that probably until post season, I'm not really sure where I'm going to be standing. So just trying to take every opportunity and try to do as good as I can so I can be at the top.

**Q. You mentioned the time watching Preston when he was here. What do you want to tell your teammates about how they can support you or have a good time while they're watching you this week?**

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: Well, the boys are in Hawai'i right now, so I know they're going to be having fun over there. I told a few guys on the team that the only

thing that they can do to support me is to bring some of those Hawai'i juices they have over there. That's the thing that I miss the most from that trip. Unfortunately they're not going to be here to support me, but hopefully they'll be watching on TV.

**Q. Talk about the experience out at 16, getting to hit that shot. Have you had the chance to be out there yet, and what are you anticipating come tomorrow?**

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: That's a good one. Played it Monday and Tuesday. Both days probably it was at 10 percent of its capacity, and it felt pretty shocking, so I can only imagine how it's going to be. I would say more on Friday because I'm playing last off tomorrow. So I would think maybe there's not going to be much people tomorrow when I reach 16, but Friday is going to be pretty packed. I'll just let that adrenaline hit me a little bit and see how I do.

**Q. Both your parents are Olympians. What sort of conversations have you had with them leading up to this week?**

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: Not much, honestly. My dad saw me yesterday with this thing on my hand and he kind of panicked, is your wrist okay, are you doing good, and I'm like, yeah, I'm fine.

They've always been super supportive. The good thing about having Olympian athletes as your parents is that they really know how hard it is to make it to the top, and they've always been very strict with me growing up during practices, but they know how hard it is outside to compete and to actually do good.

I know they're going to be rooting for me. They're probably going to be nervous on TV since they're not here, but the only thing I can say is that I wish they were here because it's going to be a really cool moment for me.

**Q. I chatted with you after your big win last August and you told me how you have played with Jon Rahm before but you have not had the chance to play with Phil Mickelson. Have you had the chance to meet and**



**play with Phil yet, and have you played with Rahm since then?**

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: Unfortunately not yet, but I was able to play with Jon, I think, like a week after I won when I got back to school. He actually played a few rounds with us in some of the qualifying. It was kind of shocking because I played really, really bad. I hadn't touched a club in like 10, 12 days after that victory at the Am, and I told Rahm, I'm like, man, I promise that I played better to win. It was not like this. It was kind of funny.

But he kind of told me it was more normal after a big win to lose your game a little bit with all the media and all the other things that come with it. It was cool to share also that moment with Jon.

**Q. What do you hope to accomplish this week?**

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: First of all, I'd like to show myself that I'm able to compete among the best players in the world. I had the opportunity to play at The Open Championship 2023. I think I did a good job, and not playing good, I ended up missing the cut by one or two strokes, and I felt that I didn't even play good.

This year almost like 18 months after, I feel like my game has become better. I've matured as a golfer and as a person. So just show it to myself. It's going to be tough with all the crowd and all the people out there, but I always say the same; I play for myself and hopefully I can demonstrate that I'm able to belong to this group.

**Q. PGA TOUR University has established itself the last two years pretty phenomenally. How has it become a motivator for college golfers but for you specifically?**

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: I mean, it's awesome. I mean, the best thing that they're doing is they're promoting college. They're promoting guys like me to stay four years, which maybe you didn't see that many players before, especially the top ones when they were trying to pursue their professional career. So having those rankings that can provide you with a PGA TOUR card for the first part or with a comfort, which is also pretty good, it's a way for us to stay hungry in our last two years, and knowing that if we do really good, we're going to have an easy access to the TOUR.

**Q. Do you know any of the other players like Ludvig Åberg that have come through and been successful with that?**

JOSE LUIS BALLESTER BARRIO: Yeah, I had a chance to play with Ludvig my sophomore year before he even

turned professional, and I actually saw Thorbjornsen like an hour ago leaving the club, so it was good to talk with him for a little bit, and he told me that he's rooting for me, also, hopefully getting that PGA TOUR card at the end of the year. It's going to be really exciting and really cool.

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