

WGC Dell Technologies Match Play

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

Austin, Texas, USA

Austin Country Club

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome World No. 3 Jon Rahm to the virtual interview room here at the World Golf Championships Dell Technologies Match Play. Thanks for joining us. I know this week is certainly a bit different than these typical stroke-play events on the PGA TOUR. You're making your fourth start, having made it all the way to the championship match in your first one in 2017. Just a few opening thoughts on this whole breed of cat of match play and how you think it sets up for you physically and mentally.

JON RAHM: Well I love match play. It is the one time you play one-on-one against somebody else, and it's maybe the more relatable of the four match to other sports, right? I guess a lot what you do is dependent on what the person in front of you is doing, and you don't necessarily need to be playing your best golf every single day, you just need to be better than the person in front of you, which is the beauty of it; it's one-on-one. It's a typically different game.

I enjoy it a lot. I really, really like it. It's about just trying to somehow get it done. Strategies change, it goes back and forth, sometimes you need to be aggressive, sometimes you don't. It's certainly something I wish we had more often.

Now, I love the golf course. I think it's one of those that really sets up great for match play. There's a lot at play; it's a lot of holes that play different depending upon the wind. You can drive some holes, you can drive other holes, you can get in trouble on the ones and all that. It gives you birdie opportunities, there's bogey opportunities; it's a really fun week. It's a really fun town, fun event. Something I really, really enjoy. I'm glad we get to be back here this year.

DOUG MILNE: Six top 10s in 10 starts, I believe, so far this season including a top-10 in your most recent start at THE PLAYERS. Just how satisfied are you with that and your thoughts on your game coming into the week?



JON RAHM: Well, if we take into account that I teed up with all brand new clubs this year, certainly started playing better than I expected. I expected some struggles at first. With that said, I'm going to say that I'm kind of wanting to do a little bit better on Sundays. I just haven't. I had a chance at Torrey Pines, I had a chance at PLAYERS last week -- a couple weeks ago, sorry. I could have been closer to the lead. Yes, I'm doing top 10s and that's all right, but I'm here to win tournaments, and if I'm not going to win, then I want to at least give myself a chance coming down the stretch because I haven't done that this year so far. Every week is a little bit different but, still, same thing. I've been playing good, I've been playing consistent, so hopefully I can get it over the line.

DOUG MILNE: We'll open it up and take questions.

Q. Not sure the timetable, but is fatherhood approaching? What's the plan there?

JON RAHM: I'm not going to disclose too much. All I can say is if anybody's thinking of a betting on me on the Masters, maybe think about it twice because there's a chance I have to just turn around and leave that week.

As far as I'm concerned, Kelly and the baby are doing great, so it is approaching. I mean, she is due April 10th to the 12th. So that's her due date, so yeah, it's coming up.

I hear all kinds of stories, right, from people saying, oh, first one is always late, two people say, well, no, mine were early, this and that. So I don't know.

I'm excited about it. I'm trying to take it one day at a time. And I can tell you I'm ready to go at any moment's notice, to be honest. If it happens today, I can go to the hotel and be gone quick. So happy about it. That's all I can say.

If I knew it, if I could give anybody a timeline, I would, but nobody knows. So I'm just hoping everything goes well. I've said it before; if I have to leave any event, I'll leave. If I have to leave this week, hopefully it doesn't come when I'm in the final and I just have to leave after nine holes. I mean, that would be unfortunate for the winner, but it is what it is. Being a father is much more important than any golf event would ever be, so that's my head right now.

Q. Obviously Augusta played differently in November



than in your previous three appearances. Did you learn anything from the November Masters that you think could be useful moving forward or was it just kind of a completely different animal?

JON RAHM: I played with Sebastian Muñoz on Sunday, and that was his first Masters. I pretty much told him anything you learn today, this week, forget about it because it will never play like this again, period.

I mean, I hit some shots into some greens -- I hit a 4-iron on Sunday on 15 and it was low and drawing into the wind to this back middle pin to land it an inch short and ended up three feet past that in years past that ball would have nearly been in the water on 16.

So it just, it didn't play the same. It wasn't the same. You had to be very precise with the shots into the green. It was much easier off the tee because the ball was just plugging in the fairway. Chipping around the greens and putting, it was just slower, a little softer. It wasn't the same, not even close to being the same.

Still played somewhat like it because it's Augusta National, and experience is always going to help with certain areas you can or can't be, but very few years when we play in April where it plays close to those conditions. The last few certainly were very different to that, at least in my mind.

Being your first year, you do learn a lot of things, you learn certain strategies off the tee, the lines, the winds that you might play, and just visually getting comfortable with it. But when it comes to the greens, it played extremely different to what I'm used to.

Q. You win every match and get to the championship match against Dustin in your first year. And then the next year you don't win a match. I think you halved one of them. Whether you had a great week or a not-great week, do you leave the tournament questioning your form at all? Is it such a strange format that you really can't judge exactly how you're playing based on results?

JON RAHM: It's hard to do. It's hard to judge. The one thing, the true thing is to get to the final you need to play good and at some point you're going to have to get lucky. It's six matches to get to the final if I'm not mistaken. Yeah, six to the final. You're not going to play six perfect rounds. Like I said, some days you think you're playing bad, person in front of you plays worse, it doesn't matter. So it's a little difficult. Yeah, I mean, the first year I was I think B or C player and I came in and I pretty much shot 7-under every time I played the first 13 and won my matches and then the next year being the A player technically, played against

three guys that played amazing, and I struggled.

So it's just difficult. It's not easy. It's very different from kind of pulling a score maybe if you're having a bad ball-striking day like I did at THE PLAYERS where you just manage to shoot a couple under par or even and maybe have a chance on the weekend like Justin Thomas exactly did over here. If you struggle a little bit, yeah, maybe you might get to 18 or 17 and still lose and you aren't making it through. So it's different. It's not about judging your game, it's simply about beating the guy in front of you, and sometimes you get it done, other times you won't. That's the beauty of match play. That's why it's so fun.

Q. Have you ever caught yourself looking at an opponent and thinking, I should beat this guy? Even though you expect to win, I mean, I know that. But...

JON RAHM: No, because I mean it all depends. If he's beating you, it's either because he's playing better than you or you've made some mistakes, which consequently he's playing better than you. So you should, yeah, but shoulda, coulda, woulda doesn't really count, right? You just got to keep on going. I really haven't felt that because everybody here is worthy of being here, and I mean, think about the final last year, or last time they played, Kevin Kisner against Matt Kuchar. Anybody can beat you. It's not over until it's over so it doesn't really -- again, it's not over four days, it's 18 holes, and anybody can beat you in 18 holes.

Q. You expressed how much you like match play. I talked to Jordan Spieth earlier in the week and he loves it, but he also loved the sudden death format that they used to have before they went to the group stages and the pools. And he and you both said that you love it and you'd like to see more match play tournaments. Is that possible? Or with the TV responsibilities you want to ensure the top 10, top 20 players stick around all week?

JON RAHM: I agree with Jordan. I like the sudden death format. We played so many events in Europe like that, that if it wasn't sudden death you had 36-hole qualifying rounds to get to 64. So I do like the sudden death. I don't know, it's just -- I understand it's a little bit harder for the sponsors and TV because your best guys might be gone, but I think it's more thrilling. You're competing for your life every single event. Well, not your life, but it's a little different.

I don't like this whole, oh, well if he wins and then he ties, because what happens -- I'm a perfect example. If I have to leave, right, imagine I beat Sebastian tomorrow then I have to leave. I guarantee wins for the other two players. That's just not fair, and it's happened before. Then you have the whole thing of who ties and who beats and a

playoff and all that, and how sometimes somebody who gets two points can go through and somebody who gets two and a half might not go through. To me it doesn't seem the best, at least for me. I'm so used to the sudden death, I think it would be a better event if it was like that.

Q. Probably be more exciting for TV viewers, wouldn't it, because so much is riding on every match.

JON RAHM: Early in the week, yeah, it would be. Definitely. I don't know why -- and hey, the better players are going to make it to the final. I mean, you need to play good. In this format I guess you can have one bad day and still somehow make it through, right? So I think it defeats the purpose of match play a little bit.

Q. The whole issue of live mics on the course, we have seen it catch Jordan after he hits, Rory with his tee shot and obviously with Justin. How big an issue is that with you and the players and do you feel like you guys are being protected?

JON RAHM: Oh, that's a complicated subject. It's a little bit different in golf to other sports, but it doesn't happen as often as it happens in golf as in basketball, football, NHL. You know, I understand they want to hear what we're saying, but over four hours we still need the privacy to be able to talk freely amongst us and make jokes around. That's at least my personal belief.

At the same time, we are responsible for what we say, and we should be aware that there's mics and it could happen. But it's tough. It is tough. I wouldn't know how to answer it exactly. We could go on and on over many different things. Of course I've certainly been caught saying some things I don't want to say. Things just happen in the heat of the moment, and yeah, I mean, I bet there's a lot worse things being said on football fields and NBA courts and other things, right?

So I don't know. I wouldn't know how to answer it. I think it's okay when we're -- if there's a conversation between a caddie and a player on the fairway and off the tee, it's fine. But then we're walking down the fairway, maybe on the green we're just talking to ourselves, I think we should have a little bit of maybe a margin so we can just be ourselves in certain moments, right? I don't think people realize how vulnerable us athletes are out there because you have cameras and microphones all over the place and it's hard to be really focused on what's going on on every single second of the course, right, so if I had to say, I think on the tee, fairway, yeah, just try to get us in a conversation. Maybe get rid of the mics on the greens. Because we're talking to ourselves, just let us be a little bit. But it's about the competition, not about what we say

before or after.

Q. Sounds like the players are pretty united on this subject, as well, don't you think?

JON RAHM: I have no idea. I haven't spoken to anybody about it. I really don't know.

Q. I'm listening to you and I'm struck by you seem so confident and sure of yourself and really comfortable expressing your opinion. I know you've always been an honest guy, but do you feel like you've gotten more comfortable just saying what you mean over the last few years as you've spent more time out here?

JON RAHM: No, I just feel like maybe I'm asked more about certain sensitive subjects or more controversial subjects. When I started, I mean, you're not going to ask everybody that just turned pro, hey, what do you think about this because you maybe don't have the experience now or maybe it's since I've been a high-ranked player in the world for awhile, I get asked more questions. But I've always been confident with expressing my mind. I have nothing to hide. I'm a really honest person. I hate lying.

So it wouldn't -- one thing you get from me is an honest, straightforward answer. And if it's a sensitive subject like maybe the last question was, we'll just have to be careful on how to word it, but I always try to express my mind. I'm not a fake person. I can't be a fake person. I've just never been.

You can tell by my facial expressions on the golf course; I can't hide what I'm thinking or feeling. So you're always going to get a straightforward answer. I've always been comfortable so it's just who I am in that sense.

Q. So it's more a function of being asked about the topics of the day instead of just specifics about yourself?

JON RAHM: Well, yeah, exactly. I feel like the more of these I've done, the better I've played, I feel like it gets to a point where maybe people want to know what I think about certain subjects. Maybe some things affect me more than others. Because when you're on PGA TOUR Live week after week, some things might affect you more than others, like the last question, that when I started on TOUR, when I was never one of those feature groups. So maybe -- it's just, I don't know, I'm comfortable with who I am and with my thoughts and my beliefs, so you'll get a straightforward answer.

Q. Do you like that? Do you like getting your takes out there? Do you have a little -- I don't know if it's golf

analyst in you or what, but do you enjoy that to some extent?

JON RAHM: I mean, I'm not going to willingly just start imposing my mind or expressing my mind on every single subject. If somebody wants to know, and asks, for whatever it is, I will. But I'm, I won't go out of my way to say it. Whether I enjoy it or not, I mean some things, some topics I do, some topics I don't. I don't know. I wouldn't know how to say it. It depends on what we're talking about, I might enjoy it more than other things.

Q. When you play match play it's obvious that you have to react physically and strategically to another player, but I'm curious how things change psychologically for you in terms of how you view your opponent when instead of being 149 people it's just one person.

JON RAHM: You know, when you step on that first tee, at least what I plan, I treat everybody the same, whether it's somebody who's won 15 times, somebody who's never won, a rookie, not a rookie, an experienced player, it doesn't matter. It's a hole-by-hole basis, right? And again, you just said it; you're reactive to the person in front of you, what they do. So in match play it's important to take the lead and be the one who sets the pace so you don't have to react to what he is doing you're the one setting the pace.

Again, yeah, I don't see ranking. I don't see history. All that goes out the window. Like I said earlier, you probably didn't hear, anybody can beat you on 18 holes, period. You can have a bad day, you can have a good day, you can have a good day, you can have a really good day like what's happened to me in the past. I've lost matches playing great, like when I tied with Matt Kuchar last year and I don't know if we both were 18-under combined on 18 holes, right, it was something ridiculous.

So it's all about who the person, what kind of person or what kind of day the person in front of you ends up having. You can have a bad day and he can have even worse day and you can end up beating him. So it's a tough format in that sense. You got to play good and you got to get lucky sometimes. But yeah, it really doesn't matter what they've done and what caliber player they may be according to World Rankings even though if they're in this event they're really good players.

Q. It was interesting when you talk about you want to set the pace. Is there a way to do that that goes beyond just playing good golf and making birdies? Are there other ways that you can set the pace that go beyond how you play?

JON RAHM: Well, so imagine situationally here, if I tee off first on the first hole, right, and hole after hole you keep piping driver dead center, dead center, dead center, you keep hitting good shots into the green. And especially if you're the longer good player you keep putting pressure on the next player. You're not letting down. You're not giving him time to breathe. And at some point it can get frustrating, especially if you keep winning holes, right?

So almost like no matter what I do, seems like I can't win a hole. So that's kind of what I mean. It's just being able to set the pace. It's like being in a playoff, right? If you tee off first and you keep putting the ball in the fairway, you keep putting the ball on the green, eventually you might wear the other person down. It's a little bit in that sense.

Obviously there's much more that goes into that, but if you can be the one teeing off first, I mean, that's why even if you're four down and you end up winning a hole, it's not only that you're three down, it's the fact that you have the honor on the tee and you actually get to kind of dictate a bit of what's going on on the hole. So, yeah, I mean it's an important part of the game. I mean, it's not always like a match-changing thing but having that honor, being able to tee off first can be very beneficial.

DOUG MILNE: All right, we appreciate your time and wish you the best of luck this week. Thank you.

JON RAHM: Thank you.

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