

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 24, 2021



JON RAHM

RACHEL NOBLE: I would like to welcome Jon Rahm into the interview room here at the World Golf Championships-Workday Championship at The Concession.

Jon, you finished T-3 at this event last year; however, a completely different course and region this year. How do you go about preparing for a new course like this?

JON RAHM: Yeah, I had some good memories over there in Mexico.

Well, luckily, we came to a golf course I've played before. We played Nationals here my junior year. And I do know a member, so I've been back once after that.

It's great golf course. It's a challenging golf course tee to green, difficult. Greens are difficult. It's going to be a fun one. It's going to test every part of our game. Everything needs to be on, and I can't wait to -- much like we had a challenge last week, it's going to be another challenging week.

RACHEL NOBLE: You're No. 2 in the world right now, coming in with good form after a strong finish at the Genesis Invitational, consistently high results throughout the season. Just a couple comments on the state of your game right now.

JON RAHM: Well, I think expectations were a little bit different once I came in with a full new bag, even changed putters for Torrey Pines, and still some adjusting in my head to do. It's a new golf ball. Clubs are great, clubs are fitted perfectly. It's just that the new golf ball reacts a little bit different and something to get used to and that's about it.

So far my game has been good, consistent. I wish I could give myself more in contention on a Sunday and come down the stretch with a chance to win, which I haven't done yet, even though I've had some high finishes, so that's a goal. Keep learning, keep playing better and hopefully peak at the right time.

Q. We spoke to you yesterday when the news was kind of new about Tiger. Now that you've had 24 hours to digest it, we know a little bit more about the injuries that he sustained, what's kind of your reaction?

JON RAHM: It hasn't changed. I think we're still shocked that it happened. My first thought was, you know, just over a year ago we lost Kobe Bryant out of the blue, and I'm just, if anything, thankful that Tiger's still here. Hopefully he comes out of this one. Hopefully his body's still good. I don't necessarily need to see him on a golf course again. I would love to, but I just hope he can live a normal life from here on. He's given everything to this game,

he's done so much for us, and every day that we're all out here is going to be a memory of Tiger Woods. Luckily he's got so much impact in this world that even though if he doesn't hit a golf shot, with his foundation and many other works, he's still able to make a great impact in this world.

Like I said yesterday, just hoping he can get back and just have a normal life and have a healthy enough body.

Q. You were talking about the golf course and how you've played it before and how challenging it is. Obviously there's a lot of emphasis on the approach shots this week. How do you sort of compare these greens to maybe another course or other courses that you guys have played throughout the year? Does it sort of compare to Augusta at all with how undulating the greens are?

JON RAHM: Yes and no. I think it's hard to say, because the beauty of Augusta and some other MacKenzie-like golf courses, they're deceptive. Sometimes they look a lot harder than what it is and you can use slopes to your advantage. This golf course right here, you've got a lot of like tabletop areas, right, where you hit a shot into the green and everything just runs away from the pin. A great example is the seventh hole, everything on the back right area, everything just goes away from the pin. Augusta usually in some parts of the green you have a slope that's going to help you move it towards the pin.

So in some aspects these greens can be more difficult. Now, they're not going to be as fast as Augusta National can be. So if you can put the ball in the right spot, you're going to be able to make some putts. It's not easy. They're tricky, they're very difficult. Wouldn't be surprised if statistically they play as some of the hardest ones all year.

Q. Quick question for you about the concession. I'm talking about the one that happened in the 1969 Ryder Cup that was the inspiration for the name of the course everybody's playing this week. Curious if you know what that is, first of all. And a couple players haven't, so that's okay.

JON RAHM: I know.

Q. Say that again.

JON RAHM: I do know. I'm an avid history fan, especially history of the game, so I know all about Tony and Jack. I'll go as far as saying there's not many players other than Jack Nicklaus that can get away with that in a Ryder Cup. If that happened nowadays, you might get chewed out by some people on your side.

Q. It's interesting because Jack Nicklaus did get chewed out by people, including Sam Snead at the time, and so that was going to be my question. What do you think of that? Can you see that happening today, which is something I think you already answered, and is it something you would consider doing in a similar situation?

JON RAHM: Well, in that situation, if I'm not mistaken, the U.S. with a tie still retained the Cup, right? So it feels like winning it really. But still, I think Jack had the future vision of seeing -- giving Great Britain an island, a tie instead of a loss, which I think benefited the event itself, the future generations of the event, because if the U.S. kept winning every year, it's not fun, right? It's no fun to watch for both sides. So I think Jack had that vision.

Nobody wants to see somebody miss a three-footer to lose a tournament, that's just an awful feeling. If it's a little bit longer, I can understand it, or if he has to win the Ryder Cup, I understand it. I get it, man. Maybe he got criticized at the time, but it's also Jack Nicklaus. You can't argue with what he does. I wouldn't argue with what he did at all. Again, it's a stamp in history, one more of the reasons he is who he is.

Q. To put you on the spot, if there was one player among players today, your contemporaries, who would be likely to concede a putt like that? Who would kind of have that sense of the moment? American or European, who do you think it would be?

JON RAHM: I don't think that's happening nowadays, honestly. I truly don't see it.

Again, if you're on the side that retains the Cup, I can see it happening obviously in that way, right? There's no way that the one team that doesn't have a chance of keeping the Cup if they tie is going to do it. So at any given time I think it's something you consult with your captain.

But there's no player nowadays on the Jack Nicklaus caliber, right? I actually talked about this with a player. I think Tiger would be the only one who could get away with it nowadays, and I'm not sure if he would do it, you'd have to ask him. I think he's the one where he's big enough where he transcends the game itself to where he can do it and you don't argue because he's Tiger Woods, it's Jack Nicklaus. There's only certain people that can do it.

Q. Jon, if I could just get back to Tiger for a second. I know the last couple years he hasn't played a lot and he's been going toward playing less and less. I'm just kind of wondering in this scenario, not that whether he plays again is very important in the big picture here, but this does kind of bring to the reality, closer to the reality of Tiger no longer playing on the Tour. I just wonder what you feel what that might be like when that time does come, since he brings such a different buzz to every tournament that he plays in.

JON RAHM: You know, him not swinging or playing doesn't mean that he can't be a part of the game and the PGA TOUR.

With that said, you said it, too. His body's gone through a lot, especially the last five years. He's got however many left knee surgeries, back surgeries and other surgeries, and now you have this. The trauma of an accident like that can cause not only the broken parts on his

leg but also the stress and strain that an impact like that can put on the body itself, right? Who knows, especially with what he's endured. He had back surgery earlier this year. I hope he can come back and I hope he can tee it up again and I hope he can have a retirement that he dreams about, like everybody does, going to St. Andrews and standing on the bridge on 18 and saying good-bye and just being able to properly say good-bye to the game. Personally, I would love to see him win again and accomplish more things.

Now, being realistic with everything that's happened, at this point I just hope he can have a healthy life, that's all I can say. I hope he can walk out of this one and enjoy his life as a dad and as an ambassador of the game. We'll see. I'm not big on focusing too much on the future, but when he retires, I feel like he's done so much for all of us, some kind of a thank-you from the PGA TOUR is in order, so I hope we can do something for him for everything he's done for everybody.

Q. Jon, I had some super golfing questions for you. Dustin said that with the detailed greens books, it's actually easier to learn a golf course these days than in the past. You might even be able to figure out a golf course before you even get here. I'm just curious, do you think that negates some of the challenge or perhaps even some of your advantage of having some prior golf course knowledge?

JON RAHM: You mean the greens books like the little map with all the slopes?

Q. Yeah. All the charting is so good now that he basically figured it out before he even arrived on site.

JON RAHM: Well, I don't use those books.

Q. How come?

JON RAHM: My caddie gets them. I don't look at them because I just -- I'm a feel player, I trust what I see. If I have a question, I'll ask him, and he might look at it if we're in doubt.

I've never spoken of this, I have to be honest, I don't think they should be allowed. That's my opinion. I think being able to read a green and read a break and understand the green is a talent, it's a skill that can be developed, and by just giving you the information, they're taking away from the game.

Again, I think being able to read greens and understand greens, it's a talent, it's part of the game, and like I said, it's a skill that can be developed or not. So that's my take on it.

Q. Secondly, unrelated, you mentioned the golf ball and kind of getting used to that with your equipment. What's different? What are the things that you're getting used to? Because your form and your play is still excellent.

JON RAHM: Well, thank you. It's very similar in the long game to the golf ball I had

previously, but inside, maybe I'm going to say up to the 8-iron, probably more the 9 and pitching wedge, the ball launches a little bit lower with more spin, which gives me a little bit more variety in some approach shots. If you looked at my stats in the past inside 150 yards, I was losing strokes with most of the better players on Tour. Past that, I was on par. It's one of the reasons that I was looking forward to this, it was improving that.

Now, the TaylorMade golf ball's great in the wind and so is the Callaway one, but with a little bit more spin comes a little bit more variety of shots and just being able to choose the right shot at the right time. That's kind of getting used to that. More spin reacts differently. I can actually hit certain shots I wasn't comfortable with before. It's just playing rounds and getting used to it.

Now, it's not like we have the same conditions every single week, so every week I'm learning something new and I'm getting something new done and transitioning into the new stuff a little bit better. Yeah, like I said, it's just mainly we'll get a little bit more spin in the shorter clubs, which is obviously a good thing, more control, more spin and more shots.

Q. How far along do you feel like you are in the process?

JON RAHM: Well, I don't know, because I don't know how good it can get. I really don't know. Hopefully I can tell you it's very early, early stages, knowing -- hoping that that ceiling is very high and I can keep working towards it. It's a work in progress. I've been working hard on my wedge game in the past and I feel like it's a new broken barrier with being able to add more shots to my repertoire, just being able to master those and be able to hit them when I need to.

RACHEL NOBLE: Looks like that's it for questions, Jon. Appreciate the time and good luck this week.

JON RAHM: Thank you very much.