

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
18 October 2023



RICKIE FOWLER

MICHAEL BALIKER: We'll go ahead and get started here with Rickie Fowler at the ZOZO Championship.

Rickie, fourth appearance at this event and third in Japan. How special is it for you to be back in this country? I know it's a place you're pretty fond of.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I love being able to come back to Japan. I've really enjoyed the last few years being here. Last few years on the golf course have been a little tough for me, so very appreciative of ZOZO and Travis, the tournament director, to extend those invites where I've been able to come over. Luckily I didn't need one this year, but still, like I said, I love to be here. I love the Japanese culture, the fans are amazing here. Being able to go out to dinner, whether it's in (indiscernible) or down to Tokyo is great.

Yeah, myself, it's nice to have my wife here with me this year, but my trainer and caddie who have been here with me the last couple years, we just have a lot of fun both on the golf course and being able to go out and enjoy Japan.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Just speaking about (technical difficulty) finishing tied for second, do you show up this week with a little added motivation trying to get rid of some unfinished business from last year and getting the job done this time around?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, it was great to have a good finish last year. That was one that kind of helped me build some confidence and momentum going into what was a little bit of an offseason and really helped propel me to play some good golf this year. Coming off of that, obviously know that I can play well here and looking forward to continue that and hopefully do one better than last year.

MICHAEL BALIKER: I was going to say, right, the impact of last year and getting back in the winner's circle and everything that came with the regular season, making it back to East Lake, I guess how -- when you compare the player you were coming into last year and this year, how would you describe the difference, if any?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, I mean, now I have a lot more self belief and confidence and momentum coming into -- or at the end of last year, August, you know, been about two, three years of tough times on the golf course. So to have some good finishes, one at Napa and then here at ZOZO, those were two big weeks for me to kind of hit the reset or restart. So those were -- ZOZO was a big part of why I had success this year.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Just getting off the pro-am today, just thoughts on the golf course and

how everything's shaping up this week here.

RICKIE FOWLER: The golf course is always in great shape. Greens are a little bit soft right now, so hopefully those can firm out through the week.

No, this seems like it's going to be the warmest and driest tournament we've had in a few years, so I'm looking forward to it.

Yeah, I think part of Japanese culture is attention to detail and that's one thing you can see with the golf course. Yeah, it's in great shape. Like I said, greens are a little bit soft, but hopefully those will continue to firm up with the dry weather. Yeah, it will be an amazing week.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Just two more quick ones, then we can open up for any questions. Playing with Hideki the first two rounds this week, what are your expectations in terms of what that environment's going to be like come Thursday?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I mean, I feel like I have a great following here in Japan and usually have a handful of fans that are out there supporting me, but it's going to be a completely different level playing with Hideki.

Hideki's a rock star over here and I'm looking forward to it. He's someone I admire as a person, as a player, enjoy being around him as well as his caddie. It will be an exciting atmosphere, for sure, for both myself and Keegan to see the show of Hideki in Japan.

MICHAEL BALIKER: And then just a little off topic, but moving forward to 2024 and looking ahead, something that you and Hideki have both done before, competing in the Olympics. Is that something that's on your mind, trying to get to Paris after having competed in Rio? What would that mean to get to Paris and represent the U.S. again?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, for me, I would say the Olympics would be similar to what my goal of the Ryder Cup was last year. The Ryder Cup was kind of the ultimate goal because I probably needed to check off a few other goals to make that happen. Was not -- as you could see, it wasn't out of reach, but it was pretty far from where I was.

So I have a lot of work to do to make the Olympic team, but I would -- if I were to do that, I would have accomplished a lot of things that I want to and there would be a lot of good golf.

So I'd love to be able to represent the U.S. again in the Olympics, but we'll see if we can take care of other things to make that happen.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Perfect. We'll take any questions. Again, we do have translation available for any questions in Japanese.

Q. So three questions. How far do you hit your driver shot average? He's asking

about your driver.

And second question, how does your driver fit in your eyes when you set up, like shape wise?

And then third question is what kind of element are you looking for in your drivers?

RICKIE FOWLER: I would say for driver, a lot of what we -- numbers we work off is how far we can carry the ball. Three hundred is about my -- 300 yards is about my, I guess, average. If to carry a bunker is 290 yards, I know if I hit a good one I can carry it. If it's 300 to carry, I have to hit a really good one. So somewhere right around there.

Driver shape for me, my driver's fairly I would say traditional or a simple shape, which is something I prefer. I don't want -- I want it to just look pretty basic or simple when I look down at it.

And then for a driver, what I look for, I love when they go long and straight. I think for the most part everyone makes a really good driver these days. Cobra's done an amazing job and I love the equipment that I play.

Yeah, I would say a lot of times the long and straight part comes down to the operator, not the club.

Q. He's asking, so when you are hitting driver shot at the range, he has seen you hitting like low fade or high fade, like many kinds of shots. Then he's asking like is it very important for you to hit many kinds of like shots? Is that your strongest point of your golf game?

RICKIE FOWLER: I use hitting different shots, that's something when I'm able to hit every shot, whether it's a low cut or a high draw, just shows that my swing is in a good spot and I have a lot of control. That's in a way a kind of game I play with myself to hit different shots. Like I said, when I'm swinging well or swinging properly, I can hit any shot that I want.

Q. How much motivation is what happened at the Ryder Cup coming in this tournament?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, I mean, it's motivation that all of us needed to play a bit better. We have a few guys that did play well that week, but not enough. It seemed like all 12 of the European guys stepped up and played some darn good golf.

Yeah, coming off of that, it was unfortunate we had -- myself and a couple other guys that weren't feeling very well, so I'm happy to be in a healthy spot and excited to play some better golf than I did in Rome.

They're always really fun weeks, special weeks to be a part of. They just happen to be a lot

more fun when you're on the winning side. Unfortunately, there's been very few of those for the past 30 years, especially when you talk about overseas.

Q. Just a follow-up on Ryder Cup, how do you put it behind you? A little hangover, how do you erase it and just look forward?

RICKIE FOWLER: I don't think you ever really erase it. Like I mentioned, they're still amazing weeks, just not fun being on the wrong side of it.

Win or lose, they're still some of the best weeks of your career being on those teams with some of the best players in the world, especially from your country, just to be able to be in that situation. There's a lot of goals and accomplishments that you have to achieve to be there.

Yeah, we like to put the losing memories behind us, but the memories we have with teammates and captains and the overall week, it's something it's still fun to look back on.

The golf part of it, try and learn from mistakes or not playing so well. I'd had a great year up until that point and there's a lot of things that I can look back on to pick back up where we were and play some good golf for the few events I have this fall and going into next year.

Q. Rickie, you've had a bit of time off since the Ryder Cup. Wondering just what you've been up to and how you're feeling about the game coming into this week.

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, hasn't been a whole lot of time. It feels like I guess it was about a week and a half, goes by quickly. Spent some time with our little one since she wasn't in Rome with us and she's not here. Yeah, some dad time. Fished a little bit and played golf. Even when I'm not on the road or traveling to play golf, golf's our job and what I love to do, so that takes up a decent amount of our time even when we're home on an off week.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Rickie, thanks again for the time. Best of luck this week.