

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: RICKIE FOWLER
June 28, 2017



JOHN BUSH: We'd like to welcome Rickie Fowler into the interview room. He's making his sixth career start at the Quicken Loans National. Rickie, a new golf course for you, if we can get some comments on being here this week.

RICKIE FOWLER: I'm really looking forward to it. It's been a great week so far. Fun group in the pro-am. Adam and Bill, and getting to play with JR, and then getting to be a part of a welcome-home surprise with Brian coming back to the States after being overseas for three and a half years was pretty special. So my week's made. Now we'll see if we can play some good golf. I'm looking forward to the new golf course here. I've never been here. It's tough. Got to drive it in the fairway for sure, so looking forward to the challenge.

JOHN BUSH: Currently No. 9 in the FedExCup standings, you already have a win under your belt this year. Just talk a little bit as we head into the home stretch of the season and your goals.

RICKIE FOWLER: Goals that kind of continue trending upward. I've been playing well, consistent, having the win and being in contention in the first two majors of the year. Just looking to kind of continue that, to play well here and go over and play well at the Scottish and get myself acclimated, get ready for the British Open. This is the busiest part of our season and the time of year that you want to play your best, so looking forward to getting that going.

Q. Justin was just in here and mentioned that the golf course was hard and he said it could probably host a U.S. Open tomorrow. What are some of your thoughts just from seeing the golf course. Are you expecting tough scoring conditions this week?

RICKIE FOWLER: It will be very tough. You have to hit the fairway to have a chance of doing anything, even though it's nice to see the greens firm where the ball's bouncing and you have to be pretty spot on hitting your numbers. It's very much going to be — the golf tournament, as long as we keep any moisture away, it doesn't look like there's anything in the forecast, the tournament's going to be won from tee to green. You hit a lot of fairways and a lot of greens, it's going to take a lot of pressure off, you're not going to have to make putts, you're not going to have to get a bunch of balls up and down. So hitting fairways is definitely first off. But it does have the feel of a little bit more than just a normal tour event as far as what the difficulty level is out there.

Q. Rickie, does your preparation change when you come to a new venue like this? Do you spend extra time in your practice rounds hitting balls from different positions, that sort of thing, different gear?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, it changes because it is a new place. I have to come out and learn it just like a lot of these other guys. The biggest thing is just understanding eye lines and sight lines off tees, trying to figure out where exactly you want to play from. Visual memory, just knowing what it's like around greens, where you can miss it to certain pins, where you want to leave it. Other than that, my preparation, I played an extra nine holes. I played 18 on Tuesday where I would normally practice and play nine and then 18 today for the pro-am. So as far as physical, you know, exhaustion level, has it taken any more out of me? No. It's not a whole lot more preparation than I would normally do on a Tuesday, Wednesday of a tournament week.

Q. So pretty much from the opening shot today, JR Smith in your pro-am group was really impressive. He hit drives near 300 yards on pretty much every hole. You were talking to him a lot on many of the holes. Were you coaching him?

RICKIE FOWLER: I didn't do a whole lot on the coaching side with JR. We had a good time, and it is cool to see someone who plays at a very high level in another sport come out and show off their game a bit. It was definitely impressive to see him hit some of the shots. He played the par 3s great. He's a three-point specialist, so he's good on the threes. I stayed away from the coaching. Actually, Claude Harman was out walking with us a little bit kind of from No. 8 on, and Claude's someone who helps me obviously along with his dad, Butch. He was helping JR a little bit with some simple fundamentals. I think he continued to play well. But you can tell JR's an athlete, he adapts well and understands body awareness and knows what to do and how to figure out a way to hit the ball.

Q. You've had a very good year, statistically you're up near the top in a bunch of categories, but one place where you're not near the top is final-round scoring average. Is there anything you can really do about that? Have you thought about that or tried to address it?

RICKIE FOWLER: Not necessarily. I haven't even looked at that. I know I'm up in a lot of categories, and statistically, yeah, driving the ball, ball striking, scrambling, bunker play, putting, everything's been good. I just need to keep putting myself in a good position and taking care of business. It was nice to get the one win at Honda and I've put myself in the position a few other times, so the more that we're there, I mean, it's not going to happen every time, but more trophies will add up.

Q. Have you caught yourself wanting it too bad on certain occasions, pushing a little too hard on Sundays?

RICKIE FOWLER: There's probably been a few times where it hasn't been exactly either the right mindset or potentially getting behind the eight-ball early and pushing a little bit too much from there instead of kind of letting things fall into place and letting things happen. That's something that helped me going into Sunday at the U.S. Open

this year and just didn't get anything going. I played well, I felt very in control of the game, tough conditions, and Brooks went out and played a great round. Unfortunately, like I said, I just didn't get anything going, but by no means was it a bad round.

Q. You've looked very confident with your putter this year, it's been talked about a lot in broadcasts. Is there any secret to why you seemingly putted better this year than ever before?

RICKIE FOWLER: Not necessarily. Putting could be up and down a bit. Could be one putt that goes in that kind of changes your thought process and your confidence with being on the green and making putts.

But I've always been a good putter. I feel like I put the work in. And fundamentally, my putting is fairly fundamentally sound, and part of the reason is just the work that I've done from a young age down at the Scotty Cameron studio and just being aware of kind of what makes certain things happen in putting.

So yeah, sometimes your feel gets off, your eyes get off a little bit, but I feel like I've done a good job the last couple years of staying on top of that and managing it and making sure that things don't get too far off. It is nice that I'm seeing some of that pay off this year. Some of the off years have been partly because putting hasn't been as sharp as I would like it to be.

Q. I realize this is a non-tournament question, but do you remember what your first experience was like playing Augusta National, who did you play with and any memories that kind of stick out from your first time playing there?

RICKIE FOWLER: First time I went up, we actually went up after Bay Hill, flew up with Phil, my caddie and I did. Phil had already had a morning game set up. He was playing with a couple I think some CEO sponsors of his. I think I had one of the local caddies. You take a local caddie with you when you go there, and then Joe was the one that got to walk around with us.

So we went and played 18. I'm pretty sure it was just myself out there playing. Then we went and played with Phil in the afternoon. I've been around Augusta quite a few times now with Phil. Probably have played — other than tournament rounds, I would say I've played probably more of my rounds with Phil than anyone else.

It's a special place. I think anytime you get to drive down Magnolia Lane, especially the first time, and then when I get to take friends driving down there with family, it might be one of their first or first few times, makes you realize how special a place it is.

Q. How do you feel about the Quicken Loans tournament and what they're doing with charity work?

RICKIE FOWLER: It's been great for me to be able to be with Quicken Loans and getting to play this tournament at a few different venues from Congressional to RTJ and now here at Potomac. What they're doing with Shot for Heroes to earlier today being able to be a part of welcoming someone that was stationed over a few different places overseas for roughly three and a half years and being able to bring Brian home and welcome him back to his family. It's pretty amazing to see Bill and his team and everyone at Quicken Loans, all the work that goes into giving back to the military.

Q. Brian mentioned to us about walking up on 18 and knowing that his kids were at the end and the nerves that were associated with that. He said he was talking to you. Can you talk about what that moment was like and why this is so poignant to be a part of that homecoming?

RICKIE FOWLER: It was really cool. I told him I was nervous on the tee shot. I was like, I've got to hit one good for you and get the hole started at least in the right direction, and then same thing into the green. I'm like, I want to make sure they think you're a good caddie, at least hit the green and keep it fun for the both of us.

I think everyone's seen a lot of homecoming videos, and if you don't get teary-eyed at least, then there's something wrong with you. And having that feeling coming down the fairway, walking to the green, sharing that moment with him and being able to see him share that special moment with his kids behind the 18th green is definitely something I'll never forget.

Q. Rickie, we had a chance to talk to Billy yesterday and he said he would gladly take a 10 under and sit in the clubhouse for four days. Do you see double digits under par as a potential winning score?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, it's out there. You'll have to play well. Yeah, I would sit, 10 or 12 I would be happy. But I'm going to go out there and see if we can better that. But getting to double digits is going to be an accomplishment this week, especially if, like we talked about, weather staying away. It's going to be hot, it's going to be humid, but they should have full control of the golf course and how it plays.

So if it continues to firm up a bit and even if it continues to stay where it's at, there's plenty of rough to defend the golf course. You may see someone get out to playing the first two rounds could get to double digits. It's going to take some pretty solid golf, but I don't really see anyone running from there in a way. Shooting anything in the red, 2, 3 under, is going to be pretty solid. Yeah, 10, 12 under would be pretty safe sitting in the clubhouse.

JOHN BUSH: All right. Rickie Fowler, best of luck this week.

RICKIE FOWLER: Thanks.