

**Pre-Tournament Interview: JORDAN SPIETH**  
**August 2, 2017**

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**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Jordan, welcome back to Firestone.

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Thank you.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Two wins in your last two starts, obviously a pretty thrilling finish at Birkdale. With this big stretch coming up now from this event all way through the FedExCup Playoffs, just talk about the challenges of keeping your game in peak form as we close out the season.

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Yeah, I think it just comes down to rest, finding the right balance of getting -- just practicing correctly, getting enough rest with enough reps and, that's always a challenge as we get late into the season. There's just so many big events that are so compact, especially last year.

But took some time off this last week. I actually feel rejuvenated and ready to go, which after what happened at Birkdale, might be kind of hard to believe, it kind of takes a lot out of you. But we've got significant goals that we have yet to achieve this year for the rest of the season and I'm excited to get started here at Firestone. The course is extremely pure. Hopefully we don't get a ton of rain because it's playing just perfect right now.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** And specifically about Firestone, fourth appearance here, tied for third last year, how's the course set up to your eye?

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Last year it was very, very firm which made it even harder to hit fairways on an already historically very difficult place to find the fairway. Looks like it's going to be a little bit different this year but the greens are faster. Playing it, it's a little softer, which makes sense because we're in August versus June, but they have done a tremendous job of keeping it in tip-top shape. I played today, that was the only round I played, and found that there's going to be some pretty dicey putts out there from inside of 10 feet if you get on the wrong sides of the hole.

**Q. Jordan, how many times, if any, have you watched any of the highlights?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Twice.

**Q. And do you still -- what's your reaction? Do you still feel like, how did I do that, or does it just seem normal?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** It's cool just to watch what it looked like on the outside compared to what it felt like and the visuals I saw. I've watched it. I got back and tried to go back to sleep when we landed Monday morning and attempted and maybe slept for a couple hours

and then flipped it on right away. I knew we had it recorded so I watched it then. Then Michael got up, too, and we both watched it together. We didn't watch the first -- I think we started on like 12 and just watched it from there. Before that, I don't think it was necessary.

Yeah, it was fun. It was fun kind of talking to Michael about what he was going through on 13 versus what I was going through. Then we tried, we watched the putt on 15 quite a few times to try to figure out what camera angle so we could see Michael laughing while I was pointing to him telling him go get that. It was cool to watch it with Mike, too, and just kind of talk about what we were both thinking at that time. And of course he's like, I knew you had it in the bag, and I'm like, You can't say that when you're up one with three holes to go. You can say that in hindsight but there's a lot of golf left. But it was really cool to watch. It was a finish unlike any I've ever had.

**Q. Yesterday you looked like you were showing something on your phone to Justin and Michael. I didn't know, was it some text or something you might have gotten from someone?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I can't remember. Michael and I were doing a little bit of swing videos, but --

**Q. Was there someone you heard from that kind of blew your mind or someone who wrote something in the aftermath of that that really was memorable?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I got text messages that are similar to the past from certainly from everybody, from friends, family and other athletes and businessmen that I've played with, whoever it may be.

I got two handwritten notes that were pretty funny and extremely meaningful, one from President Bush and then one from Jack Nicklaus. And I get those from President Bush. I've played a bit of golf with him back in Dallas and he always puts something funny in there.

He said, "Call me, I think I need to give you some driving lessons," was what he had in there. I've played with him and I know that I definitely don't need driving lessons from him, but anyway, I thought that was good.

Mr. Nicklaus was just like his tweets, were extremely heartfelt and really cool. I got tremendous texts from Tiger, Phil, Rory, I mean, to go along with all the guys that we were with there anyways. Pretty awesome.

**Q. Do you happen to have a sand dune behind your house that you run up and down every day because I'll tell you what, when you went up over that hill, I'm like, what's he doing?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Yeah, it was certainly physically demanding there a bit, but didn't seem like it because there was so much adrenaline.

**Q. The real question is though, looking at the WGCs, you've got the regular tournaments and then you have the majors. Where does this fall on your classification of events?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Right in between them.

**Q. Is that exactly how you have it?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Q. You come to the Bridgestone or these and you see this great course and you know it's going to be all -- it's an old iconic golf course since the '50s?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Yeah, sure. Yeah, this one's very special given the history here, specifically Firestone and the championship here. But yes, I would put them right in between. I think the emphasis because of the impact and the field's stronger, there's more FedExCup points, there's more world ranking points than a normal event but not quite like a major. It doesn't quite have the impact of a major so that's kind of where it falls in our minds and how we prepare as well.

**Q. Where would you put the pros and cons of going for a Grand Slam and starting basically right away, two weeks later you've got your shot?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** The pros and cons of it being so soon? Pros is you believe you're in form. I think I'm in form, and form is a huge part of being in contention obviously. But when you feel that way going in, it feels that much easier to get into contention. It doesn't feel like you have to -- mentally, I think, it's just a little easier, so that's a huge pro.

I'm not really finding any negatives in this. I've been asked this a few times, and I mean this. There have been other times, say the 2016 Masters defending '15, or the '17 trying to get back on '16 like this, this added something or other that's going into a major championship. And I've maybe felt that a bit but for this it's like, I'm just going to -- it's just a major. I say that, they are still the four events that we try to peak and think most about at the beginning of every year.

But this PGA, if I'm healthy and playing well, I play in 30 of them, I believe I'll have plenty of chances to win them, but it doesn't have to be this year. If it's this year and it happens, that's great, that's another life-long goal that we've then achieved. But I believe that I'll do it some day, so if it happens in two weeks or next week, then fantastic, and if it doesn't, then it's not going to be a big-time bummer whatsoever because I know I have plenty of opportunities. Getting three legs of it is much harder than getting the last leg, I think. Although I've never tried to get the last leg, so it's easy for me to say. We've had three in two years and so, I mean, if we just continue with the same process, get the right breaks and driving ranges are in play, then I've got a good shot at number four.

The con, and what makes it more difficult than just saying it's another major is that it's one a year now instead of four a year that that focuses on, if that's what the focus is, but my focus isn't on completing the career Grand Slam. My focus is on this, is the PGA Championship. There's going to be noise around it, and especially if I'm in contention, there's going to be constant questions about it, but I don't think just based on what it's like the week before, I don't think going in it's going to mean much to me.

**Q. How do you think the noise will be different than the noise at St. Andrews, and how much do you think you learned from that in that regard?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Might be pretty similar, and back then I felt the way I feel right now. I thought obviously that was -- how often does someone win the first two of the year? I think it's only been done a few times, but going into St. Andrews, it was plenty of chatter about it but it was a little less because I was over there.

The time change, I wasn't on my phone, I wasn't -- I think it would have been -- if the PGA were before the Open that year, if Whistling Straits was before St. Andrews, I would have felt it more. But we were just kind of going about our business there and we had won two majors, I felt so free. I mean, there was no care in the world. If it doesn't go well, it doesn't go well. I've accomplished more than I could imagine this year. I've exceeded my goals for the year by far. Back then, obviously still working really hard to try and maximize what I could the rest of the year.

That's how I feel right now. I feel like I'm free-rolling now. Not that I shouldn't have before, but after Pebble and before Hartford, it's just I feel like I'm playing well enough and should be having better results for more chances to win and I get off to two good starts in tournaments and been able to close them out.

For me, it's been about the starts but I don't know if there will be much of a difference compared to St. Andrews.

**Q. Obviously you've turned around bad rounds in the past probably many, many times, but maybe not to that extreme as you did on that Sunday. I'm just wondering is anything you learned about yourself there that you maybe hadn't known before that you can take from it even when things are going at their worst in the future?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I think a lot came off of the way that I played the final round in 2016 at the Masters. Things were going so good and I had one round that was the first nine holes and then it almost felt like a completely different round that were the next three holes, and then there was another last six that was -- I mean, I played three rounds of golf that day in my mind when I look back at it, I almost forget about the first round that day, the first nine holes that was awesome.

Normally you play a round of golf and you get done and you explain, hey, I was a little off

today or I felt good or my speed putting was off or whatever. I mean, I could dissect three completely different stories in those three rounds that day and that's what it felt like here. I had two completely different stories within one round. It's just the mental side of how majors affect you when you put such an emphasis on them and you know what kind of history that that creates and that's your goal in what you love to do. It can create these scenarios where you can, instead of just staying real level, you can fluctuate more. I wish it weren't necessarily the case, but I've also had it to where it's been just a straight up. I'm fortunate that, in not many of them, I guess this year's Masters may have been one where it was just kind of down the whole way but for the most part there's been a bit of everything, and I can learn a lot from that experience in '16 that I just had -- I had not necessarily more time, I didn't have more holes, I had five instead of six, but I was in much better position at that time. I said, you know what, I just stole a shot here after 13 when I had been kind of giving them away the whole day.

I took something out of this hole that I didn't necessarily deserve and that was a positive that, hey, I'm only one down, I believe that I can make up a shot in five holes against Matt Kuchar. I played against him many times, it's family. I know that we play five holes right now at Firestone, our scores are going to fluctuate enough, as long as I can beat him by one in those five holes, it's just a different round.

**Q. You've spoken earlier this year saying that your game was close to producing big results, and clearly you have those results. We're hearing a similar refrain now from Rory. My question is, is that margin for top players just much more thinner than we can imagine between feeling your game is in a good place, not seeing those results and then all of a sudden getting the results?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I think so. I mean, it's normally down to just the simplest things, alignment, setup, something you find in putting, whatever it may be. If Rory's saying that, then I would certainly take his word for it and that's not good for the rest of us.

I knew that it was close. I knew that my striking was the best that it had been and that putting, it's just a matter of you kind of get -- you go through it where, and for me it has been just a set-up thing that was causing me problems from every range, I would just be streaky. I would get it to where it felt great and then it wouldn't feel good, instead of it all just feeling the same, and working from that level which is the last two years where I've been putting my best, so it just happens sometimes. You take a few weeks off or a month off in the off-season, you come back and sometimes you put in a ton of repetitions and it's not quite the right way to do it, that's where you're starting from. It can change, but it takes a bit of work and when you start to kind of figure out what exactly it was, the hardest part is putting the grasp on exactly what it is. Once you do and then you can nail that in enough, then you're right back to where you were. I imagine that's what it is with Rory, and yeah, I think that margin's very small.

**Q. Jordan, you said that the 2015 British Open you felt like you were free-wheeling it because you had already accomplished so much after that last day, Michael seemed**

**as devastated as he ever has since he's been on your bag. I'm wondering if you felt that in some way that Open this year was avenging that second-to-last hole of that tournament even though the rest of us have all forgotten about that?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** He hasn't mentioned that to me, but his performance this year was by far the best that I've -- that we've had together. I mean, the best that I can remember seeing. But I'm obviously experiencing it as my guy versus watching it on TV and you don't really get that much interaction when you watch other caddies and players.

It wasn't 17 at St. Andrews that we were so upset about, it was 18 and the club choice into 18 green did not have a chance on that putt to be down in the swale and it all happened like so fast there. 17 was just such a brutally hard hole and I just didn't hit a good putt. I actually did well to have six, seven feet for par on that day. It was 18, not kind of picking it to the right number and then hitting the club that we wanted in that we would have produced to make sure we were above the slope. So there's certainly something maybe to that within him that feels like he avenged that, but he hasn't mentioned that if that's the case.

**Q. Do you think he felt responsible for that?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** No, it's a team. It's a collaboration, good and bad. So he probably feels partly responsible, just like he feels partly responsible for the win two weeks ago.

**Q. I'm just curious how you mentally talk yourself into hitting a good shot at the 14 tee after really not seeing that many good results for the first 13 holes. I know you felt good about a bogey at 13, but how do you talk yourself into, okay, I'm now going to hit a good shot, this is where I'm going to do it.**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Yeah, if I was that easy, I would do it all the time.

What was it? I made the putt on 13 and that was a huge putt. I think it was the longest putt I made the whole day, there and No. 5. I came off of there again feeling -- by the time I went and hit that tee shot, I had what I mentioned earlier, created a new round out of it and said, I can go off past experiences, past failures, that was in a three-hole stretch at Augusta there, this was in a 13-hole stretch. Either way, they're both, what, you know, 4 to 6 over in those stretches that I almost never go there. I'm going okay, we don't go through this, this isn't us, I'm playing well, I'm still in a good position. This is what Michael kept saying, even when we went to tied to three holes or four holes, he says, we're still in a great position right now, we're tied for the lead in this major.

It's easy for him to say that and that's what he should say. It's another for me to believe it, and I believed it there. I don't know why, but I believed it and I got up there and I had a great number. I was fortunate that the number I had into the hole left me with really -- I could hit the exact shot that I wanted to hit, that I was comfortable hitting and I didn't have to worry about it going short, long or left to right, I could just hit a nice hold 6-iron right at the flagstick. If I hold it too much, I'm putting from 20 feet, and if I hit it the way I want to, then

it's going to be good.

**Q. I was going to ask as a follow-up how big it was to have that par 3 right after that to where you could hit an iron shot? You've been a good iron player all year and the fact that -- as opposed to a driver or something else, and it came at a good time it seemed to me?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I've never thought of that. I hit a good drive on 15, I hit the drive on 16 right where I wanted to, 17 was missed a bit, but the one on 13, I'll say it now because on coverage it was quoted as being 100 yards right.

It was not 100 yards right because our fairway is the right rough on that hole. So essentially you try to hit it in the right rough. Instead of playing a draw, because it was raining, the ball skorts right off the face. When there's water on the ball and the face, the ball skorts to the right. The other days, I was playing a draw off that right side that would hold the wind and stay there. If I did that, I felt that anything that I held out that also got water on the face would start and stay way right. So in my mind I've got to start this ball left and hit a fade and just kind of cut it over there. Water gets in between the ball and I bail out on that and open the face as well.

I saw the slo-mo replay. My face went dead open and it ends up going to the right. Now, I missed my right side of the fairway by 20 yards-ish and it hit the guy in the head and then went over the next mound. So essentially it was 20 yards offline. I hit balls further offline than that on a regular basis, but where it ended up and what it looked like compared to the fairway for viewership was way offline.

It really wasn't that bad. I mean, it wasn't a good shot. It was a foul ball to the right, but I need to back myself up here in saying that I'm capable of hitting worse shots than that, okay?

**Q. As we all are.**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I played a slap cut that the face opened up a little too early on and it was raining, and it just squirted even further, then it ricocheted, like it hit the cart path essentially. Then it went into an unplayable lie. In other words, I was okay hitting driver on the next hole if it was necessary.

**Q. That's a good explanation.**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Thank you. I've been waiting to back myself up on that for a while now.

**Q. When you watch the telecast, was there a click right before you took the swing?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I don't think so on 13.

**Q. You didn't hear anything?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I didn't hear anything. There was on 17 there when I stopped on the pitch shot. It was almost like I was doing a photo shoot. In photo shoots, they'll be like hey, the camera's going to be going (noise), you just keep going. That was like this guy didn't even try. It was like, this is ridiculous. So fortunately I was able to step back into it without thinking much of it and hit the shot.

**Q. You talk about the iron play being the best of your career and the putting not being quite where it was the past two years. Do you feel like there is a way to eventually marry the two, where the ball-striking stays at that level and the putting?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Absolutely. Yeah, because what I've been doing in my swing is what I've been trying to get to and it takes a lot of reps for it to be the new norm and for it to be the norm when pressure's on and you don't revert back to your old tendencies and that's kind of been what's been successful this year. The shots I hit with my irons down the stretch at The Open when it was heightened, it was raining, it was tough conditions, were exactly what I wanted to do and when I hit them. I'm like, man, that's so much better than I remember doing, feeling this way in the past, which is awesome.

The putting, I can completely separate the two, yes, and say I believe my iron play can stay where it's been and I believe that my putter can get hot just like it did on the last few holes.

Now, you're not going to go 5 under on five-hole stretches twice in a round, but it can be a bit better on the greens.

**Q. What do you feel like you have to do or are doing to get that putting back to that level?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** It's setup stuff for me. If I can -- same with my long game. If I can feel like I have one side eliminated, if I feel like I can't pull it and I just need to -- I can release the face or I can do a stroke what feels outside-in to me what is, in fact, a good stroke but it's not going to miss left, I'm so free and that's when I putt my best. I can't remember pulling a putt the last two years. I probably did, but I felt like I had that kind of slot to where I couldn't do it. If anything, I would just leave the face open, and putts that I missed that weren't good putts were just ones that I didn't quite get through the ball. And it comes from setup.

At The Open in the final round, I kind of -- I hit a good putt on the first hole but then misread on the second and I hit just a horrible pull on the third, and it's just so abnormal for me to do when I know I can miss it right, which is my only tendency really with the putter normally.

Now when you have a two-way miss, how can you trust what's coming up next? And that's what the struggle's been a little bit here and there throughout the year. Even at the Travelers it was like that. I missed some short putts just not recognizing where the pull or push was, and I'm starting to pinpoint it and it's in setup. I don't expect it to be fixed within a

week, I don't expect it to be there this week, but if I'm correct and I can put enough reps in, then we can get it ready by Thursday of next week.

**Q. You're not the first person who said if the driving range is in play. Are you okay if that sort of lives on?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Obviously I'm a little sensitive to it, but yeah, Birkdale asked for my 3-iron or a replica of, which means that's going to be the shot that's pictured there and remembered there unfortunately. But fortunately, I mean, that time, the shot, the up and down -- I mean, the up and down was much harder than the 3-iron was.

**Q. I just wanted to ask you but that was like a moment of clarity amidst the chaos. Have you thought about that?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Not until I knew it was safe and got up next to the green and thought, wow, we're out of this jam, this is better than going back to the tee just like I thought it was going to be. I got a good break and it's not going into these pot bunkers and I can clean this up with an up-and-down now. That was when I kind of had the clarity, when I got up there and said, "We grind on this up-and-down we're only one back." I felt like I was six back.

**Q. Jordan, what's your opinion of the 18th hole here as a finishing hole and how do you strategically play it?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** I think it's such a tough drive. It's such a very difficult tee shot. There's been a couple trees removed or a tree left, like I hit it left today like I've done quite a few times and there was trees out and the rough's kind of spotty where you can actually hit the green from over there, which gives you a little bit of leeway. But I've only been in that fairway one out of four balls I've hit at this tournament maybe, and from there it's not -- you know, it's a relatively simple hole. You have kind of bold pins in a sense. That back left, if you're in the fairway, you can feed it into there. If you land it short, it bounces. Land it long, it comes back, same as kind of the front right, front left pins. It's all in the tee ball and it's a very difficult one at that with a lot of trouble around.

The hardest part out here is you've got such narrow fairways, but when you get in the rough, how safe are you going to play? You can play safe and all day have 50, 60-yard pitches into the greens if you want to do that, but you get tired of that and you think you can pull off shots and that's where you really get into trouble out here. 18 is certainly that way.

**Q. Jordan, this question is off the beaten path but do you remember what your first experience was like playing Augusta National, any memories that kind of stick out from the very first time you played the course, and who did you play with?**

**JORDAN SPIETH:** Magnolia Lane, I remember going down, I played with a few guys out of Dallas. Cameron was with us, too. We actually were at Pine Valley earlier in the day and we flew down and got to Augusta and we were staying there, so we put our stuff down by 10

tee box.

I remember going out and 10 was the first hole that I played at Augusta and Cameron steps up. Cameron's a good player, played professionally when he started out out of college before teaching. He rose to this big hook 3-wood and I go, There's no way that's in the fairway, is it? He goes, I think that's the middle of the fairway. He never played it either.

We got down there and it was the dead center of the fairway. It was my first, like wow, this course is going to be totally different visually being there than any kind of television can do.

**MICHAEL BALIKER:** Jordan, all the best of luck this week. Thanks for the time.