

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
September 19, 2017



JORDAN SPIETH

CHRIS REIMER: We want to welcome Jordan Spieth here to the media center at the TOUR Championship. Jordan, you're coming in in the position you absolutely want to be in the FedExCup standings, also having won it before. Just talk about your preparation and excitement level for being here at East Lake.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I was pumped to have the round I had on Sunday a couple days ago, gained some momentum to maintain the No. 1 spot. Wasn't secure when I woke up on Sunday, so that was the goal in hand that day. I felt like I got a little bit closer. I was a little off to start the week in my striking and I started to kind of get back to the way I was -- I feel right now pretty close to the way I was hitting it the first two playoff events and trying to dial in the putter and the short game as well.

So things feel good. If it were a major championship I would be very pleased with where things are on a Tuesday. And what you were saying in preparation, mainly at this point it's conserving energy. '14 and '16, especially '14 I remember being completely worn out by the time I got to the TOUR Championship. '15 I had a lot of momentum and a lot of adrenaline obviously, but I understand that this week there's a lot on the line, it's essentially a major after coming off of a pretty hectic schedule the last six, seven weeks. So I'm trying to conserve energy. Didn't do a whole lot yesterday, some wedge and short game work and light work and nine holes today.

Q. This is the one week where it's a little bit different, there's a tournament within the tournament. Does it feel different for you where everyone's sort of chasing you in a sense before the tournament even starts?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think players are probably more focused on the FedExCup than the TOUR Championship. I don't think the top six or seven guys are focused on me at all. I think that's where they're focused on the TOUR Championship. And after that I think guys are probably looking at hey, how can I -- what are the scenarios that could possibly pull a Bill Haas or whatever it may be. But it's hard for me to speak for other players.

But I'm solely focused on this tournament. There are a lot of scenarios where I can still win the FedExCup and not win and I can finish seventh like last week and probably still win depending on how it shapes up. But likelihood is the guys that have been playing really well, the guys that are hot you're likely to see toward the stop of the leaderboard again, your Marc Leishman, Jason, Rickie. Guys that come off last week playing well typically play really well again. These are guys, Rickie and Leish, in a position that if they win -- well, Rickie pretty much wins the FedExCup pending a solo second for me, I think. I understand

though guys are going to be there and I understand I have to beat them.

Q. Did you read that list of all the permutations?

JORDAN SPIETH: No, and I'm not interested in it to be honest.

Q. Two questions. Can you talk a little bit about your familiarity with this course? You've had some of your best putting weeks here but you've also talked about tee to green liking sort of the undulation of it a little bit. And then also the second part of the question is, do you try to do everything that you did in 2015 whether just to get the good mojo going?

JORDAN SPIETH: No, I don't know if you guys -- the tournament in '15, what I remember from it was really scraping it around and making a lot of putts. I hit the ball -- it was one of my worst ball-striking weeks of the year that week and I just chipped and putted so well that I was able to win. I don't want to emulate that at all, that's a lot more stressful and I haven't been making putts from outside 10 feet like I did that year consistently so I can't rely on that.

What was the first part of your question?

Q. And why do you feel so comfortable here?

JORDAN SPIETH: I really like this golf course, I love the bermuda. I grew up on greens similar to this. The Masters course at Brookhaven, big, undulating, bermuda greens have some grain in them. So I feel comfortable even though we don't see it that often anymore. I like the way that I read bermuda greens, I feel very confident when I step over the putt that I have the right read and that varies from course to course.

And then you have a lot of uneven shots into these greens, you have a lot of uneven lies and it creates more feel and I think that's better for me the less I'm thinking about my golf swing and trying to be perfect and more feeling ball flights off of uneven slopes in the fairways. And that's similar to Augusta and I think that's why I play well there even if I wasn't playing well going into it. The undulations on the green and in the fairway create a lot of a feel aspect that I enjoy.

Q. Jordan, you talked about treating this like a major before. What specifically does that mean? Is that more physical or is it more mental?

JORDAN SPIETH: It's probably I think it's more physical just how you work, how much you're working, what I'm doing off the course physically, doing pretty much just having it be a very boring week off the golf course. You're in bed early, spend a lot of time with your feet up and understanding that the progression of the week is important. If you get off to a great start, great, but you get into the thick of things here on the weekend and it takes a lot out of you. So maintaining that kind of energy physically is very important this week but it also goes into how we're practicing.

Cameron's here, doesn't come that often so really trying to dial stuff in while not overworking, and there is a fine line and I've kind of teetered on good and overdone. We had a great, I thought a really great plan that we put in place at the Open Championship when Cam was there, practicing and maintaining strength. The difference is it takes a lot out of you when it's 86 degrees versus 60. So trying to figure out the right balance there because the PGA I maybe did a little bit too much when it was that hot. It may sound like I'm 24 and I shouldn't worry about it, but you can really tell the difference physically and mentally by the time the weekend rolls around if you've overdone it early in the week.

Q. Jordan, you probably touched on this question already but where would you sort of rank winning the FedExCup in terms to say of winning the majors, the WGCs and hopefully one day winning a repeat gold medal?

JORDAN SPIETH: I would say right below the majors. I would say this is -- that's probably where I would put it, yeah. I haven't really thought about where I would rank FedExCup versus World Golf Championships versus Olympic gold medal versus THE PLAYERS but they're all right there in a category right below the majors.

Q. Jordan, the PGA TOUR just released its schedule for the 2017-18 season, I don't know if you've seen it yet. There are 49 total tournaments. You guys always talk about the need for an offseason but it has to be balanced by giving players opportunities. Do you see that as kind of a Catch 22 and do you like the way the Tour has gone about dealing with that?

JORDAN SPIETH: I didn't see the release. What's it look like toward the end of the season, where's it end and how many events?

Q. It's 49 tournaments.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, which is similar to what it is right now, right?

Q. Yeah, it's two more.

JORDAN SPIETH: But where does the FedExCup --

Q. Same thing, it's the same way. This is for '17 and '18.

JORDAN SPIETH: Oh, this next season, okay, all right. Sorry. Yeah, I think I'm not surprised that next year's similar and then after that we'll see what happens. I wouldn't necessarily be quick to judge on how the Tour's saying that based on a short-term view of next year. Wait and see what happens after that.

Q. And it's less about the actual specific schedule next year as opposed to the balance between trying to find that offseason and trying to create the opportunities

for players.

JORDAN SPIETH: And they are very much working on that going just past next year's season. So I very much support what they're saying and they are doing a lot of hard work and a lot of great work to do.

Q. Jordan, after Justin won the PGA he said that jealousy of you and your achievements was what drove him. What role did jealousy or has jealousy played in your own competitive drive either as a young guy or now in this era?

JORDAN SPIETH: I don't think either one of us would probably use that word but in what you're saying I would say looking at and striving for the accomplishments of the best players in the game.

I mean, if we're out here and you love what you do and you want to be that type of player, then you have to look at your guys like Tiger, you have to look at Phil. It's a lot easier to look at more current players. Like it would be easier for me to feel confident in trying to accomplish the accomplishments that guys like Tiger, Phil, Ernie, Vijay, these guys that are still playing versus your Nicklauses, Palmers, I can't relate to that generation at all. But if these guys are still playing here and you can pick their brains, talk to them and they can talk to you and very much relate to what it was like when they were your age, whether it's 20 years ago or even going back 10 years and how the transition has been made into where they are now, I feel like it's a lot more relatable type goals that are obviously extremely lofty. And these are the best players to ever play the game but that's where I like to set those lofty goals. And yeah, so I guess the jealousy is of those guys and their accomplishments and that's where I kind of look at where I stand now and reset goals going forward.

Q. Jordan, as someone who's obviously interested in golf but also a football fan, do you think it's important to end this event and thereby the season before Labor Day and before football gets serious?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think everybody's in agreement that it would help the ratings of the PGA TOUR, which is probably better for everybody in this room and outside of this room if golf has higher ratings. If you can get the biggest tournaments in the right spots that don't conflict with other major sports or at least a limited number, then I think it's better for everybody and that probably creates the opportunity for more of an offseason if we want it and that's also great for us and probably for y'all, too.

Q. Jordan, there's a new trophy this year for the TOUR Championship, the Calamity Jane is given to the winner. What does that mean to you and the significance with Bobby Jones?

JORDAN SPIETH: I received one a couple years ago.

CHRIS REIMER: That was more of a gift than now. It's now the official trophy.

Q. I guess now that that's the official trophy, what does that mean to you?

JORDAN SPIETH: I thought it was an exceptional gift. It's actually in a different room displayed, I have them both at my house.

What does that mean to me? I'm sorry, I just assumed it was given out as part of the trophy anyways. I hadn't really paid much attention to the other awards ceremonies but I think it's very special. This is the home of Bobby Jones and has exceptional history here and that putter has exceptional history. I thought it was one of the coolest gifts I've ever received after a tournament. The fact that that now kind of becomes the standard here is very good, but again I just thought it was always there, I'm sorry.

Q. Looking at 14 and 15 specifically, your approach shot into 14, how do you go about playing that with usually a tricky lie there, and then 15, is there anything you do in a practice round to prepare to play that hole?

JORDAN SPIETH: Those two holes more likely than not going forward will determine this championship with the change in the nines. I don't think it made much of a difference last year. Rory obviously holed out on 16 which was a huge hole for him and you saw 16 and 18 play the role in the final. But those two will probably make a big difference.

Ideally you have to hit a fade off the tee and then you've got to hit probably a draw on the second shot given the lie. The ball's above your feet on 14. You work a draw with a long iron into that green and the idea is just to hit the center of the green. You can't really go for any of the pins, it's too flat on the landing spots, but you can putt from the middle to any of those and it's not too difficult even from 25, 30 feet.

Then as you work into 15, again you're trying to just hit the center of the green. You've got to find a comfortable shot. So in the practice round it's okay, this is what the wind's going to be this week, hopefully it's consistent the whole week and do I feel more comfortable hitting a cut into that green or a draw because it is a very uneasy feeling shot. It's one of the harder shots we hit all year.

Q. Wondering, fifth time here now, what have you learned over the years, experiences that have helped you play this golf course, what are things you've gained from playing here now?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think picking spots. I remember in '15 Jason had just won at BMW at Conway where I played with him the first two days and he shot 18 under and he came out here and he went 3 under through four or 4 under through four to start the first round. I'm playing with him and I go Jesus, here we go again, you know. You hit 5 and 6 and I think he kind of pushed one and it hit a tree and went out of play. He played those holes I think double and bogey and all of a sudden he's back to even par and I was 1 under or 2 under at the time. I was like wow, I'm back in it. I almost thought I was out of it just after watching

the week before through four holes.

Pick your spots because anything can happen on some of these. There's some very difficult holes out here and this bermuda rough makes it almost impossible to hold greens on a lot of holes, especially 14, 16 and 17. Those greens are almost impossible to hit if you miss the fairway, so driving becomes a key. You've got to stay focused and recognize even when you make some birdies it doesn't mean to really push the gas pedal down, you've got to kind of watch out because scores fluctuate I think on this golf course quite a bit. You get some easy holes that you can really take advantage of but then you get some ones where par is a phenomenal score.

Q. There's obviously a lot of money on the line and this is a different tournament in that everything's kind of closed down for you guys to kind of do all your work. What does it look like on a Monday and a Tuesday, is it a little more active on the range, on the putting green? And is there a point where you sort of look over at Jon Rahm, for example, and say oh, you're getting an early start, too?

JORDAN SPIETH: On this week specifically?

Q. Yeah, like how is it different from a regular tour event as far as the amount of preparation?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, it's lonely. You feel like you have one of the best courses in the world to yourself to prepare on that golf course. That doesn't happen anywhere, anywhere else. Kapalua maybe, but Kapalua you still have a lot of tourists around as we lead into the tournament. But that Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday is the same feeling we get here.

No, I'm not surprised. There's a lot on the line. And again, in a major championship everybody's there on Monday working and most of the guys were out there yesterday working at least a little bit. It's dialed back a little, the end of the season. But today every one's out there putting the grind on. It's pretty serious. It's not very light. I haven't felt that way at all so far this week and it probably won't be tomorrow. This is the last five, six days of grind in the season and then we get to have some fun next week and then create a bit of an offseason. Most of the players that are playing this week will have quite a bit of off time in the fall.

Q. We had a situation last year where Dustin was in the clubhouse watching and if Chappy or Ryan Moore wins, he wins the FedExCup, and if Rory wins, he doesn't. How do you think you would handle that situation?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think there's a likelihood that I'll be in that situation this year. I'm not sure. I don't know who the Rory will be. That might change the way you look at things, too. It's tough. I mean he's sitting there not able to control a \$7 million difference, like that doesn't happen anywhere else. It's like having a \$7 million bet on a fight that you're not even taking part in. It's like I would be really nervous but at that point I'm already out of the

tournament so I could probably have a few beers to calm me down, I don't know.

I remember we were actually watching it, we were on the plane with Phil going to the Ryder Cup already while it was going on and I remember sitting there thinking, where is DJ right now? Obviously he's here, he's sticking around. Is he by himself, is he surrounded with people, is he going to celebrate if Ryan wins.

I imagine if somebody else made a putt for me to win a difference of \$7 million, I'll probably celebrate accordingly with a scream or a fist pump or something. But it's an odd scenario and it's likely to happen at this tournament and it has. But it actually hasn't happened in the last, what, five years or so, even longer maybe. When's the last time the TOUR Championship and FedExCup winner were different? Was that Tiger and Phil? Yeah, so pretty rare. But it always plays in a little in that and it's interesting, so I hope I can go out there and control it myself. That's obviously the goal, but if not, it sounds kind of fun.

Q. Jordan, you spoke earlier about that group of the top six or seven guys who control their own fate. What do you think about that group that includes many of the guys that are just becoming household names in the sports world as a whole, not just in golf.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, that bonus does a lot and there are some young guys on that list. A guy like DJ -- I think Rory said in here that I think he mentioned last year that the \$10 million, it doesn't really -- it means a lot but it doesn't change his life. I think Dustin's in that same category. You know, but a young guy like Justin, Jon Rahm where it's their first -- it's still within their first three years on tour, it's a life-changing amount of money. Yeah, and what I said before it being just under a major, it creates you as being more household.

Anytime someone becomes that successful or you win that kind of bonus, it creates haters as well, that kind of comes with it when you become at a certain level, I guess, and those guys are really in my mind already there. But the more you kind of win and the more it becomes these prestigious type accomplishments, it certainly changes the game a bit and I think it's a life-changing amount for anybody and even more so for guys that are young starting out.

Q. Jordan, you mentioned earlier comparing yourself to current players, that is Tiger and Phil and so on and so forth. With regard to the majors, I'm sure you've contemplated what's possible but are you willing to share publicly what is possible for you in terms of numbers or are you not comfortable at this stage?

JORDAN SPIETH: I guess I'm still certainly unsure. Three majors in the last three years is obviously -- didn't know if I would ever have three majors in my life and to do them in a three-year stretch. I won two in one year and then it was like, I mean it was craziness. When's his next one going to be? It's like man, I mean, guys win two majors 10 years apart. Look at Ben Crenshaw, that guy's looked at as a two-time Masters champion and one of

them 10 or 11 years apart or whatever it was and he's looked at as a hero and whatnot. But I just felt like I had to win another one to justify what happened.

It's like man, once I kind of sat back after '16 and said, you know what, don't expect anything like last year. Sit back and relax and recognize that you're going to be in position enough, they're going to go your way if you just keep your head down and just keep on trying to improve. And that's the way I look at it now.

Look, I don't expect to win a major in 2018. I expect myself to be in position but I've proven to myself and to everybody else that it doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to win.

So in comparison with major championships going forward, I would love to win another one in my career and that's what I'm going to say. Do I think I can continue what's been happening the last few years? Yes, I believe that. I believe I'm improving as a player each year. I believe this year was an improvement on really the last two years -- this might have been the best I felt like I played in my career minus making a lot of putts and starting off first rounds really strong were kind of the two things that were a little off. But I just keep my head down and I believe I'll be in the position to continue to have years like this.

Q. Jordan, it seems like every year there's one or two players who get into this tournament and are able to set their schedule for the coming year for the first time this week. Tony Finau got into this event and he'll play the Masters for the first time next year. How important is it for a player, and you're not that far removed from it, to be able to set their schedule for the next year beforehand?

JORDAN SPIETH: It's hard to speak to that. I'm very fortunate I really never had other than my rookie year just trying to figure out where I was going that next week in the spring. I've really been fortunate to be able to do that my whole career. But it's massive. I mean for rest and recovery, for feeling like you can build a plan to peak at certain times and that is a big difference. It's a difference of a few shots I think if you do it correctly in those tournaments, and a few shots is the difference of winning or losing. It's a huge difference.

Tony Finau is an unbelievably talented player who's probably going to win I think dozens of times out here. He is really, really good and very underrated in my opinion.

Patrick Cantlay, 13 events he gets in here, he's healthy and he's extremely talented and will probably do the same. This is a great start to being able to pick a schedule that I think creates more opportunities for them to be in contention and win.

CHRIS REIMER: Thank you, good luck this week.

JORDAN SPIETH: Sure.