

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 27, 2018

JUSTIN ROSE



MARK WILLIAMS: I would like to welcome Justin Rose to the interview room at the World Golf Championships Mexico Championship. Welcome back, Justin. You've already won one of the World Golf Championships this season, the HSBC in China. Just talk about what it would mean to you to get over the line and grab those first two of the season and if you feel like you're in good shape to do that.

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, absolutely. I think no doubt winning the WGC HSBC Champions was a kickstart to the season. Whenever you win before the new year rolls around, you kind of feel like you've put some points on the board and some credit in the bank. From my point of view now, it's just about this is the beginning of a long run of golf.

But to come out, I've had four weeks off, so sometimes that positions you, you come out slightly unsure of exactly where you're going to be after four weeks, but I'm coming in fresh. The reason for taking a few weeks off was to essentially just sort of rebalance the system a little bit. I traveled so much at the end of last year and the beginning of this year that I kind of knew there might be a cost to that at some point, so I just preemptively took a few weeks off. I also really wanted to work on my game. There were a few things -- obviously I've been playing really well, but there were a few things I wanted to tune up and here we are in Mexico and ready to go.

MARK WILLIAMS: You mentioned not playing much this season. As you said, you've had very few starts. You also had a top-10 at Farmers Insurance Open with a T8 there, so a good solid performance and this is just your third start.

Just looking back last year at this tournament at Chapultepec, you were one of a few players that didn't shoot in the 60s. You had four rounds in the 70s but still finished in the middle of the field. What about this golf course when you arrived here and saw it for the first time, what was your impression and what did you learn from playing here last year?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, it's interesting, it's a fun golf course. Obviously with the altitude, there's also those calculations you're trying to figure out, how far is the ball going and there's not just the standard calculations, it's not just 10 percent across the board. It seems to change with different clubs. When you get into the middle of the bag with the 8-, 7-, 6-iron, the ball seems to go its furthest. So yeah, there was a lot of learning last year. I feel like I set up a very defensive game plan to start with, and by the end of the week I was hitting driver everywhere, so my game plan evolved as I got to know and understand the golf course.

So I'm very interested today, I'm going to go and play nine holes after this and just sort of

reacquaint myself with how I see the golf course and how my eye sees some of the lines that we found last year. I believe I also was actually No. 1 strokes gained tee to green last year even though I finished in the 30s, means I putted pretty poorly, I guess, last year. But to figure out the greens, but maybe that aggressive strategy actually created some opportunities for me that I wasn't able to take. But my mindset this year is to maybe be a little bit more aggressive and hopefully take those chance.

MARK WILLIAMS: Interesting. We'll take questions, just get a microphone. We'll start with Cameron.

Q. Justin, a lot of different theories about the altitude and how do you play for that, 10 percent, 15 percent? And then also, do you believe that it favors a long hitter? Obviously a long hitter won here last year, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it does favor them.

JUSTIN ROSE: I think it favors a high ball hitter really, whether it be a long hitter. If the ball's in the air longer, it's going further. So guys who can launch the ball higher making the most of the available altitude to give them that extra distance. So I think that's probably more so than a long hitter. I think a high ball hitter. And last year the greens were quite firm, so getting the ball coming into the green a little bit softer is always important. I think this year just from what I can see from the outside looking in is the course looks a little softer, a little bit more grass out there right now, so that might be less of a factor this year. Clearly, Tommy Fleetwood hits the ball quite long. DJ, as you say, is a long hitter, won last year.

But it shouldn't be a golf course that really suits the long hitter. I think it's the kind of golf course that suits everybody and offers everybody the opportunity to play well. It's very strategic, there's a lot of wedges in hand for most of the field. Yeah, it's about kind of just getting the ball in the hole this week. There doesn't seem to be -- just from memory, you can be aggressive, you can try and take it over tree lines occasionally. But if you're on your own that works for a long hitter, but equally there's a lot of risk with that as well. So game plan's very important around here, but I think all types of players can find their way around the golf course.

Q. Justin Thomas was in here talking about how important TrackMan is this week and really crunching the numbers and looking at the launch angles and the spin rates and all that stuff. He thought players were going to get very involved in that this week. Is that something that you pay special attention to.

JUSTIN ROSE: I just spent a couple hours -- well, not quite, maybe an hour, a full hour going through every club in my bag, hitting four or five shots with each club just tracking and getting all the data on exactly how far it was going. TrackMan has a setting now where I think we're about 7,000 feet here, so you can adjust the TrackMan to 7,000 feet and it normalizes the shot that you're hitting. So we were using that as a column and then seeing actually how far the ball was going and they were relatively close. They were within five yards of one another.

So I felt like we have -- I think it's very difficult because how the strike the ball here is quite important. If you hit a shot really cleanly with a lot of spin, the ball stays in the air for a long time and it really goes. If you slightly mis-hit, especially a long iron, if you slightly mis-hit a long iron, you don't get the benefit of the altitude as much. So I feel like there's a bigger spread between your iron shots than at other venues.

Q. First of all, last year I recall you played a couple times -- well, Pebble and Riv I want to say last year and this year you've just come off a month off. Just the thinking behind that and how you're scheduling yourself leading into Augusta.

JUSTIN ROSE: Yes, I really enjoy the west coast. I really enjoy Pebble and Riv, they're tournaments that I'll definitely play again. This year I just wanted to do something different. It's reactive to how the end of the year went. I played a lot of golf, I traveled a lot, went around the world a few times.

Q. Five times.

JUSTIN ROSE: Was it? I was in Abu Dhabi already, San Diego. A couple of those, they're long 12-hour time change trips. No one's super human, I knew there would be maybe a cost to it if I kept pushing and pushing. So I kind of wanted to pay my debts before the invoice came in, so to speak. So that was the reason for taking the four weeks off, it was a little preemptive with the Masters in mind obviously. So I now feel fresh, ready to play five of the next six weeks and play into Augusta.

Q. Secondly, I happened to see a 1-iron in your bag along with a 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and about 15 wedges. What do you got going on there?

JUSTIN ROSE: Options, that's what I've got going on.

Q. What are you looking at?

JUSTIN ROSE: I just brought a few extras this week because, like I was saying earlier, it's a very strategic golf course game plan wise. I didn't know if the 1-iron would be useful potentially. But from what I just said, I think the higher flight here is kind of the more advantageous ball flight so I'm kind of leaning away from the long irons thinking still my 5-wood. I've got two options, I've got two 4-irons in there, one's the P790, one's the blade, launches it a little higher, so probably go with that one. So yeah, just options, and give Fooch a workout, he hasn't been out for a month.

Q. You were talking about how difficult for you or last year was for you to putt here. What is your strategy to figure out the greens?

JUSTIN ROSE: No real strategy. I remember I arrived here and just struggled on the putting green even from day one. Today I spent a lot of extra time. First thing I did this

morning was putt for an hour and a half. Had my putting coach out there, really set up the week from the word go. Put my emphasis on the putting green, putted really well, looking forward to it. They're poa annua greens, we play them, we face them a lot, they're nothing knew or nothing that I shouldn't be able to putt well on.

So for me, no issue. Just maybe pay a bit -- the greens break a lot here, for sure, so maybe just pay a bit more attention to that. Maybe I under-read them a bit last year, I think, and then maybe try and be more, you know, strategic with where I leave the ball on the green with my approach play.

Q. Leaving the Mexico Championship aside, what are your thoughts about the team that's building for the Ryder Cup, Europe's side?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, love it, I really, really love it. I think obviously you see Alex Noren, Tommy Fleetwood, guys like that just playing exceptional golf. Probably playing the best golf of anybody. Obviously you've got all the right names, you've got Casey involved, Jon Rahm. They're huge additions to our team with a lot of firepower and just give us so many more options than we had last year, so I'm excited the way it's shaping up.

Q. You mentioned Tommy Fleetwood, and obviously he's playing quite well. Is it fun for you to, especially fun for you to see a young countryman doing so well? And what's your favorite thing about his game and just your favorite thing about him as a person?

JUSTIN ROSE: I think, yeah, I love watching Tommy do well. He's become a good friend of mine. We really played a lot of golf when we were chasing each other down the stretch for the Race to Dubai last year. Whenever you get to compete against someone when the pressure's really on, you get to learn about them as a person. Tommy's just a first-class guy and I think his temperament is what impresses me the most. He really is so level out there, but he has fun on the golf course, he smiles a lot, he's very even keel but he has that sort of upside, you see him smiling a lot. He has a great relationship with his caddie. That's fun they've been with each other for a long time, they've grown up in the same area, there's just a lot of good energy about that pairing on the golf course. And he's a great ball-striker, I really love the way he hits his irons, I suppose.

Q. Hello, Justin. Seven of past WGCs, now Mexico Championship have been won by two strokes or less. Considering the field, it seems this could continue with that statistic. How do you feel or what are your expectations considering the great amount of players that are here this week?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, that's a great question. I think that sometimes all the players here in the field are capable of having an exceptional week, and if we have an exceptional week, we become very hard to beat. But if a great player has an exceptional week against a standard field, they can really separate themselves. But you know that four or five or six of the top-10 players in the world are going to play well this week. So it's very difficult to stretch out five,

10 shots ahead of the best players in the world. So I think that's the reason why it's always been pretty close, pretty tight. Obviously a lot of these tournaments have been played at Doral in the past and now obviously now here in Mexico. I think one of the most underrated shots last year of the whole year was Dustin Johnson's second shot into 18 here when he was in the bunker and had that like chippy wedge shot. That green is so treacherous, and if you hit it slightly clean, you're over the back. I think Dustin was 2 ahead playing the last, maybe was he, I guess. But looked, the way his tee shot, that was still very much more to play for. To me, that was one of the best shots of the year.

Q. Justin, about the field that is here in Mexico, we've got all these young guns, right? You're a guy that has a lot of experience, won a major also. Do you feel any pressure about this new generation, these guys that are flying to the top spots or how do you play them?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, I feel very comfortable with where my game is and I think it stacks up on any given week when I play well. I think that they're playing with a lot of confidence right now, but I feel like I've played in the last four, five months every bit as good as any one of them, so I take confidence in that.

But yeah, it motivates me because I know I have to be my best. My time is kind of not running out, but I need to -- I've got maybe three, four, five more years to really make the most of my career, to really put a nice little cherry on top of my career. And the standard is improving out here, there's no doubt about it. If you look at the world rankings, more guys are earning more points. The top guys are earning more points than I think they ever have is what it feels like to me. It's very competitive, it's very hard to forge your way into the top-5 in the world right now with how many wins these young players are racking up. Obviously we saw periods of time where Tiger would win five, six, seven, eight a year, but you're now getting to four or five guys having multiple win seasons. That's the type of level you have to play at.

MARK WILLIAMS: Okay, Justin, we appreciate your time and good luck this week.