

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 28, 2018

JON RAHM



CHUAH CHOO CHIANG: We have Jon Rahm here with us, two-time PGA TOUR winner including the recent CareerBuilder Challenge and a two-time winner on the European Tour as well.

Jon, a T3 here last year at the World Golf Championships-Mexico Championship. How fun is it to be back here in this wonderful city?

JON RAHM: Well, it's fun for many reasons. Top 3 last year obviously brings me a lot of positive memories, but the Mexican people here, the Hispanic culture, Latin fans are so engaging, you know? I still feel like it happens a little bit. Last year I got here and people don't know I'm Spanish because of my name, so if they speak to me in English, they wouldn't know, but the fact that the way I played this year and they see this flag on the leaderboard and they know I'm from here, they take me as one of their own, which is great because I have a lot of fans. I was playing with Dustin and Phil out here today, and I felt for once in my life I had almost as many fans as they did out there. So it was really fun to be out there. It was great to play in these conditions and I just can't wait to get it started, I'm excited.

CHUAH CHOO CHIANG: And I think you have an announcement to make about your participation in this great championship this week. Do you want to share it with us?

JON RAHM: Yeah. Well, for people that don't know, while the hurricanes were hitting the southeast coast of the United States, there were also some bad things happening here. There was a bad earthquake that hit Mexico City and I think a couple days ago last week there was another earthquake that hit Mexico and they were both pretty hard and pretty high on the scale.

So I thought we're doing great things with playing this great event in Mexico helping out the golf community, but why stop there? Right now a lot of us donated money during the FedExCup Playoffs for the hurricane relief, for the help. So I decided this week, much like I did last year, I'm going to donate for every birdie that I make and every eagle that I make, it will be a thousand dollars for the birdies, \$3,000 for every eagle that I make. It's all going to go towards the Mexican Red Cross to help out these people in need. Hopefully I get a lot of birdies and a lot of eagles to help out as much as possible.

Q. You mentioned that your playing partners, you played nine holes today?

JON RAHM: We played nine, yeah. It was me, Phil, DJ and Rafa.

Q. Did you have a little Ryder Cup match?

JON RAHM: No, no, no. We were just playing, trying to learn from each other, you know? Trying to see how far DJ can hit it, trying to see how good Phil's wedges are. It's always nice to, when you have the caliber of players we had in the group because you can learn a lot about the golf course by looking at other guys, what they're doing. Especially with putting, you don't have to hit putts, you can just watch them hit putts and you can see how the balls are going to break and react. It helps out to do the least amount of work possible on weeks like today.

Q. And secondly, you've had a nice little two-week break. What did you get accomplished in those two weeks, just recharge the batteries?

JON RAHM: Just rest, that was mainly the main thing. Work out, make sure I'm physically in the best shape as I can be and just be rested. I found that the back nine at Pebble Beach I was completely drained, I had no energy. I couldn't swing and that's why I ended up -- I mean, I was playing great and ended up shooting 5-over par on the back nine. That doesn't usually happen. It was a lot of tiredness, a lot of exhaustion in my body.

Q. It's kind of strange to ask you in English when we both speak Spanish, but first of all, thank you very much for that news about the donation of birdies and eagles. I really hope you make a lot of both and to win.

The question is, you are getting so close to the first place of the world ranking. What do you need -- what do you think you need to do to get a first place, and most important, what do you think you need to do to stay in first place for a while?

JON RAHM: A lot more birdies and eagles, that's for sure. To be honest, I don't know. That's the best way I can say that because I haven't achieved that yet. I can tell you what I'm going to maybe do. I'm going to practice hard, I'm going to work out hard, I'm going to try my hardest, but I don't know what I need to do to stay there. Once I get to No. 1, maybe I'll get an idea but I really don't know. I hope it happens, but dethroning Dustin Johnson isn't going to be easy. He's a great player so I'm going to have to play really high quality golf to even get close to him.

Q. How about your temper, are you working on that? I'm sorry about the question.

JON RAHM: Well, you asked it. Why are you sorry then?

Q. Well, we heard about --

JON RAHM: No, no, no. Well, I mean, it's things that happen. Like I said, it's an ongoing work and there's ups and downs. I feel like it was pretty good up until the last few weeks on this West Coast Swing. Maybe it wasn't the best it could have been, but if we don't get some bad moments or some stumbles, it's never going to get better. So I welcome those,

as hard as it is to suffer and experience what I do because a lot of times I feel horrible for what I do and I just need to learn and keep getting better. It's a work in progress. A lot of people can tell you, especially my head coach in college who knows me pretty well, it's gotten really good in the last six years, so I just hope it keeps getting better and it gets to a point where this is not a worry for me.

Q. Jon, you mentioned that you like to pick stuff up from other players like you did today with Rafa and Phil and Dustin. Playing with Dustin, be it practice rounds or competitively, what have you learned to help your game?

JON RAHM: Well, funny, we actually play a really similar game. We were talking about it today and we were saying if we can hit a driver off the tee, we're going to hit a driver off the tee. We would rather hit a driver and miss the fairway than lay up and miss the fairway, so we both have a very similar mindset.

When it comes to Dustin, he's just really steady. It's a guy who is very hardly going to feel unbalanced and very hardly going to feel like he doesn't have a chance to win. When a guy feels like that, all you can do is try to feel the same way he does and act the same way he does, and hopefully you can beat him.

But when we're talking about that, I was talking about different ways of playing the golf course, right, because we all play the ball differently. Rafa was hitting shots a little farther behind than we were doing, and that's great for us to see a layup, where it's going to end up, what kind of shot you have, whereas hitting the driver off the tee. It kind of saves time because if you play alone you need to hit a couple balls you off the tee to see that. When you have four guys like that that can hit it as good as we do off the tee, it was kind of easier to just try different things and see what happens.

Q. Jon, I'm going to ask you this question in Spanish. I'm also a Spaniard. It's a pleasure being here and I'm very proud of you. I wanted to ask you what you think is special about Mexico and this tournament.

JON RAHM: For a tournament of this magnitude to leave the United States to come to Mexico City means that it must be a very special place. I think the biggest factor in coming here is that the people are very hospitable. We were treated very well last year and we've been treated very well this year. I'm sure every year that we keep playing we will continue to be treated well. It's a very fun week for all of us. I think the main reason why this tournament is held here is to grow the game of golf in Mexico, and its values. The main reason we're all here is because Mexican people are very hospitable, friendly, and they have great food.

Q. How do you feel about this tournament? Do you think you can win it?

JON RAHM: I wouldn't come if I didn't think I could win. Every time I step on the first tee at a tournament, I'm confident I can win. After two weeks off, I'm full of energy and ready to go.

I hope I can play well.

Q. I remember very clearly from last year that you told me that you hadn't played a professional tournament in your country. Have you played a professional golf tournament in your country, and how has your career and your life changed since last year?

JON RAHM: I played the Valderrama Masters in Spain and the fan support was very similar to what I've experienced here. It's been surprising how much support I've had here. I've been treated as one of their own. In my life I haven't changed as a person, I've tried not to. It's inevitable that my professional career has changed, but I'm still the same person and nobody in my family treats me any different. But my public image when I go to Spain or any Latin country, I am more well recognized. But I think if one doesn't change as a person, then life doesn't change that much.

Q. You've had the chance to play a tournament with Tiger and without Tiger. How would you compare the amount of fans on a week where Tiger's playing to the amount of fans you see here?

JON RAHM: When I play a tournament with Tiger, everybody's watching Tiger. So I can't tell you the difference because I haven't played with Tiger yet, but you can tell that the crowds have a little bit more energy. At Torrey Pines I could feel it was a lot more electric when he was playing behind me. I didn't play the other two tournaments that he played in, so I couldn't tell you. This week, though, has been comparable. There are several weeks during the year where there are a lot less people than there are here, and that proves that the Mexican fans are behind the tournament. As I said before, with every passing year we will have more people attending the tournament, not only Mexicans, but people from all of Latin America because it is the World Golf Championship that is closest to them, and I hope it keeps growing.

Q. Jon, I can think of four names of compatriots, Seve Ballesteros, Olazabal, Miguel Angel Jimenez, and Sergio Garcia. How have they inspired you, and is there any other Spanish golfer who has inspired you?

JON RAHM: Each one of them has inspired me. The passion that Seve had for the game of golf had no equal, that passion that he had for sport. Miguel Angel is a clear example of anything can happen on a good day. I don't know how many tournaments he's been able to win after the age of 45. That means that if you stay physically fit, you will have a long career. And Sergio and Olazabal, Olazabal was one of the best players with an iron in his hand, and Sergio Garcia is probably one of the best players tee to green of the last 20 years. All this means that if you train, you're fit and you're confident in yourself, good things will happen. These players' resumes are longer than mine and I hope to be able to emulate them.

Q. You're part of a very successful generation of Spanish athletes, such as Fernando

Alonzo, Rafael Nadal and the Spanish National Team. How do you feel being a part of this generation?

JON RAHM: I'm very proud that you are comparing me to these legends of Spanish sport. It's incredible what Fernando Alonzo and Rafa Nadal have been able to do.

Nadal winning 15 Grand Slams and winning the same Grand Slam 10 times is something that will probably never be repeated. And Fernando Alonzo won the world title a couple of times and that's something that nobody had ever been able to do before.

In golf, we have Seve, Sergio, Olazabal, and Miguel Angel, who have done it before I have, but I appreciate you comparing me to these greats of Spanish sport. I will use this as motivation, and if I continue to train and work as I have been doing up to now, then I hope to be able to reach the level that they did, but it's very complicated to get there.

Q. Jon, you have consistency, charisma, and I think that probably helped to electrify fans. How is the golf course, and will you change anything from last year's strategy?

JON RAHM: I was telling Phil during our practice round, the more I play this golf course, the more I like it. I find it a very fun golf course and I don't think I'll change anything from last year's strategy. I did very well last year, and I am confident this year and I don't see why I would need to change. I hope to put myself in the position I was last year and finish the job.

Q. In the last 18 months you have gone up in the world ranking all the way to No. 2. Do you feel any extra pressure of having to play like the No. 2 player in the world at such a young age?

JON RAHM: No, no, I haven't felt the need to change my game. If I've been able to get to where I am with my game the way it is, why would I change it, and I know that I can go further. I put myself in the position where I can do something important.

I was told at Torrey Pines that I could make it to No. 1 and that scared me a little bit. Well, maybe not scared me, but it did surprise me, and I knew what I had to do to get to No. 1. But to get to No. 1, you have to win golf tournaments. I can't think of anyone that has made it to No. 1 without winning golf tournaments. Jason Day had to win a golf tournament, Dustin Johnson had to win Genesis, Jordan Spieth had to win, Tiger had to win. But then there are players like Phil Mickelson, who has won 42 times on the PGA TOUR and never made it to No. 1. Olazabal didn't make it. Sergio hasn't made it. It's not easy. You have to have the chance, and I hope to one day have the chance. But I don't plan on changing anything, just improving.