

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW

November 27, 2018



JUSTIN ROSE

JACK RYAN: We'll go ahead and get started here with Justin Rose at the 2018 Hero World Challenge. Justin is a resident of Albany and this must be a very special event for you.

JUSTIN ROSE: Absolutely, nice commute this week for sure, just jump in the golf course and head up to the course. Obviously I've seen the preparation, everyone's worked really hard here for a couple months getting the course ready, getting this event ready. So yeah, it's a fun week, nice to share my home course with the guys that come and play this week.

JACK RYAN: You had a nice result in China at the HSBC Champions in your title defense and you're the reigning FedExCup champion. So what are your goals this season? As you look back on last season, obviously you had a very successful one, and as we're about to turn the year, what are your goals?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, so it was a fun season. Obviously FedExCup champion, fantastic. It was nice to get off to a good start, third place, got some points on the board immediately in China. So it was always nice to have a little cushion I suppose before Christmas comes around, you've made somewhat of a start to next season, which is January 1 onwards. But yeah, that's just the flow of how I try to do it in my head. It's nice to get some cheap points on the board early.

Goals next year, I would say I've played a lot of golf the last two years, done a lot of traveling, so maybe being really careful with my schedule and making sure I'm fresh and ready. And as we go into 2020, that's going to be a huge year with Olympics and Ryder Cup, so just managing all the variables that go along with that.

So yeah, just pay attention to the schedule and then being fresh and ready to play in the majors. This will be an exciting year and I feel like it's time for me to win another major championship, so there will be a lot of focus on that in terms of my team, my schedule, and what goes into achieving that goal.

Q. Justin, you had such a great year on the greens last year and I was just curious, with your switch to the claw putting grip, what went into that decision, what was the thought process behind it that convinced you to make that switch?

JUSTIN ROSE: I've been toying with it for quite some time. Actually I used it from April and May in 2016 and I went back to the regular style, and then I really wanted to do it for the Ryder Cup. I knew I was making the switch around Ryder Cup 2016 time, and Ryder Cup's a tough week to introduce a new putting grip, but I wish I had.

So it was something that I just felt more comfortable with for some reason. It took a lot of -- it took a lot of knit-picking away from my stroke and I think it's allowed me to focus on other aspects of putting. Putting's not about a perfect stroke, it's about skill acquisition, being able to read greens well, put it on the right speed, obviously start it on your line. I just feel it simplified a lot of my process and I think that's been the reason statistically this year's all compiled into my best putting year ever for sure.

Q. Rosie, given how everything has worked out atop the World Golf ranking the last few weeks, have you stopped celebrating getting to No. 1, and has it almost made it easier that it's played out this way and seems like you two will just decide it on the golf course at some point?

JUSTIN ROSE: I think it was nice that I won -- obviously I finished second to get to No. 1 the first time, and it was nice in Turkey to win a tournament to get to No. 1. That's always how I envisioned doing it. Almost the second time it happened, it was almost a little bit sweeter so I was able to enjoy it again. And the third time it happened it happened because Brooks finished 12th in Japan and it was just one of those statistical situations. Obviously he's gone back to No. 1 this week based on --

So I think for me I played a lot of golf -- or I didn't play much golf at the end of 2016, so the golf that I've been playing recently that has been taking up my divisor every time I play it's gone from like 44, 45, 46, 47, to 48. So my points have been diluting and obviously he maybe hasn't -- it's a situational thing over a two-year cycle.

But yeah, obviously I've been there four weeks, three times. It's nice to be there, I love being at the top. It's a fantastic thing, and next time I get to the top I'll screen shot it again on my phone no doubt. It's not necessarily "been there, done that," but it's a product of good play. I'm focusing on good play, but I wouldn't say it's a primary goal to stay there necessarily. I want to play the golf that's required to stay there and that's my objective now.

Q. You mentioned earlier about your schedule. How tough will it be to manage that stretch leading up to the Masters? There's seemingly so many big events kind of mid February on, a couple of World Golf events, THE PLAYERS. How do you decide?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, I think February's a key month for me. Funny you would key on February. I think February's going to be a time where I'm going to take a few weeks off. I have three weeks off there in February, which will hopefully set me up for that run. Florida Swing, there's a lot of busy golf, a lot of great golf, big-time tournaments, but they're all easy to get to. I feel just in terms of the overall load on the system, they don't take that much out of you.

I think with February off, then going into March, I love THE PLAYERS Championship being in March. I was always a fan of that, the way the golf course plays. I'm going to play the Match Play again this year, haven't played that for a number of years. Might mean that Mexico's not on my schedule this year just based on that February break that I'm looking for

to freshen up going to the Masters.

So I still have an A and a B scenario and it's a little bit to do how I feel after this next run of golf. But I have some options, but February's the key month I think just for me to recharge a little bit.

Q. How does it compare playing in the Bahamas versus other places in the world?

JUSTIN ROSE: Well, I think obviously it's, firstly, it's at home. I've had the fortune to play at home a few times. The Wentworth tournament is close to where I grew up, so that always felt like home. The Bay Hill tournament in Orlando felt like home, lived there for seven or eight years. And now this one feels like home.

Playing at home is an interesting feeling for me personally. I'm not sure it's an advantage really because there's the off-course distraction that's so different to your normal routine on Tour. But generally playing in the Bahamas, obviously I think the golf course here at Albany they do a great job of getting it to championship spec, greens are super fast, obviously there's always a challenge with the wind here. The ocean breeze makes it tricky and demanding, and this golf course is all about keeping it in play so when it gets windy, this course can play really, really tough.

It's nice to showcase the Bahamas obviously, I know there's so many different islands with different styles of golf courses all over, but there's surprisingly good golf scattered around the Bahamas and it's nice to showcase that.

Q. How much do you notice the trends in other players' swings and how they're playing? Using Tiger as an example, he went through a stretch obviously with injuries and things like that, and all of a sudden in this past year he starts to become Tiger Woods again. Is that something you notice as a competitor and what does that feel like when you see that coming along?

JUSTIN ROSE: I think everyone follows Tiger's progress for sure, whether it's a swing change, whether it's a dip in form, whether it's his health. I think in recent years everyone's just been willing him back to good health. I think that's just a wish for anybody is just to be happy and healthy. That's the foundation for any success really.

It's been good to see him up and about, feeling fit, strong, out of pain, more importantly, and I think because of that he's able to be Tiger Woods. No one can function at a high level when they're struggling with other areas in their life. Yeah, it's awesome to see him feeling good, playing well.

Q. Was there a time this year where you noticed just when you saw him playing, this is the guy I remember?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, I played with him at Bay Hill in May -- March, excuse me, and the

way he was striking the ball, it was just -- it was as good as anybody out here. That's when I knew that he was looking the real deal again.

His chipping -- actually, he's hit some wedge shots this year that have really impressed me off some tight tricky lies. There was one at Muirfield Village where he was short of the 9th green on a downslope that was wet, super tight lie to a front pin, water hazard everywhere, he clipped a beautiful shot in there. That was something maybe he would have struggled with 12, 18 months prior.

When I saw his short game back along with his swing 100 percent, I knew that mentally he was in a spot -- I knew it was a matter of time for him to win. And I think just elaborating on it a little bit more, I think winning at East Lake showed that he's almost a more evolved player. He's always eaten up courses like Bay Hill and Doral, done a lot of damage at a lot of venues, but at definitely a few venues he's really dominated. East Lake wasn't one through his career that he would go to and think this was my week, so I think for him winning there has showed his game's evolved over the last year or so.

Q. Your stroke gained averages across the board were pretty consistent last season. Is there anything specific that you want to work on during the offseason, any particular area, or is it a matter now of just kind of tweaking some things?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, I appreciate all the things that have been going well and it's always a matter of how do you protect that, how do you keep your strengths being your strengths. You've still got to focus on them. I've begun to develop what I call sort of my minimum viable product in terms of practice daily; what do I have to do daily just to kind of maintain what's going well, and then when I get inspired to go down a route with my game, then I'll get into a practice session based upon improvement. That could be different just depending on how I'm feeling.

I still think my iron play could be a lot stronger. It's inherently been a strength of mine, but I think statistically I haven't been hitting my irons as I would like for the past number of seasons. Short game, chipping, I feel like there's still a level I can go to there. Yeah, so maybe 100 yards and in, focus on that, and iron play.

Q. Justin, I know it's going to be the last tournament for many players, but you've still got something left in Indonesia, and you spoke in Turkey about how important it is for you to try and win back to back at certain events, which you haven't done very often.

Can you tell us something about what makes you go back to Indonesia again, the other part of the world and the other part of the season when people are getting ready for Christmas?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, for sure it's a long trip to make, but I think it's always important to go and defend a title. I think I've always tried to do that wherever I've won around the world, I've always tried to go back the next year and defend it.

You're right, I hadn't actually defended a title and that was one of my goals starting in China, I wanted to defend either China, Turkey or Indonesia. Those were my three opportunities left this year, so obviously I was able to do that in Turkey and I'm really excited to come down to Indonesia.

At the moment, every time I play there's a scenario as well. I finish third this week, I go back to No. 1. Obviously if I win this week, clearly I go back to No. 1. I'm sure it will be exactly the same in Indonesia. Depending what happens this week, if I don't finish top X, so there's always going to be a scenario probably until the end of the year. Until Brooks starts playing again and see what he does, there's always going to be that equation.

It's an equation that now I've become comfortable with every single week, and I said to the boys in Turkey, I said, "Listen, let's not make the final round bigger than it needs to be because the No. 1 thing is going to be going on for the next four, five times I play. So let's not make it an issue for Sunday in Turkey, that was my mentality. Just focus on the tournament and didn't have the extra storyline playing in my head.

But certainly that's going to be the case the next two weeks and kind of getting used to it. Anyway, it would be lovely to finish the year No. 1 so I'm sure Indonesia will have an extra purpose.

Q. Talking about No. 1, how impressive has Francesco been this year finishing No. 1 in Europe?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, I think he got obviously what he deserved there rightly. Obviously Tommy and even myself towards the end there were trying to chase him. Statistically, I didn't have a chance to kind of quite catch him there at the end. His run of golf from May to September, including the Ryder Cup, unbelievable.

I think it's so rewarding to watch a player like Francesco who as he's grown older, he's found ways to get better. He's always been a talented guy, he's always been a solid player, but there's been areas of his game that kept him from getting to the very top highest level.

I think how he's committed, working with Dave Alred. Dave's a very, very talented guy and is a great coach, but to work with Dave Alred, you need to put in the work and the hours and the mental and the sacrifice, and that's what Francesco's done. He's decided to really give it 100 percent and to see him get the reward is impressive.

Q. Justin, can you tell us if you feel that within skill mindset and everything you have it now?

JUSTIN ROSE: The what mindset?

Q. The within skill.

JUSTIN ROSE: I think self belief is definitely there. There's not a player I play with in the gym of golf right now that I play with and I think, oh, if only I had that, or I don't quite feel up to the task. So I feel comfortable. I think that's the biggest thing for me, if I step on the tee and I feel comfortable with who I'm playing with, it tells me a lot about myself and I think that's the way I feel.

Form comes and goes a little bit, but inherently I think that when I'm playing my best golf I can win any tournament at any time. So it's just a matter of me trying to, like I said, control the variables, do all the right work, that I bring my best game as often as I can.

My consistency's been fantastic, but if I can just bring the next gear or the next level more consistently, that's going to translate to some more wins. Yeah, I feel good. I'm really enjoying my golf and I think that's the most important thing as well. It's easy to enjoy when it's going well, but I'm enjoying not necessarily the success or the results, but I'm enjoying the process and I think that's important.

Q. About the majors, two parts. First, is there a favorite major, and second, technically would you kind of go in thinking this is the major I might have a better chance compared to other three?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, I've always said beggars can't be choosers, so you take whatever major comes along, but the Masters has been one that I've been close to a couple times. I feel comfortable on that golf course. I feel like it's the one that you have memories of, it's the one you develop information and a game plan through the years.

The others rotate around. So if you come close on a U.S. Open one year, it could be a golf course that doesn't suit you next year or doesn't suit your eye. Augusta, yeah, I always feel good there. And I think The Open Championship is one I'm gaining some momentum with. I had a lean few years there at the Open, but I think that's coming around. And my confidence is growing towards The Open Championship and my chances to win there. So as a British player, clearly that's one I would dearly love to win. And the PGA Championship, sure. It's going to have a bit of a different feel now in May, so I don't see any reason why that won't go my way at some point.

JACK RYAN: Thank you as always, Justin, and best of luck this week.

JUSTIN ROSE: Thanks, guys.