

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 20, 2019



JON RAHM

GREG VILLALOBOS: Let's give Jon Rahm a welcome to the media center at the WGC Mexico Championship.

We're going to do English questions first, and then if there happen to be questions in Spanish, we'll go in Spanish, okay? Jon is making his third start at the WGC Mexico Championship coming off a tie for 3rd in 2017 and tie for 20th in 2018. First of all, Jon, being familiar with this venue, your expectations for this week.

JON RAHM: Expectations, I think everybody that comes to a tournament as a pro athlete, you expect to play good, right? Obviously I want to win, I want to play good. I had the lead in this tournament before and didn't get it done, so I know what it feels like and I'm capable of doing it. I know what I have to do and hopefully it gets done. I've been having a pretty good run of tournaments lately, been playing solid, consistent, hopefully this week is the week everything kind of gets together and I have myself a chance to win.

Q. Last year I remember you at 18 after you finished your round, you saw, I think, the last four groups and I heard you say, "I love this course. Every time I play it, I love it even more."

JON RAHM: Um-hmm.

Q. Why do you love it how much? What does it have, what makes it different?

JON RAHM: I think the word is "traditional." You know, all these golf courses built 100 years ago. You have Chapultepec, Colonial; you have many other courses we play that were built a long time ago. And they weren't built for the golf that we play nowadays but somehow they hold up. You've got tree-lined, narrow fairways, small greens, sloped greens. You have to think your way around the golf course and you have to play it really, really good. You truly can't miss around a place like this and then go and win a tournament, and that's why I love it so much.

It's the way I grew up playing golf. A lot of courses in Spain are rather traditional than the new American style of golf. It's a little bit different, it's more European, more what I'm used to, more what I like, so it's very refreshing. After playing weeks like Torrey Pines, Phoenix where the courses are very long, you've got a little bit wider areas. Not fairways, but wider areas to hit it to. And right here you need to keep it in the fairway. You have holes as simple as No. 5, where today I hit a 4-iron and a pitching wedge. If you miss any of those two shots, you're struggling for par.

Same on No. 4. It's not the longest hole. You can hit it in the fairway. If you miss the green, tough. If you miss the fairway, tough. This is simple holes that it's not the hardest shots in the world, but if you miss any of them, you're going to struggle. It's as simple as that. You need to play good all throughout, you need to play good off the tee, iron game, chipping and putting to be able to win a tournament here.

Q. (Question in Spanish.)

JON RAHM: Yeah, exactly.

Q. On that note, Jon, I was curious, that first year you were here, you had already won at -- serious now, come on.

JON RAHM: I know, it's just funny.

Q. You had already won at San Diego when you came here for the first time. If there was that moment you had starting the back nine that was exciting, it was a terrific charge. Didn't end the way you wanted to, but as much as people try to become consistent players, do you think that stretches like that in match play, and when you almost came back and almost got Dustin, moments like that, do people see you, define you that way as a player?

JON RAHM: Yeah, I think it's the Spanish passion that I carry inside of me, right? The passion that past players had and I definitely have that willingness to compete and the enjoyment I get competing.

Two years ago when I got to the back nine, that eagle on 11 and birdieing 14 and 15 to tie for the lead, it's just so much fun to get in contention at a tournament. It's really fun to get in contention at a World Golf Championship and it's really fun to do in a place like this. We don't get World Golf Championship in Spain, but as a Spanish speaker, as a Hispanic player and heritage, this is like a second home tournament. People really welcome me here, I get a ton of support. It's a lot more fun to do it. When you say what I remember from that year, when it comes to golf, I have a pretty good memory, so what do you want me to remember? I remember every single shot I hit in that tournament.

Q. What first comes to mind?

JON RAHM: How much fun I had the final round. I was playing with Phil, who's one of the guys I consider my mentor. I've spent a lot of time with Phil. You know, I was not playing my best in the first few holes and I made a great par putt on 9, a great par putt on 2 and that is when I took off. I made the eagle on 11, he made eagle on 11, we both started playing good and I found myself tied for the lead on 16 tee. It came as a surprise, I had no idea that was going to happen, but definitely great experience to have as my first big event that wasn't a major. It was my first time ever I was kind of oblivious to everything that was going on around me.

GREG VILLALOBOS: Before we switch to Spanish, we would like to know if there are any other questions in English.

Q. You were talking about this golf course, it reminds you of old golf courses in Spain, and how comfortable you are here because of that? Can you elaborate a little more about what was playing over the trees, things you have to do here?

JON RAHM: Yeah, exactly as you just mentioned. Golf courses that you know. Pedrena, where Seve grew up, very similar. Even my home course, Larrabea, they're all tree-lined courses, narrow fairways, there's a lot of holes where doglegs, you need to be comfortable hitting balls over the trees. Definitely small greens, sloped greens, you know, tricky greens to putt on. Greens where you're going to miss a lot of short putts. Also poa annua greens. It's just what I grew up playing.

The only difference is when we play in northern Spain, it's soaking wet and sea level. That's really the only difference which is probably pretty good. But the course, the way it looks, the more and more familiar I get with it. And it's as simple as that.

Q. One quick questions on your course. You mentioned a lot of doglegs. Was there ever a time that you didn't go over the trees, you actually shaped the shot around it?

JON RAHM: Since I was about 13 I've tried to go over trees. When I was younger I couldn't, so I went through the trees and developed some creativity. Now that I'm a little bigger, stronger, I can go over the trees. It's as simple as that, I've always been stubborn.

Q. Justin Thomas made an interesting comment the other day that I would like your opinion on. He said he hates losing more than he likes winning. Do you feel the same way?

JON RAHM: Definitely.

Q. How so?

JON RAHM: I don't know.

Q. Does that mean you don't celebrate winning enough?

JON RAHM: Oh, you do celebrate winning. But it's easier to get over the win, meaning that you go to the next week and you're going to play and you have a chance to win again. When you lose, those feelings that you get when you lose stay with you a little longer.

It's the same psychology term, it takes five or seven positive thoughts to overcome a negative one. When you have something like Justin had last year here, what he had last week when you have a lead, you actually have a chance and you end up losing, there's a lot

of things going on in your mind. You work so hard to win tournaments and you want to win, when you don't win, it stinks big-time.

Q. From the time you were 13 years old, is there one loss that you had the hardest time getting over?

JON RAHM: Since I was born. I'm too competitive, anything I lose I remember.

Q. What was the worst?

JON RAHM: The worst? God. I don't know what -- there was a tournament back in Europe that was in southern Spain, you represent your country, the top 30 from each country, in Sotogrande. It's pretty prestigious. And I had the lead, I was 4 under through nine holes. Actually, I was I think 5 under through 11 and I had a pretty big lead. On the last seven holes somehow I blew it.

I was 16 years old playing against the best in Europe, completely blew it, lost in a playoff. That definitely resonated with me, stayed with me. It's something that you learn from. It never happened to me before and I never thought I would be the guy to lose a lead like that, but it happens, it's golf and I learned and try to not let it happen again.

Q. Do you know the name of the guy who won that week?

JON RAHM: I know the two players I played in the playoff against. Christopher Ventura, ended up being an Oklahoma State national champion. And the guy who won was Robin King from the Netherlands, who was really good European level. We played together on the Michael Bonlegga trophy, I believe. He was really good as an amateur. I forgot the last name. King or Kane. If look up the tournament, you'll see him winning.

Q. What was the name of the tournament?

JON RAHM: It used to be Copa Sotogrande. I don't know what it is now, they changed it. Juan probably knows better than I do.

It's a long word for you to write, I know. That's how the rest of us feel when we have to do English.

Q. Jon, having half the field with 70 players, is it harder to win this when you have basically the 70 best players or 150-player field where obviously guys are good enough but maybe not the top players in the world?

JON RAHM: It's just as hard to win anywhere because, I mean, the odds say with more players, the harder it should be to win. But you never know when somebody's going to come up and have a good week and win a tournament. A week like this as well. You do have more high-ranked players, but it's always tough to win. It's always good players in the

top and there's always people playing good. At this level nobody's called a liability in that sense, so it's very, very tough to win either way.