

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
April 2, 2019

RICKIE FOWLER



JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome Rickie Fowler into the interview room, making his first-ever start here at the Valero Texas Open. Rickie, welcome. If we can get some comments on being here this week.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, definitely looking forward to it. It's my 10th year on Tour and it's not often your first time being somewhere. Excited to be here. I always love playing the week before a before major if I can, if the schedule permits. Typically, I would play Houston in this spot the previous years, but with the schedule change, it worked out great to have two weeks off after a four-week stretch ending at THE PLAYERS, and then to be here to get some stuff kind of back and going, looking forward to playing well and ultimately getting ready for next week as well.

JOHN BUSH: Speaking of playing well, just talk a little bit about your season this year. You won at Waste Management, one of three top-5 finishes, a really good place so far. If you can comment about your season.

RICKIE FOWLER: It's been nice to get off to a good start, especially having a win early in the season. There's a lot of great things that come from that, moving up in the FedExCup points, getting to go to Kapalua next year, kind of working on building from there. Want to get another multiple win season like we had in '15. I was hoping to have a better PLAYERS. I felt really good going in there after having a win and finishing second at the Honda, but unfortunately got sick Wednesday night that week so I was happy just making the weekend. If I had to play Thursday morning, I don't think I would have made my tee time. Glad to have that behind us and looking forward to these next two weeks.

Q. Welcome to San Antonio, Rickie. You mentioned it, but what is your line of thinking compared to other players? You say you want to play the week before Augusta, others don't. What is your line of thinking there?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, everyone's different. Some guys are going to want to maybe make a trip up to Augusta in the weeks prior, stay home, practice, work with coaches, get ready that way.

I like playing competitively if I can leading up to majors or some big weeks. So for me, like I said, I played Houston in the past leading up to Augusta. I typically play the Scottish Open into the British. Sometimes into the U.S. Open or the PGA it can be different, it's a little tougher with schedule, but when I can, I definitely have seen it be beneficial to play the week before. You're not far coming off competition when you tee it up Thursday morning in a major and it just makes me feel more comfortable and more confident.

Q. Rickie, it's unusual to take four weeks off at this stage of the season.

RICKIE FOWLER: I had four weeks in a row and then two weeks off.

Q. Just two weeks. Still, you're one of only two who missed the Match Play. I'm just wondering what the thinking was with the schedule and whether the change this year with the PGA being played earlier, whether that also influenced it?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, for me, it kind of came down to if I was going to play kind of Mexico or the Match Play. Honda being staying at home, love that place. I love Bay Hill. Obviously not going to skip THE PLAYERS. So I knew that was going to be at least a three-week, potentially a four-week stretch. This year we decided to go with four weeks. I felt like those were all places I've played well at, can play well at, and I felt comfortable with one of the weeks being at home and then driving to Bay Hill and driving to PLAYERS.

So it was a manageable four-week stretch. It just kind of was a bummer that I got sick on the back end of it, and with that coming off a four-week stretch, I thought with a few majors coming up following that, obviously you want to -- it's all about longevity and playing well throughout the season, it's not just about a couple weeks here and there. So the two-week break is definitely needed.

Like I said, I like playing into majors if I can, so that's where taking off Tampa, taking off Match Play and then playing here and getting into Augusta. So the two weeks I think is key when you can get those breaks. One week is really not enough for your body to shut down and recover and go back out. Like I said, especially coming off of a four-week stretch. Like I said, everyone's different. I feel like this is a nice start to the year and I want to continue that going on and then rest, and time management is key to that.

Q. Rickie, since you've been working with Butch Harmon the last couple years, your consistency has definitely improved. Could you spot one or two things he told you that have really changed your approach to the game and the way you're playing, the way you're performing?

RICKIE FOWLER: I would say the big -- I mean, working with Butch and as well as Claude, his son, Butch isn't traveling anymore now, but it's really been over the last five, six years obviously working on the swing, cleaning that up, making it as efficient as possible, and we continue to work on that as well.

But I would say that's something that has made it a lot easier for me to go week in and week out knowing what I'm bringing to the table, being a lot more consistent. I think a lot of that is just swing related. One of the main things we worked on from early on and still continue to do so is just the first half of the swing, making sure from the ball to the top of the backswing, we're getting into some good positions and making sure that it's setting me up for an efficient swing that is a lot more repetitive than where I was before.

Q. Rickie, talk about your first time in San Antonio at the Valero Texas Open. What are your feelings about playing here for the first time?

RICKIE FOWLER: I'm looking forward to it. We got in last night, so I haven't seen the golf course yet. I just did some practice this morning. I'll go play -- what is it? I'll go play the back nine this afternoon and then I'll play the front nine tomorrow in the pro-am and go see how we like it. Heard good things, heard it's a good test for a golf course.

Like I said, for the most part, being here is a big part of being the week before the Masters. It fits in well for me. There's guys that like to play the week before and some that don't. I'm one that likes to play, so I'm excited that this is our first trip. Unfortunately, in the past scheduling has just kind of kept us from making our way down here. I'm looking forward to seeing it. A lot of people have told me that it could be a golf course that really suits me well.

Q. So scheduling was the main reason you hadn't been here?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yes. This year playing four in a row through THE PLAYERS, it's the first time I've done that in quite a while. Typically, I only go out and play two or three events and try to get a few two or potentially three-week breaks in the year. It makes it tough. It's been interesting trying to schedule out this year with the schedule change making everything fit, and I'm sure we may make some tweaks next year going forward just getting used to where all the new tournaments fall.

Q. Some players think this is a pretty tough course with all the native areas, the deep bunkers. What are some of the stories you've heard?

RICKIE FOWLER: The wind can pick up here. I love playing in the wind, but that obviously makes it tough. And you've got to drive the ball well to give yourself opportunities. Like you said with the native areas and the deep bunkers, you've got to avoid the hazards or whatever they call it now, penalty areas or something. It's a good ball-striker's golf course from what I've been told. So I'm looking forward to it. I hope we get a little bit of wind to kind of bring out a little bit more of the ball-strikers. I enjoy that. Like I said, I love playing in the wind. I know that can happen down here. No, looking forward to seeing, like I said, the back nine this afternoon, the front nine tomorrow.

Q. Besides golf, have you been to San Antonio before? What's your impressions of San Antonio?

RICKIE FOWLER: I've flown into San Antonio once before. It was I believe four, maybe four years ago I came in, spent a couple days with Jimmy Walker at his house out in Boerne at Cordillera.

No, I haven't really been in San Antonio. Looking forward to potentially getting downtown for dinner somewhere in the week. We'll see. I know my fiancée went in town today to go sight

see, see the area a little bit. So I'll get some stories from her, I'm sure I'll see some pictures. Like I said, it would be nice to get down there at least one or two of the nights for dinner.

Q. Sounds like you are busy, but I'm just curious, players have done it in the past, any plans to be courtside tonight for the Hawks-Spurs game?

RICKIE FOWLER: No. I mean, I love sporting events, I love going to them obviously. Can appreciate sports being played at the highest level. But I think we have a little dinner over at Jimmy's house tonight, so a little more laid back. That's typically more of a tournament week theme. So looking forward to that. I'm sure Jimmy's cooking up some good food tonight.

JOHN BUSH: Let's take a question from our VIP media member, Alex in the front row.

Q. Golf is not only a physical sport, but it's also a big mental sport. What are some of the things you do to prepare yourself mentally for major events like this upcoming week and what are some of the things you do personally, I guess you could say?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean, there's a lot of people out there that can play golf and they're physically good enough, but I would say the guys that succeed out here, a lot of it is because kind of the mental side of it and how they can overcome adversity and play well when they need to.

For me, I think some of the biggest things, trying to simulate competition as much as possible. Like I said, I enjoy playing the week before majors just because it gets me kind of in that mind frame and also I can check and see where my game's at, understand what may need to be worked on, what's going well. And then at home, definitely enjoy playing matches with friends, whether it's one on one, two-man best ball, getting some good games.

Growing up I used to play a lot of, whether it was closest to the pin putting contests, chipping contests, and then playing matches against friends. The people you want to beat the most are your friends and the ones you hate losing to the most are your friends. Those are kind of I think the best way is trying to compete as much as possible. I think that's something that helped me continue to get better growing up as a junior through amateur golf and then still today. We have some good matches at home with the boys.

JOHN BUSH: Anything else?

Q. How are you doing with the mental part of not winning a major? Are you able to take that in stride since you've been so close so many times? Has it been a burden to you and how do you handle that?

RICKIE FOWLER: I wasn't really thinking about it until now, but I've won THE PLAYERS, which is the strongest field we play in. I know I can win and beat the best players in the world. Obviously timing has to be right and you have to play well at those right weeks. We should be talking to Brooks Koepka and see how he does it; he seems to be kind of the

major tamer getting two of his -- how many wins on Tour? Four or five? He's got three majors?

JOHN BUSH: It's a good percentage.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, he's got a good percentage of Tour wins versus major wins.

No, I keep feeling more and more comfortable in majors. Augusta last year, after not having the Sunday I wanted the year before, going out fighting my way through the front nine and putting together a back nine that I really thought I was in a position to really go and win the event. Patrick played well all week, but I know I can go win them. Justin to put ourselves in that position and execute like we did last year on Sunday.

Q. So you think it's basically just a matter of time to keep knocking on that door?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah. Phil didn't win his first Masters -- I can't remember the exact age, but I'm just getting into my prime, so I'm not too worried.

Q. Talk to Jimmy about that.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah. Well, I'm looking for Jimmy to get some more. He's got one, but I think we all want to -- you win once, whether it's a Tour event or you win one major, you always want to get more. It's like when you're playing skins games and you've got to validate on the next hole.

Q. Can you talk briefly just a minute about your friendship with Jimmy?

RICKIE FOWLER: Jimmy and I are great buddies. We've spent a lot of time together over the last, I don't know, six, seven years.

Jimmy's someone, he's a lot of fun to spend time with on the golf course, away from the golf course, very interesting guy. Loves his wine, he's very knowledgeable on it, very interesting in the astrophotography area. He's a well-known astrophotographer, a lot of people may not know about.

Like I say, he's just fun to be around. He's a great family man, a guy's guy. He can kind of fit in wherever. So we've enjoyed traveling together, splitting houses together on the road at times and partnering up. We've played a handful of events together as partners. Went down to the World Cup a couple years ago, played together in Australia. So one of my closer friends out here, for sure.

JOHN BUSH: All right. Rickie Fowler, thanks for your time and best of luck this week.

RICKIE FOWLER: Thank you.