

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
December 3, 2019



RICKIE FOWLER

JACK RYAN: We'll go ahead and get started here with Rickie Fowler at the Hero World Challenge.

Rickie, if we can just get an opening comment on making your start here at a place you won before.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, it's always nice to kind of finish up the calendar year typically here, but next week we'll be going to Australia. Always good to be in The Bahamas. Also, someone who's spent a lot of time at Bakers Bay and obviously keeping that part of The Bahamas in thoughts and prayers moving forward and getting that part of the world kind of rebuilt back up and running.

It's always fun to come to Albany here for the Hero. From Tiger's event at Sherwood to Isleworth to being here for the past few years, it's a fun week. Obviously an accomplishment to be a part of the field here and it's always enjoyable.

JACK RYAN: And as you mentioned, you are going to be playing in the Presidents Cup next week in Australia. You were the fifth captain's pick. The media has not heard from you since then. What did that mean for you to be named to that team and what are you most looking forward to next week?

RICKIE FOWLER: Definitely one that I didn't want to miss. I was a little ways out on making it on points. It would have been a lot easier to just make it on points and not have to worry about picks and what if. So it's been a fun ride, especially the last month to five weeks or so as far as once I kind of knew that Brooks was still a little iffy and not sure that he was able to go, not that I was wishing he was going or not. I wanted to make sure he's healthy. I think he made the right decision long term for his health and hopefully he's going to be back healthy here somewhat soon.

But to be able to go down to Australia, played a handful of tournaments down there, I love it down there, especially Melbourne, the Sandbelt. Royal Melbourne's a great track and I feel like it's my favorite style of golf, that firm, fast, links golf, getting able to use your creativity and shot making. So I'm excited to be a part of the flight going down Saturday.

Q. Rickie, being away for a while, tell us a little bit about rehab that went into getting you fit, and the second thing is, how important is this week going into the Presidents Cup?

RICKIE FOWLER: Well, start with this week. This week's big for me just getting some

tournament rounds under my belt and getting back into the swing of things, but it's been really nice to actually have somewhat of an offseason. Definitely the longest break I've had away from tournament golf in September and October. I still played and practiced a decent amount, but was able to spend a lot of time the last three months in the gym and getting a lot of work done, and once we were back from the honeymoon, when I was going to start getting ready for Mayakoba is when I ended up getting food poisoning at home, so that's why I had to pull the plug on Mayakoba.

But once I got healthy there, been pretty much all golf. I wake up in the morning and say bye to Allison and go spend most of the day at the course and come home and work out later in the day and then we'll cook dinner. It's been nice to, like I said, to have that time off, but now get back into the grind and go full time putting in a lot of work.

It's been fun getting ready for this week. Like I said, once we finally did get the official pick, to have a little something extra to look forward to after here.

Q. Rickie, you have these guys down in south Florida like JT and Tiger and just a bunch of guys that you can play with and get better that way. Can you elaborate a little bit on maybe some of the team matches that you guys have been able to create over the last month or so to try and sort of replicate what you're going to be dealing with down in Australia?

RICKIE FOWLER: A lot of -- the most common are just two-man best-ball teams. Didn't really play any alternate shot. Just, you know, best ball. You still get to play your ball out and play a full round of golf. We do play a lot of matches. You mentioned some of the guys, and then outside that, some of my teammates from Oklahoma State, there are some mini tour players as well as guys that play on the Korn Ferry, so there's no lack of guys to play with in south Florida.

Q. (Question about matches.)

RICKIE FOWLER: We played quite a bit in the past couple weeks, but over the weekend, let's see, Saturday it was myself, Gary, Cantlay, JT and Tiger. Then Sunday we subbed out Tiger for Jordan. Tiger was busy; it's not that we kicked him out. So great games there. Everything was actually really close.

Gary and I decided to be partners because we were riding in a cart together. Unfortunately, we ended up losing. We both played well, but somehow the other guys just ham-and-egged it better than us. Both days were kind of coming down to the last hole.

So when you're playing with some of the best players in the world, you know that par's not going to win a hole. There's plenty of trash talking going on throughout the round as well. Definitely some really good prep. I always think playing with guys that are of your caliber or better or at least around as far as just straight up competition, that's the best way to push yourself and make yourself better.

Q. Who did you lose to?

RICKIE FOWLER: Gary and I were playing and our loss basically came down to the last hole on all the matches, but it would be JT-Tiger, JT-Cantlay, Cantlay-Tiger. Some of those were pushed but we lost overall. And then the next day was the same, but with Jordan in the loop.

Q. Can you describe the wave of emotions going from getting the call that you're not on the team, having to play possibly some of the matches back home as now a member of the team to now being on it and trying to get practice in for the Presidents Cup?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah. I mean, I knew everything was up to the team and Tiger as far as the picks went and I wasn't banking on being a pick or not being a pick, and it wasn't going to necessarily change my life if I was or wasn't picked.

Like I said, it would have made it a lot easier if I would have just made it on points and we were just a little ways out. It didn't necessarily change my plan or outlook on what was going to be going into getting ready for this week. I was kind of notified shortly after the picks that there was still a pretty good chance that Brooks was not going to be able to go, but they needed to wait to get final word from Brooks on where he was and when he was going to make that decision. So I was kind of -- I was kind of on standby.

But no, it didn't really change as far as what I was doing to prepare to get my game where I wanted it to and kind of getting back into the swing of things because this week was always on the schedule, so I was going to need to be ready to play here regardless, but it's always nice to get a pick and be able to add another week into the schedule.

Q. You've been to Australia before. When you think about Australia, what is the thing that came to your mind?

RICKIE FOWLER: I mean, I've played -- I haven't been to the west coast of Australia, but I've played anywhere from down in Adelaide, we played World Amateur there, been to Melbourne a few times, Sydney, up and down the Gold Coast. Some of my favorite golf is there in Melbourne. We talked about it earlier, the Sandbelt, just the style of golf. It's a beautiful part of the world, a great city. We'll be staying at the Crown, which is a great location, and we'll have a great setup, not too far to commute to the course. It's a good part of the world.

Like I said, I love that style of golf. I think some of the golf course architecture down there and how the courses play or can play, it makes it a lot of fun.

Q. Leaving aside the benefits of the food poisoning diet, how does nutrition fit into your fitness routine and how do you handle it differently, say, when you're at home or

when you can be around your trainer or your nutrition person and when you go on the road?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, so at home we primarily do mainly cooking, especially dinner. So I would say I'm not super strict, but we make sure we're eating pretty clean and making sure that we're putting fuel in our body for the most part. You've got to enjoy a little bit here and there.

And then on the road, over the last couple years we have a chef that travels around with a handful of us, myself, JT, Jordan, Cantlay, Brooks. He kind of rotates and we'll split houses at times. So when we have him, that makes it a lot easier. We're able to get good quality food, we know what we're eating, it's clean.

So we're definitely conscious of diet throughout the year and how food can affect -- you don't want to put a heavy meal in if you're playing the next morning and that's where chefs come in very handy the last few years. Those weeks that we do have him are nice. He's got a pretty impressive resume between the guys that he works with. He's got plenty of wins over the last few years, Brooks adding some majors in there. But that is something that we've put a focus on in the past few years for sure, more so than the first few years out on Tour.

Q. What's the chef's name?

RICKIE FOWLER: Michael Parker.

Q. You mentioned being well practiced throughout your offseason and continuing that regimen and that this week was on your schedule regardless. Once you got that call from Captain Woods to be on the team, that had to change the framing of this week playing back-to-back weeks. So aside from tournament golf, getting back to that after a long layoff and getting a round and trying to shoot the lowest score, what about your game are you looking for fine tune going into the match play format next week?

RICKIE FOWLER: I really feel good about my game across the board, just the amount that I've been able to play and practice at home and get some rounds and matches with the guys and actually having to go out and put together a round of golf and play and compete against them. Here, just kind of getting the tournament feel back, going up and teeing it up on the first hole and just trying to go just as if you're playing at home in a way.

And this is I think a great week to ease into that. Obviously a great field, but there's only 18 of us. Typically, we don't get too many spectators out here, it will be a pretty mellow week, so this is a nice way to work my way into next week, which will be a little different stage. So I'm looking forward to it. The game feels great. Like I said, I've been able to get a lot of work in and we'll fine tune something this week and be ready to go down at Royal Melbourne.

Q. Rickie, I actually have a couple of questions. The first one is about the Olympics. We know you care deeply about it. Do you still see a role available given how competitive it is to get a place on the American team?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, no, I would love to be able to go to Tokyo. We had a great time in Rio, but I'm going to need to play some darn good golf over the next five, six months really to give myself a chance.

I mean, golf's very competitive right now, especially when you look at -- I mean, we're going to get four guys to go to Tokyo, but to be one of those four from the U.S., you almost need to be ranked top-5 in the world right now. It's not easy, but still a goal that we're shooting for and that's kind of a long-term thing as far as you're looking at kind of the June -- by June or so.

Yeah, we just need to go play well, go win some tournaments and see where that puts us.

Q. I'm sure you would like to reflect on this question from inside the ring, but I do have to ask you as a golfer, the last season was a sport for riches in a sense because we've had Brooks adding to his resume, Tiger winning Masters, Gary winning the U.S. Open, then Shane doing it in Ireland and Rory's had such a consistent season. Could golf have it any better right now?

RICKIE FOWLER: Obviously last year was pretty special. Tiger getting another major. I think Tiger getting another major, kind of when you pull maybe with the fans and media and TV viewing, I mean that's going to -- astronomical what Tiger's able to do for our sport and how much he moves the needle. But it also, when you look at what other guys have accomplished from Gary at the U.S. Open, Shane at the British and both Brooks and Rory putting together pretty impressive seasons, golf's pretty deep right now. There's a lot of great players in the world and it's fun to go tee it up and compete against those guys, so golf's pretty healthy.

Q. How long did the bug keep you from hitting balls or playing at all?

RICKIE FOWLER: I was mobile, I wasn't laid up or anything, but to get some of the samples and blood work back, it took about a week until I was able to get on exactly what I needed to get rid of everything. It was just an intestinal bacterial infection.

Q. So you played, like, during it?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I just wasn't able to go and actually put the work in to go get ready for Mayakoba. So once I was able to get on medication for it, I was starting to feel a lot better in 24 hours and good after, you know, two to three days.

Q. And over the course of your career, have you typically been someone who shakes off the rust pretty quickly or has there ever been a stretch that it's taken longer than

you thought?

RICKIE FOWLER: I felt like I've always been pretty good, but I would say typically as far as tournament to tournament as far as a break goes, I haven't had this much time off. But I would say I've had a lot more preparation going into this week than I've had off of other breaks, which has made it nice knowing coming in here I put work in and I'm ready to go play. It's just getting back to tournament golf.

So part of that, it's been nice because the body's good. Like I say, being able to get the amount of time that we've had in the gym and being able to put the work in the last month to five weeks, you know, you really don't get that free time or that -- kind of that luxury with how the schedules and how the tournaments lay out throughout the year now.

Q. Also, lastly, have you seen Bryson and what do you think of the muscles and the weight gain?

RICKIE FOWLER: I joked around, I saw when he posted and when I saw him, I pulled up here yesterday, I think I said like "Hulk Smash" or something. He's definitely gotten thicker. I think I put thick on his Instagram post. I think I might have had like three Cs in there.

He's definitely put some work in. It's not easy to put kind of proper weight on as it is also to lose weight, and we'll see how it works. I'm not a big fan of moving one way or the other that quickly or that much. Hopefully, it works out for him. I know he's creating more speed, which is something that can obviously be a benefit, but I know I wouldn't want to walk around and carry, you know, extra muscle. I like staying where I'm at. Bryson's someone that he definitely may think more than some of us and he's had plenty of success, so keep doing what he's doing. If he keeps winning, then there's nothing we could say.

Q. Rickie, you mentioned Gary Woodland. He's a rookie in the major U.S. events like a Presidents Cup. Cantlay is another guy who hasn't played in this thing, and Xander is another guy. Can you imagine a, quote unquote, rookie class that is less rookie like? In other words, would you hesitate to pair any of those two rookies together? It seems like they don't need much hand holding.

RICKIE FOWLER: No. You know, you look at those guys, obviously well accomplished across the board. You don't find many rookies going into a team event having a major. Not saying that they'll be paired together or not, but I don't see any reason why, yeah, that they can't go out and just go play some golf.

It's nothing different, just go play with your buddy and go see what you can do. No, I've talked with mainly Gary and Cantlay since they live in south Florida and Cantlay's 300 yards from my house. Just told them you guys are going to have a blast, especially down there, Royal Melbourne, the style of golf down there. From what I've looked at, it looks like we're going to have pretty solid weather the whole week.

No, it's a special place. I remember my first team event in 2010, they're great weeks. I'm looking forward to being on the team with those three guys and I think they're going to have some good memories and stories to come after the week.

Q. Patrick ever come over to your house and talk your ear off?

RICKIE FOWLER: He's been over a couple times. He was over this past weekend getting some therapy because Troy was in town. He can get talking, though.

Q. You talk about Wales and you've been on some Presidents Cup teams and you've missed some Cup teams. What is that like to miss, and is it fair to say that the best part about being on the team is being, pardon my phrasing, but being part of the "in crowd," not being on the outside? You know what I mean? Tiger talked about this being the only team of its kind and you've missed some and now you're in.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, when you look at the teams, the Ryder Cup, Presidents Cup, I mean, you're part of teams and it's like being a part of a little fraternity in a way. And you would much rather be in than out, especially probably that -- those few weeks where I wasn't a pick and then I was. And then even when the first eight made it off points, just knowing what goes on as far as the group texts with the guys and everyone giving each other a hard time or just going back and forth, talking about what's going on that week, whether it's scheduling or which guys are playing with who or what are your potentials.

Yeah, thinking about all that, you don't want to be left out, but that's also the motivation to go ahead and make it on points. Unfortunately, being just out, like I think it just makes you push harder because for me, knowing what goes on and what the team events are about, you want to be a part of it.

Q. I'm trying to think, were you in Korea?

RICKIE FOWLER: Um-hmm.

Q. But you weren't at Muirfield Village?

RICKIE FOWLER: No.

Q. Can you recall during the times like the months leading up to the matches where you have group texts going on and you're out on the range at a tournament and you're not part of it and what a kick in the gut that is, if it is?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, for me, I wouldn't say it's -- it's not something that necessarily makes or breaks your year. It does -- it does suck not to be a part of the crew and the team, and especially like you said, leading up and the guys going to dinner, having a team dinner. You're like, all right, I'll just go get room service and hang by myself.

No, there are weeks and those months leading up, the times that you want to be a part of that, you definitely don't want to be on the outside. Like I said, that's part of the motivation.

Some of these rookies, Gary, Cantlay, Xander, they didn't know about it maybe a few months ago, but they know now. I think that's going to be added motivation for them to want to be a part of team events. I think that's something that you've heard from Tiger and Phil talk about multiple times is that the team events are special weeks, but it's not always just about that one week, that camaraderie and brotherhood, the group texts. I guess Tiger and Phil probably didn't have the group texts back in the day. That's a little bit more modern, they're a little older now, but they're special weeks.

Q. Have you ever had a group text when a number popped up that you didn't recognize?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah. Well, sometimes it could be a rookie, someone that you might not be that close with. I don't even know if I had like Tony's number before Ryder Cup last year. You're so used to seeing guys at tournaments and you communicate that way. Then you're like, you're going to play, if you're on the range and you go play, but sometimes there's guys that you just communicate through like actual face-to-face, kind of old school. It happens every once in a while. There's some guys that get new numbers every year or less than that it seems like.

JACK RYAN: Are you all set? Thank you, Rickie, appreciate the time. Best of luck this week.