

RBC Heritage

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

Rickie Fowler

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Rickie Fowler, thanks for joining us for a few minutes prior to the 2020 RBC Heritage. You're making your fifth start here at Harbour Town and your first since 2012, highlighted by a top ten in 2010 and tied for 8. Just some thoughts on being back here. I know it's been a few years. Just some thoughts on being back here at Harbour Town.

RICKIE FOWLER: This is a special place to me here at Harbour Town. Actually, the first TOUR event I ever played, I won THE PLAYERS Amateur back in 2007 and got a spot to play as an amateur in 2008. It's great to be back. Unfortunately, through the past, it's been tough to play after Augusta, with the schedule I would play leading up to that.

So it's been nice with how the schedule has worked out, coming back from our little off-season. I was excited that I was going to be able to come back to Hilton Head. Yeah, it's a special place. I love the golf course. It's fun and different. It's not just bombs away and find it. You've got to play in certain spots. The wind can play tricks around here in the trees. It's just a fun place. Like I said, I'm excited to be back.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of the time off, we obviously saw the TaylorMade Driving Relief. If you could just give us a little insight into what you've been doing the past three months to kind of keep your mind and game fresh.

RICKIE FOWLER: Really the first month, didn't really leave the house. Worked out like six days a week. Went to the grocery store once a week. So that was -- you know, breakfast, lunch, and dinner at home every day. Just enjoyed actually kind of an off-season, which that's the first time I've really had that. I would say, over the 11 years I've been on TOUR, I've never spent more than three weeks in a row at home. So this was uncharted territory for me.

After the first month, started kind of getting back into playing and practicing a little bit, and then with the TaylorMade Driving Relief, that kind of gave me something to work or look forward to. So to be able to do that and to be able to give back to COVID relief was nice and also a way to kind of see where the game was leading up to our start at Colonial.

So hopefully, since I didn't get to do media last week

and missed the cut, doing media and being here on the virtual media conference, this is a good start.

THE MODERATOR: With that, we'll start with a few questions.

Q. What did you experience last week as far as dealing with the coronavirus that will help you go forward this week?

RICKIE FOWLER: It was more just me. It was definitely interesting to be out there and not have the fans and the energy. You're still playing against the best players in the world, but not having fans out there is very different. Not knowing how close your ball is, crowd reactions, making a putt for birdie. It's very quiet. It's whatever happens in your group. Try and relax and just go play golf. That's what it comes down to at the end of the day.

I felt really good going into last week. Unfortunately, just got a little out of sync. Didn't drive well. Didn't make very many putts. I was able to get some work in, and I'm feeling a lot better about where I stand going into this week.

No, I don't think there's anything that I necessarily need to learn from last week as far as dealing with the new situation. The TOUR's done a great job of making everything as easy as possible, from testing to just on site and food and everything like that. It's been nice. I've enjoyed it.

Q. And the other one, would you consider putting on 40 pounds to gain 20 miles an hour of ball speed? And what do you think of what Bryson's doing, and could that lead the game into a new direction?

RICKIE FOWLER: For me, I mean, some of my workouts at home, I'll do with a weight vest on, and that's typically 45 or 50 pounds. I would not want to carry that around. Just the sheer fact of having to walk -- just walking a golf course with that extra weight, let alone doing some workout at the house, that's enough for 45 minutes to an hour.

It's been really impressive to see what he's done over, say, the last year or so with his transformation and obviously some serious gain in speed and power. But it will be interesting to see kind of -- I was actually just

talking to Golf Channel outside about it, as far as where the peak is. Where does it become almost counterproductive as far as like too much speed, where dispersion becomes too great. There has to be some sort of peak in there. It seems like it may be around the 190 area. It gets tough to control the ball going straight once you get to the 200-plus area.

The long drive guys, obviously, have a lot of speed, but they can get away with 1 in 8 in the grid. 1 in 8 won't do very well out here on TOUR. But it is impressive. We'll see kind of how it works. I'll stick to -- I'm kind of in the mid-170s. I don't necessarily have the frame to hold that extra 40, like you were asking earlier. I'll stick at my 155. I could probably use a little more muscle, but that will be something to work on continuously from here on.

I spent a lot of time in the gym over the quarantine, but 40's a lot. Like I said, I don't want to carry that weight vest around.

Q. Can you talk about the experience of being miked up last week? I guess the opposite of that, can you also comment on quite a few players actually spoke out and said they didn't want to do it? What sort of motivated you to do it?

RICKIE FOWLER: I can see players being across the board on it. I thought it was cool to have the chance to be the first one to do it. We wore mikes in the TaylorMade Driving Relief.

I was open to it just because I thought, as a golf fan myself and when I do watch some of my good buddies play -- most of the time it's if they're in contention on Sunday. But when you do get the player-caddie interactions and what they're talking about, what kind of shots they may be trying to hit, I think, as a golf fan, that's the most interesting. Just seeing what they're going through and if it was pulled off or not. Sometimes the chatter after the shot, what happened or why they missed in a certain spot, maybe what went through mentally that caused them to do that or what was the swing flaw at that time.

So a lot of times, we do have boom mikes around for TV coverage or whether it's PGA TOUR Live. They catch some of that. But, yeah, I didn't find any issue with being miked up as far as there's nothing that got in the way. I really didn't notice it at all after I had it on on Wednesday to try it out. After I hit a few balls, you're not even thinking about it.

It was a perfect time to do it just with no fans and just being able to try to open the door and let them into mine and Joe's world a little bit out there on the golf course.

Q. Just wondering for guys, either playing here the first time or maybe it's been a while, what's the biggest adjustment or toughest adjustment to being such a unique layout on TOUR?

RICKIE FOWLER: What was that?

Q. For guys who haven't played here at all or haven't played Harbour Town in a long time, what's the biggest adjustment? Just because it's such a unique course.

RICKIE FOWLER: I would say, once you're out there, if it is windy -- it has been windy the last two days, but a different direction than what we're going to see -- but just how the ball can get affected if it's above the trees, and when the ball does stay down, it's kind of out of the wind.

Then also, when you get out there on 17 and 18, you really feel how much the wind is blowing. A lot of times when you're on the golf course from 1 through 16, you never feel that. So it may shock you as how much balls can get hurt or helped or pushed side to side because you're down there in the trees and you don't really feel what's going on up there.

To me, I think that's been one of the biggest things. Also, just trusting where the wind is with the compass because, when you are down there in the trees, it can feel like it's doing something completely different than what it is doing above.

Outside of that, it's just a golf course that it feels very tight and claustrophobic at times because in between the houses, a lot of times trees on both sides, you're hitting through shoots and small greens with trees overhanging. Also, I guess understanding where trees come into play with the shots into greens. It's almost like a goalie sitting there at the green ready to swat your ball down.

Q. And then as a whole, do you feel like guys hit driver on TOUR more often than when you first came out just because of what data says? And is that something that can extend to this week as well?

RICKIE FOWLER: Talking about driver, you said?

Q. Yeah, just hitting driver more often instead of places where guys used to lay back. Now since stats often say just push --

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, that's something I look at. To me, I look at Bay Hill No. 11. That's a hole where I typically laid up or laid back in the past, and if you kind of take on the narrower fairway up by the water, it then makes the second shot a lot easier. There are situations where the risk is rewarded, and if you're willing to or feel comfortable enough with taking that

risk, you can make things a lot easier from there on out.

Yeah, data can always show one thing, but if a player isn't comfortable with a certain shot, you know, I think going with what's in your head and what you feel most comfortable with is going to work out best in the long run, but sometimes you have to test out and see, even if you are uncomfortable, if a certain situation, a driver may give you that opportunity to take advantage of a shorter shot or a place where you can be more aggressive from there.

Q. Good afternoon, Rickie. It's kind of a follow on from Steve's question about Bryson, just how sustainable you think it is. Because it's all well and good when you're in quarantine or lockdown and you're able to workout all day every day and eat 6,000 calories a day, but once you get into the regular grind of the TOUR and spending one day a week traveling and playing in hot conditions, can he actually keep it up?

RICKIE FOWLER: I definitely think he can keep it up and maintain the weight that he wants to. I think my only concern would be keeping it up but also staying healthy because it is a lot of speed. It's a lot of pressure being put on the body in certain areas. So that's the last thing I want to happen. I don't want to see him get injured. I don't want to see him push the limit that does put him in that position.

That would be my only concern. I'm not worried about him creating the speed. We know he can, and he's obviously put on plenty of muscle and weight to where he can create that, but, yeah, my only concern would be him staying healthy with it being a lot more repetitive.

Q. Just curious what you think, the PGA Championship looks like it's going to go on in San Francisco but no spectators. First Major that we're going to play post break. What do you think about playing a Major Championship with no spectators, and how might that impact things going forward?

RICKIE FOWLER: Like I talked about earlier, I mean, the fans are the ones that bring the energy, and when you look at Majors, there's typically a bigger fan presence to just normal events. I think you would have to throw Waste Management Phoenix Open out the window because that's kind of an outlier.

Yeah, part of what makes a Major and have that feeling is the fan and the atmosphere. Not that it won't still feel like a Major. We're all showing up there knowing we're playing the PGA Championship, but it's definitely different with no fans. We talked about it earlier. It's quiet. Yeah, the fans are very crucial to the sport and

how it feels on the golf course.

So it will be very interesting. I'm hoping that San Francisco is able to go through. It's definitely not fun when things have to change based on circumstances, but also, we want to make sure that we're moving forward in the smartest and healthiest way possible. So we'll just kind of have to wait and see what happens, but I'm looking forward to San Francisco if that's where we go tee it up.

Q. When we do have spectators, looks like Memorial is going to try to do it in a few weeks time, are you comfortable with that? Are you comfortable with the idea of any spectators being out here given the current climate?

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I feel like there's plenty of ways to stay safe and stay within the guidelines with having spectators. It won't be to probably the full capacity of what we're used to, but I'm sure there will be some distancing. I'm sure stuff like autographs and things like that may not happen. I'm not sure where that's going to go and not sure if that's going to be the TOUR making a decision or if that's going to be player to player. I haven't heard yet.

It would at least bring some of that atmosphere back, having fans, and if they introduce it at a small scale and continue that way, like I said, I don't think there's any reason why we can't do it in a smart and within the guidelines kind of way.

Q. Just a quick follow-up on wearing the mike. I wonder if, first of all, if you had any conversations about a live feed versus being on a delay? And if you were comfortable just being basically on a hot mike. And then also, you talk about it not really impacting your swing, but I wonder if you could just actually describe what the weight -- if there's any weight on that battery pack or how the wiring actually works, all that stuff. Thanks.

RICKIE FOWLER: Yeah, I had conversations on the feed. We were live. There was no delay. Luckily, I'm someone that's fairly clean on the golf course. Maybe I'll say some stuff in my head to myself, but outside of that, I don't get down on myself a whole lot as far as what people can see. I try and keep that, like I said, a bit more internal.

Then I thought it was cool to kind of let people in to hear what we're talking about and going through as far as the shot and what we're trying to do. It would have been nice to play a little bit better, but that's just the nature of the game.

Then as far as the pack and the wire, the pack weighed a lot less than what my phone does. I typically play

practice rounds with that in my back pocket, or when we're playing, have the yardage book back there. That's probably about what the pack weighed. It was very little weight, so that was not an issue. You couldn't feel it. The wire was a little thicker than what we wore at the TaylorMade Driving Relief, but, again, once I got it in a good spot and hit a few shots on the range, it wasn't an issue.

I'm sure there's going to be more situations or times that guys may wear them coming up. I'm open to it. We'll have to see where it goes. I think for the first time everything was good, especially for it being live, no delay. Next time we'll just have to play a little bit better.

THE MODERATOR: Rickie Fowler, thank you for your time as always. We appreciate it. Wish you best of luck this week.

RICKIE FOWLER: Thank you.