

Charles Schwab Challenge

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

Jon Rahm

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us, Jon. How are you doing?

JON RAHM: Of course. I'm doing good.

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome in Jon Rahm to the press conference here at the Charles Schwab Challenge, three starts at this event, two top 5s highlighted by a runner-up finish here in 2017. If we could just get some opening comments about your return to competitive golf here on the PGA TOUR.

JON RAHM: Of course. Yesterday I just registered, so excited more than anything. I think we're all looking forward to coming back. I think we still had some not questions about uncertainty of how things would work out, but most everything is all the same. Once I'm here I'm looking to eat something, start practicing, get my day today and then go back to the room. The only main difference is no fans, no stands. It's going to be different in that sense, a little different atmosphere, but I think it's going to be a really fun experience. Hopefully nothing that we'll ever repeat.

Hopefully nothing like this ever happens on my PGA TOUR career or really ever, and we can just look back at it in the future as something that happened and we just got to experience it rather than just repeat it again.

THE MODERATOR: How has your quarantine been for the last three months and how have you been practicing getting ready to resume play again?

JON RAHM: Well, I mean, it doesn't seem like that long ago when we stopped at PLAYERS. For me it was a little different, right, with my family being in Spain and all. I spent the first two, three weeks talking to them daily a lot. I was concerned they were all fully quarantined. The virus was spreading really, really fast in Spain and a lot of people getting infected. I think almost everybody in my family knew somebody that had it and was hospitalized, and we were all just concerned. My mom being a midwife was still working, so it was -- there was a lot of concerns on my part.

I tried to do my thing, and I was basically quarantined in the U.S. before anybody in the U.S. was even close to being quarantined. Didn't play golf for seven weeks,

and well, also being a PAC member I kind of got an idea how things were going to go. I had a plan for those two months off, and then we added a month, so that's why seven weeks off, and then, yeah, I haven't practiced since then, just maybe over a month, and played more the last week. Been trying to stay active, work out, more for my sanity than anything else, but yeah, I would say it was uneventful thankfully, but I spent a lot of my time early on thinking about Spain rather than myself and making sure my family was okay.

THE MODERATOR: And a very strong field this week, having the world's top five players. Can you talk about your feature grouping with Rory and Brooks.

JON RAHM: I'm not surprised I must say. I figured they were going to entice the viewers with a couple of really, really good groups, and when we played at PLAYERS, me and Rory were coming in in really good form. Brooks maybe wasn't playing his best golf, but Brooks has the ability to come through in the biggest events. We were looking forward to a couple of fun days, especially Friday, and we kind of got, obviously, for really bad reasons, stripped of that opportunity. So I'm glad to be experiencing this again.

No crowd like we probably would have had in this group, but still fun to play with the best players in the world, see what everybody has been up to and see how it goes. But it's hard to say anymore who's the best in the world after not competing for three months. It all depends on who's prepared the best or who's handled the situation the best or who even handles these new rules on the PGA TOUR the best.

It's just a ranking. It's a continuously moving thing, and since we've been stopped, I don't think those numbers matter a lot anymore. I think we only can come back and prove that we deserve that spot.

Q. What do you really expect from your first tournament in almost three months?

JON RAHM: What I expect from this week, expectations are a hard thing. I haven't competed in three months, which is basically the longest break I've ever had since I started playing golf competitively, and I can't really say much about it. Obviously every time I tee it up, the goal is to win, so I'm here to play, to play

and to win hopefully. But expectations, who knows. Things are a little bit different. The atmosphere is going to be a little bit different, so I think it's going to be a period of getting used to things, but that doesn't mean I'm going to -- obviously as it has been in the past, like every other week I'm trying to perform my best. I've played really good golf in the past. I have a lot of good history on this golf course, just being the Ben Hogan Award champion twice, so hopefully all those great vibes keep coming through and put in a good performance again.

Q. Were you working on something in particular the last three months, technical, physical?

JON RAHM: I haven't done anything special really when it comes to the golf game. I've been working out at least five to six times a week throughout the whole quarantine. I didn't touch a club for seven weeks. I've tried to stay physically fit just because that routine every morning kind of maintained me in a mental -- in a positive mental state, right. I'm a person who's really active throughout the day, and if I don't do a lot of things and keep my body moving, I go a little bit stir crazy at home. So by being quarantined I had to do something, so that routine kind of kept me going and kept me mentally sharp more than anything, but no golf clubs for seven weeks. I think it was seven weeks I didn't touch a club.

And then after that it's hard to really work on something technical. First of all, the mission was to not shank the first seven balls I hit on the range, trying to make contact with the ball, and then slowly just try to get the rust off. In the last week, week and a half, what I tried to do is play a little bit more, spend more time on the golf course and just get used to playing and walking 18 holes, and just tried to get the rust a little bit off and tried to be as ready as possible for this week.

Q. It's obviously been a very complex couple of weeks in the U.S., and you were intentional about speaking out in support of Black Lives Matter, and I was just wondering why it was important to you to share some of the messages that you have shared in the last couple weeks.

JON RAHM: Well, as a Hispanic immigrant in the U.S., even though I'm not even close to experiencing what some people have experienced in this world, even myself just speaking Spanish with one of my teammates or with people in some public areas, I've gotten dirty looks. I've never been racially profiled for the color of my skin, but I have had some experiences. And it's not a good feeling.

And also we had a black girl on the golf team, I have black friends, I'm friends with a lot of athletes, and at the same time as a human being, I can't fathom the

reason why anybody would treat somebody differently just the way you look or they sound or what you believe in. We're all the same. We're all human beings, and we should all be treated the same way.

To me it's as simple as that. And when this whole thing broke out, I've tried to reach out to understand more profoundly what's going on because if I've somehow experienced a little bit of what racism can be like, I can't imagine what some people have experienced throughout their whole life, right. And at the same time, as an athlete let's say in a mainly white sport with somewhat of a platform on social media, I believed it was my duty to -- at least not my duty but my belief to support this cause and try to reach as many people as possible.

I understand you can't make everybody aware of everything, but if I can just have one more person understand the situation and support it, to me it's a win, right, so hopefully a lot of people got to know about it, and also being somebody who's from Spain, by posting in English and Spanish, maybe some people in Spain understand the gravity of the situation and maybe they try to think of how they've treated people in the past.

It's trying to raise awareness to everybody, and I mean, now it's become the biggest civil rights movement in history. Not that I want to be a part of it, I just felt like I had to be a part of it and try to reach as many people as possible.

Q. And do you expect that that'll be a big topic of conversation this week with other players, or now that you're at a tournament is it more of an escape and back to the usual?

JON RAHM: I have no idea. If somebody wants to ask me something or talk to me, I'm glad to talk and share my experience because that's all I can do. I can't speak for anybody else, I can only share my experience. If I see somebody worth talking to, I will. I'm always willing to learn and to comprehend what some people have gone through and the experiences, and I think that's the best way we can maybe get information to then act on certain situations. Obviously being in a tournament is going to be a little bit different, but again, if I have the opportunity to talk to somebody, if somebody wants to talk to me, I'll be more than happy to.

Q. You just mentioned that back home in Spain everyone has been affected by the virus. Did you know anyone who was affected by it, and how difficult has this been for you having to stay here quarantined in the United States when everyone was back home?

JON RAHM: It was tough. I mean, I do know people that have been affected. None of my direct family

members as far as I know. It was hard at first, but then I realized with the quarantine in Spain, if anybody in the family got it, they would be hospitalized or told to stay home and nobody would actually be able to go see them. Whether I was here or whether I was there, it didn't make that much of a difference at first. Now it would, but at first, no.

It was hard, and that's why I talked to them so often, but what made it a lot easier on me was to see how positive they were all the time. I mean, it was funny to talk to my dad, he told me he couldn't remember the last time he had breakfast, lunch and dinner at home, three meals at his house. He doesn't remember it, probably since he was a kid living in his parents' house. And then talking to my cousin who's a triathlete, always super active, not being able to leave the house, his dad is also a bicycle rider so they're both taking turns on the static bike. I think they put the bike on a rolling thing where they can pedal. It acts like a Peloton but they're on their own bike and they were looking out the window on the balcony trying to get some fresh air and doing it like two, three times a day. It was funny to hear the stuff they were doing just to keep entertained, and what kept me going is how positive they were the whole time. They were generally -- as much as they were concerned, they were happy. It made it a lot easier on me. If they were scared and stressed and concerned the whole time, it would have been a much harder couple of weeks for me, but they were in such a great mood that it made it a lot easier for me, so if they weren't concerned, that situation being a lot worse than what it was in the U.S., there was no reason for me to be concerned, so it made it a lot easier.

Q. I'm curious what you feel like the vibe is going to be like out there this week with no fans. Obviously this is unique to all of us, and the thought of maybe some of you guys jarring and eagle putt or something like that and it's dead silent out there. And as a follow-up, can you talk a little bit about your anticipation -- I know you touched on it at the beginning, but your anticipation of just getting back out there; does this almost feel like opening day to some degree, the beginning of a season, because it's been so long?

JON RAHM: Yeah, I mean, the PGA TOUR never has an opening day technically. There's such a small break between tournaments that this is the biggest break we've had between starts in a very long time. So yeah. It does have a special feel to it.

It will be odd. Like more than making a long eagle putt, if somebody holes out, which it does happen here at Colonial Country Club almost every year, you can't celebrate, you can't just high-five your caddie or

anyone else, even though you both tested positive or you wouldn't be in the field. It's going to be hard.

I think people need to realize that some mistakes will happen because we're so used to a routine that it's going to be hard to just be constantly aware of the situation we're living in that at some point somebody is going to slip. Somebody is going to fist bump, somebody is going to do something because it's going to be extremely hard just to get away from our routine. But more than that, can you imagine if somebody makes a 30-foot bomb on 18 to win the tournament? Nothing? Crickets? It's going to be a little weird.

I was joking with somebody, it would almost be better if they had like the Rickie Fowler commercial, just have speakers on every green, and if you hit a good shot just press play and you hear something and then you move on.

We also got a lot of feedback from fans. There's a lot of shots that are kind of blind that you don't see the hole very well or the green, and they give you an idea how close the ball is. The 4th hole on the left you can't really see the green. The 2nd it's sometimes hard to judge how far the ball is from the hole, and usually the fans' reaction tells you how everything is.

But in my case, I didn't leave college that long ago. It was only four years ago when I finished college, so it's probably going to feel like that again. It's like a college event, just keep on playing.

As different as it will be for us, it shouldn't be any different for the fans at home; we're going to put on the best show possible.

Q. I was hoping you could give us an idea of just how surreal the last few days have been for you from leaving home to getting to the hotel to getting to the golf course, the testing stages. Just give us a timeline and how different it has been from your normal tournament.

JON RAHM: Well, it was different starting from the flight because I have a deal with NetJets and we were flying NetJets here, and one hour into the flight we get notice that our bags hadn't been loaded into the plane, my golf clubs and suitcases. So it was a quick 180 back to Scottsdale, refuel, get our bags and then fly back. So supposed to land yesterday at 3:30, get my testing done and kind of go smooth sailing today, do what I'm doing right now and go about my day.

We ended up landing late, the whole routine was off, couldn't get tested yesterday. But still, right, I mean, there's things that happen. It's not the first time that a suitcase gets forgotten. Travel inconveniences are

extremely common. It's kind of like, welcome to life again, right, where things can go wrong.

You can do nothing but laugh about it, honestly. And then today, yeah, I got tested at 7:00 a.m. Hurt more than I thought it would, honestly, I'm not going to lie. I think it was pretty far up your nose. And you can't get ready. And I didn't want to get ready for it either way. Yeah, got my testing, got the results extremely quick. I've heard of a two-, four-hour turnaround, it was less than an hour when I got my results, and I was at home watching a TV show, and I was like, well, I'm ready to go, so let's get ready for things.

The only difference is just trying to figure out what you can and can't do. Obviously you need to be careful when you walk by somebody. We usually walk past each other constantly in the locker room. You can't just go to somebody and like fist bump like how you doing, unless you Purell right away. It's going to be a little bit different and you're going to have to watch all those things that you're used to do. I know we don't have all the access that we usually have during a week like this. I know we don't have the fitness truck to work out for obvious reasons, so I think a lot of us are going to have to alter our routine a little bit. But the essence of it is there. At the end of the day we all try to act like it's just you and your caddie on the golf course and that's it, and pretty much that's what it's going to be like. It will be a little bit different, and I think in my case the biggest thing the last few days was just trying to control not the anxiety but the willingness to play and compete again and the wanting to and all that, the excitement of wanting to play, just trying to downplay that and act like it's just another week. It's hard to do because we haven't competed in a while. I'm sure I'll be out there on the golf course today thanking my lucky stars that we're competing finally and being able to entertain the public like soccer players are doing now, football players are doing now in Europe and like many other athletes probably wish they were doing.

Hopefully it only gets better from here and we can have spectators soon and resume not only our job but basically every bit of life as normal as possible.

Q. Clearly there's a quarantining rule in place at the moment which means players coming into the USA have to spend 14 days quarantined so they can compete. Matt Fitzpatrick has come over; the likes of Tommy Fleetwood, Francesco Molinari, Lee Westwood haven't. Do you think that rule should be relaxed, and is it the sort of rule that if it was still in place it would stop you from coming over to Europe and defending your title as European No. 1 this year?

JON RAHM: If I'm not mistaken, I think the government

switched that for players coming from Europe. I don't think they have to quarantine 14 days anymore. But I do think if they're flying back, they might have to.

Those rules do make it difficult, right. If I were to play in Europe and I have to go quarantine 14 days and then come back and quarantine 14 more days, I'm losing a month of my life to play maybe one or two weeks, so to what extent is that worth it. But yes, my plan is to hopefully defend my European No. 1 title. I want to. It's just about how things go. We're still all somewhat unsure of how the events are going to go, if we're going to play certain events or not. We do have a European calendar, we've also got to see how that works out.

My plan is to hopefully go and defend, but that's obviously if the circumstances allow me to do so.

Q. Do you have a fixed calendar plan ahead until the Ryder Cup week? And the second question, do you think the majors or the Ryder Cup will be played even without fans attending the event?

JON RAHM: I've said it already; if the Ryder Cup doesn't have spectators or limited spectators, they shouldn't do it. There's no point. It's the ultimate entertainment. It's the one week where we don't play for ourselves, we're playing for Europe, we're playing for the U.S. and we're playing for the fans, and the fans make the event what it is. If there can't be spectators or you can't have the Ryder Cup as a normal Ryder Cup, I don't think they should do it; postpone it a year and do it right.

Now, with the majors, it is major championship golf, so I don't know. Like I've said, as long as they can ensure the safety of the players, I believe we could play, and there's no really reason why not unless you don't want to play in front of fans. They can still watch it from home. A U.S. Open will still be a U.S. Open, a PGA will still be a PGA, and the Masters will still be the Masters. But I also would understand if they don't want to do it without fans.

I see both sides, but I think the only event that definitely shouldn't be played without fans or with limited fans is the Ryder Cup.

Q. Just curious about your thoughts on any possibility of players ever being mic'd, especially right now, for the broadcast, interested or apprehensive?

JON RAHM: You're asking me? Honestly, I see the point, and I think people expect us to talk about much more interesting things than what we really do, so I don't think it would be as entertaining as people think. Now, selfishly, because of who I am and I know how I am on the golf course, I wouldn't support it just

because they might need a 20-, 30-second difference from live, might be a little bit delayed. And I'm not the only one; a lot of people swear or something comes up where you can hear it. I don't think it would be the best thing to do.

Maybe with no spectators you do have the mic really close to you, you'll be able to hear anything they want to hear in the interactions. I don't think there's any reason why we should be mic'd up from shot to shot really. But again, it all depends. If somebody decides to do it and it really works out and they think it's really fun, cool, go ahead. I can tell you I'm not speaking about many interesting things on the golf course. There's just a lot of golf, and if I speak at all.

I don't know, it would be something that needs to be tested, and if people like it, it might be something we could get used to. Right now I don't see it really happening or being as interesting as people think.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, Jon, and good luck this week.