

Travelers Championship

Tuesday, June 23, 2020

Jon Rahm

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Jon Rahm to the interview room at the 2020 Travelers Championship. Jon is the second ranked player in the world and making his first start here at TPC River Highlands since 2016. If we could just get an opening comment on your return to the event.

JON RAHM: I mean, I'm really happy to be here. This event and Travelers gave me two starts, one as an amateur in 2015 and one as a pro in 2016, so I'm forever grateful, and I've had a lot of fun here. Love the golf course, love the people around the event, love the new clubhouse, as well, very different to the old one. And it's just a fun place to come to.

I've had a good showing before. I think I have a top 15 out of those two years I've played. Like a classic TPC golf course, you need to play really good tee to green, which should fit my strength hopefully, and then it's just a fun golf course to play. Always in great condition, always in great shape.

The only bad thing is usually so good for the fans. The atmosphere here is usually so much fun, especially on the last four holes. We're going to miss that for sure, but still, that doesn't take from the beauty of this place. Hopefully I can keep on the good playing and post my best finish so far at the Travelers.

THE MODERATOR: We had Chez Reavie in here a little bit ago and he spoke about your relationship and how you guys play a lot of golf together at home. Could you talk a little bit about that relationship and what it'll be like playing in one of the feature groups with him this week?

JON RAHM: It's great. I haven't been paired with Chez many times. Obviously we both live in Arizona, both ASU graduates, both members at the same golf courses, so we play a lot back home. He's a tough man to beat, I can say that. Great golf player.

And an even better person. Him and his wife Amanda are great people. It's nice to be paired with somebody like him. It's going to have like a little home feel, maybe be a little bit more relaxed and have some fun on the golf course and just share the stage. I'm playing with the defending champion and last week's champion, so hopefully I can do my part this week to become a champion this year, as well, and get to that level.

Great guy, great mentor to have around. He's been on TOUR for so long. He knows so much about the game, and I get along with him and his caddie Justin, as well. It should be a really fun one.

Q. You touched on it at the start, obviously, the fact that you've had good experiences here and Travelers are always so good to you, but with the recent three-month break from golf, how much was that part of your decision to put this one on the schedule for the year?

JON RAHM: I was very thankful for this event to be one of the ones that was being rescheduled. The reason why I haven't been able to come back was the European Tour, basically. It being after the U.S. Open, it was always a week I took off because I was getting ready to go play in Europe for about a month, and it just didn't fit the schedule.

I'm glad it happened this way. For the unfortunate situation we're living in and what's going on, I'm glad this is one of the events. You couldn't put three better golf courses together to play, you go from Colonial to Harbour Town to here. I'm really happy I can be here. I was really looking forward to it through quarantine, just because I love the golf course, I love the experience.

Like I said, we won't have the fans, which would make this tournament even more special, but still, the essence of the golf course and Travelers is there, so hopefully, again, I can just play good golf. I love this week, and so I hope I can make it a well-rounded week and play good.

Q. What about the strength of field? Obviously you're No. 2 in the world and nine of the world's top 10 are playing. How much is that a motivating factor?

JON RAHM: Oh, it's great. I mean, you can tell the last few weeks, right, the cut numbers are extremely low. You have a big amount of players tied for the lead or close to the lead going into Sunday and the last few holes. The scores last week are unheard of. I was T30-something with 12-under par. Most times when you're 12-under par you're easily close to a top 15 if not top 10, especially on that golf course. It shows the depth of the tournament, the depth of the field and the quality of play that those golfers are playing.

You know, those wins are more than just regular PGA TOUR event wins. They should be highly qualified wins and you should be really proud of them because any week anybody can win, but if like down the stretch there's four or five players that can actually get it done, you have to step it up and get it done. Nobody is going to give it to you, nobody is going to make mistakes. Birdies are required. It happened the last two weeks and it's going to happen again here.

It's fun. It's a great way to compete, and that's what we all want for our game. You want to play against the best in the world when they're playing at their best, and that's what's happening right now.

Q. You mentioned earlier that one of your early starts they gave you here, and it's actually a theme they've had for a lot of young players that they've continued over the last sort of 10 to 15 years. Can you talk about that and how important it is to have a tournament that does give these first starts to up-and-comers who may be on their way and looking for a path to the TOUR and what you took out of that start that you did have at Travelers?

JON RAHM: It's important. You can't measure yourself when you're playing in college or amateur golf against the best in the world because you're not competing with them, you're competing against your peers. So having that experience, I had it at Mayakoba, I had it in Phoenix playing golf and I had it here, as well, so I had a few.

I think I had four PGA TOUR starts as an amateur before being able -- actually I think I had five, before being able to turn pro. I gained a lot of experience. You learn a lot from each player, from people on TOUR. It's just kind of eye-opening to see at what level you're at, and being able to play all these tournaments. Experience is something you can never take back; it's invaluable. You can't put a price to it.

The fact that there's events like Phoenix, because Phoenix gave me a start, they gave Rickie Fowler a start, they gave Matthew Wolff a start, you have Travelers who gave me a start and I know they've given many other amateurs, as well, it's a great thing. It gives us a little bit of a taste of what it's like. You can maybe prove yourself and play good and show yourself and the world that you belong to be there like I did in Phoenix or you can actually just learn how far or close you are from being on that type of golf level.

However so it is, however you play, you can learn a lot, and I think it's very needed. Not many sports can do that. It's not like you can go into a professional football game and just play for a half and learn how things are

going, or you can't do that in tennis. You need to earn it. So luckily in golf they have those invites, and when sponsors do it, a lot of times it pays off for a lot of us, so I hope they keep doing it, and I hope these younger players take advantage of those opportunities.

Q. I'm curious what you think about how Bryson DeChambeau is approaching his game? He's really focusing on power and length and the torque he can build in his swing. What's your impression of that?

JON RAHM: I knew all of this was going to come up. I could imagine.

Well, let me start off by saying, what he's done is no fluke. He's put in an incredible amount of work for months now. He gained a lot of weight, a lot of strength, and a lot of speed. But I think what's more impressive is we've played two golf courses so far that are not, let's say, long-hitter friendly, and he's played amazing golf on both of them. It shows he's got it under control so far, and he can use it when he needs to.

Man, why not? If I could have a 190-mile-an-hour ball speed and be accurate I would use it, and we all try to get to it. We all try to do it. He was just very drastic in the change, and that's how it is. It's going to be an advantage for many other golf courses now.

We don't know how his body is going to react to this. It's a lot of weight he's put on his frame and if there's going to be any injuries or not. Hopefully not; hopefully he stays healthy and keeps playing good golf and evolves the game.

But there's a very simple answer to all this, to all these people that say ball needs to change, this needs to do that and the other thing. Small golf courses, take Bryson DeChambeau to Valderrama, and all that power is neutralized, all that power is gone out the window and not being able to use it. Take him to Le Golf National in France. There's no room to be hitting drivers like he could be doing, right, so there's various ways to contradict length, and it's not by making golf courses longer or dialing back the golf ball because that's only going to help the longer hitters. So I think it's by making narrower, more target-golf courses, which still distance is going to help because instead of laying up with driver or 3-wood he's going to lay up with maybe an iron, but he won't be able to take advantage of just hitting it 350 yards down the middle or on the sides.

I think it's to his credit how much work he's put in, and he deserves all the distance he's earned, and especially if he has it under control. But I think golf course planning and golf course setup is what can actually neutralize that power more than any other

solution.

Q. Do you think that what he's doing might influence a younger generation of golfers coming up?

JON RAHM: It could. But like Jack Nicklaus said, golf is not a game of power, it's a game of precision. It's as simple as that. If you can be powerful and precise, hey, that's a skill, right. It's a skill he developed. It's a skill he worked on, and everybody can just go to the gym and try to get stronger and hit it further. It's not like he just was born with this, right. It's something that can be learned, and you choose to learn it or not.

But I think it will inspire. It will happen. When Tiger came on TOUR he was the longest, him and John Daly were the longest, and because of them you have the generation that we have right now of people in the 180s or mid-180s average ball speed. Bryson and Cameron Champ are the first two to get to the 90s, and maybe the next generation is going to be up there. It's just how the game has evolved, right. People get smarter, engineers get more creative and find ways to make golf not easier but a little different, and I think it's going to keep evolving, but like I said, the way to neutralize all that is with golf course design and golf course setup.

Q. There's been some reports that the Ryder Cup may be pushed back a year. I just want to get your reaction to that. Is that troubling to you or do you feel like it's the best thing to happen at this point?

JON RAHM: Well, I mean, none of that info has come from the PGA of America or European Tour, PGA TOUR. It's not official, so we don't know. That's the first thing I can say.

Now, it's tough. I mean, the situation is obviously very difficult and the Ryder Cup is a very, very special event. When the quarantine started, I was asked the same question, and I'll give the same answer. If we can't play without fans, I don't think we should play this year. It's the one event we don't play for us, we play for the U.S. or we play for the continent of Europe and the countries we represent. We play for the fans, and the fans make what the Ryder Cup is. So I think it should be played with fans.

Now, if they can make it maybe with a limited amount, still only four groups on the golf course, if you have 10,000 people instead of 40,000 you might be able to work it out, but I think it would be wiser to wait until 2021 just because also European players are not being able to play until later in the summer. They have those events in the UK and then some of the Rolex Series events that they've been able to organize, but a lot of those players have not been able to play and get back

into competitive form, so I also don't think it would be fair for a lot of them.

But it's not up to me. The PGA and the European Tour have a very tough decision to make, but I would be surprised if it actually does happen this year. I'll be okay either way. If it's played this year, I'd rather it be with spectators, and I hope it is with spectators. If not, I would rather wait until 2021.

Q. You were pretty outspoken on social media trying to encourage younger people to do social distancing and stuff. How would you describe the scene at Hilton Head last week?

JON RAHM: Well, each state and each governor decides what they think is better, right. And a lot of the people we saw that were in their backyards and they were in smaller groups, which you're allowed to do, but there was people -- I mean, it is a vacation spot, so there was a lot of people roaming around, a lot of people on bikes, restaurants were pretty busy. The harbor area was busy. I'm nobody to describe what's what.

I mean, I live in Arizona, and cases are going up, and up until a couple weeks ago Arizona was a complete zoo. There was very little rules, the bars were open, people were having parties. It's not up to me. I think each one needs to make the smarter choice for themselves and try to not extend the situation as much as possible.

I didn't see that much last week because I try to stay in my bubble. I've been renting houses; I go from the golf course to the house to the golf course to the house and that's about it.

Obviously there's going to be some people that take it more serious than others, but each one at their own risk, and that's about as much as I can say.

I mean, I don't know. All I've seen is Arizona and Hilton Head really pretty much. I can't tell you how things are in the world. I've been pretty sensitive to the matter with my family being in Spain and how bad the situation was there for a while, and I'm really, really sympathetic with them so I try to do my part to not get in that situation, and that's it.

You know, the way I thought about it was I would hate to think I am possibly infecting somebody who might see their grandparents and get them infected. It's just sad to think about, right.

Like everywhere, I'm sure there's places where things are better, things are worse, people are taking it more seriously or less seriously, but it should be up to their own decisions, not my choice. It's not my place to

judge anybody, but for whoever is, it is a vacation spot, so I think a lot of people that were there were on vacation. They were not from South Carolina; they were not residents of Hilton Head; and I think they were just taking advantage of some rules being a little less lenient over there.

Q. Getting back to Bryson a little bit, it's funny, you're known as a pretty big hitter, Rory, Brooks --

JON RAHM: Not even close.

Q. But when Rory last week was taken aback by what he saw when he was looking at Bryson. Is it a little bit alarming how quickly he's done this, to see -- not alarming is not the right word, but what's your reaction in terms of how quickly this has become because he's become these first three weeks a bit of a star of the show, so to speak, even though he hasn't won yet?

JON RAHM: Well, I mean, he's doing something different, right. He does a lot different, but a little bit more outside the box than usual. But for people that don't know, he's been in the 200-mile-an-hour range since Albany last year. We saw it there, so he's been trying to put on weight and gain muscle weight for months now, from seven, eight, nine, maybe ten months. I don't know when he started. So it hasn't just happened in the last two months. He's been with this for a while; he's just now being accurate with it.

Which to me, what's really surprising, right, he took two months just to be able to be accurate with all this and figure out all his numbers, and it works. I see him on the range and I've seen him hit five, six, seven drivers, the same ball flight straight at the same spot. That is good for anybody that hits it any length. So it's impressive that he can do it with that amount of speed. I haven't played with him yet, so I haven't seen it in person to see what the difference is. But I mean, it certainly is impressive.

It's no difference from all the guys that work really hard on their wedge game, what Dustin did a few years ago and started hitting it really, really close and dominated the game of golf.

Even though he hasn't won yet, he's been up there, and we'll see. I mean, there's going to be a golf course that's wide open. Over here on this golf course there's always holes to the side and he might be able to take advantage of his length this week.

Again, I mean, more than anything, I think he deserves more credit than criticism just because he worked really hard to get to where he is and to be precise with that length. It's pretty impressive.

Q. It's kind of funny how Gary Woodland lost 25 pounds and was obviously one of the bigger hitters and Bryson goes the other way, so there really is no right or wrong way to do it, I suppose.

JON RAHM: I've heard from some people he wants to gain more weight, so I don't know. I'll need to talk to him. I really don't know. Like I said, like the one thing I would be concerned about, and if to be concerned, is how much weight can his frame maintain. How long will he be able to play with that weight, without maybe having injuries, and how long will he be able to maintain that weight. Who knows, because it's easy to maintain the weight when you're at home and you can have solid meals at home and not playing as much, but while you're traveling and playing golf week after week after week, it might be a little bit harder. Just the grind on the body, maybe not after one year, two, three, four, five, who knows how long it's going to last, they're going to hope the best. I hope he doesn't have any injuries, he doesn't have to deal with any body problems, but it could happen. We don't know how much the human body is supposed to withstand, and those speeds are pretty crazy.

THE MODERATOR: Now that it's a few weeks underway here, can we get your thoughts on the caddie bibs that have been honoring local front-line healthcare workers?

JON RAHM: Well, I mean, there's not enough that we can say to say thank you to all the people involved on the front lines. As the son of a midwife who doesn't go to a hospital, doesn't act as a midwife anymore, she's more of an OB/GYN at this point and had to go to the hospital through quarantine and put herself at risk, I really thank everybody involved in all this, first responders, nurses, doctors, anybody who is just involved in helping the society and helping everybody in this world through this. They're putting themselves at risk to help everybody else.

Again, we've seen in many videos, we might get the recognition we get just because we are on TV, but all these people are back there on the back lines, on the front line now, should be getting the recognition. So please, if anybody who's watching sees a player they like, they watch me, they watch Brooks, they see Rory, just take a second to look at the last name under our last name and maybe look into it a little bit and just be mindful that yeah, we entertain you, but all these people are possibly saving people's lives or possibly saving your life.

Really extremely thankful for all the work they've been doing and they'll continue to do, and again, they should get the recognition they deserve. They studied hard to be where they are and help people out, and man, we need them more than ever now.

Q. Question on the state of your game: You were on an incredible run before the layoff. Did you come back -- I knew you were 12-under last week, so not like you're playing bad, but do you feel some rust or feel like you lost some momentum with that time off?

JON RAHM: I mean, it would be stupid to say I didn't lose the momentum, right; I was on a pretty solid streak, even citing back to last year. But it is what it is. I knew somebody was going to have rust, and clearly it's me. Even through quarantine I worked out pretty hard. I gained some strength, I gained some muscle weight, and I'm having some trouble figuring out my distances, and what I was doing really well before the break, which was putting, is what's failing me right now, right. My ball-striking wasn't bad at all last week, I just couldn't seem to make those shorter putts that Webb Simpson was making, and that was the difference. Even though he beat me by nine shots, making a few more putts a round is always going to help, and you never know once you're in contention. So I think I did lose a little bit of that momentum, but there's still a long way to go. There's still a lot of tournaments, and like I told my caddie last week, I'm progressing in the right direction. Didn't play great at Colonial, my first run at Harbour Town wasn't great, but it's been slowly a little bit better every single time and getting more comfortable on the golf course, more comfortable with my swing and more comfortable with the changes I've made.

It's all about the process. I'm not so focused on the end result, I'm just focused on doing my part every single day.

THE MODERATOR: Jon, we appreciate the time, and best of luck this week.