

Travelers Championship

Tuesday, June 23, 2020

Jordan Spieth

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Jordan Spieth into the virtual interview room here at the Travelers Championship. Jordan is our 2017 champion here, and we'd like to get some comments if we can on being back at a place that I know you love.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, these first three weeks are all courses that I really enjoy playing, which is obviously a good scenario coming out of the big break. I feel like I got some rust off in the last couple weeks and just trying to continue to progress. It's nice to go back to places where you have really good memories to draw back on, hit a lot of good shots, and obviously a place that you win is always nice coming up the 18th hole and remembering the shot to win in the playoff. That was the coolest shot I've ever hit in a PGA TOUR event, so I played it today. I always just go right back in the bunker and try it every time I'm there.

THE MODERATOR: And probably some of the best crowd reactions that we've ever seen when that happened there at the Travelers Championship. Talk a little bit about not having fans this week and how different that will be at this event.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, this one will be as noticeable for me as Colonial was. I feel like the support obviously at home is massive, but in general here you have just some of the loudest and biggest and best crowds of any tournament that we see on the PGA TOUR. I think it'll be -- it's a bit of a shame, obviously, but the fact that we're able to play I think is great. I think it's great to still come back to this area and be able to play this golf course. Travelers has been one of the longest title sponsors of the PGA TOUR events going back into the early '50s, so it's awesome to be back here and able to help support them. It helps support charities. So even though the fans aren't here, the rest of it is about as good as it can get.

Q. Obviously you touched on the 2017 iconic moment, and it really is one of the most iconic moments in Travelers history, the bunker shot and then the celebration afterwards. Do you watch that back when you come here to kind of like up the momentum?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, it's typically played back, whether it's in the media center or it's certain one-offs or reposts or something like that. Yeah, I mean, it never gets old. I have not gotten tired of watching that video. I

obviously remember vividly exactly what it was like and how it felt and the drowning know what I'm saying, kind of the blackout moment when it went in. I'm not one to really throw clubs. I'll slam one into the ground a little bit, but I don't normally throw clubs, especially gripping it on the shaft and throwing it. So I don't know where that came from, but clearly it was just a rush of emotions, and what an amphitheater setting on that 18th hole. I couldn't have imagined something like that anywhere else. It was electric to say the least. I went over to Daniel before he went to his playoff at Colonial and said, don't worry, Berger, it's not me, you'll be fine, just as a joke, and he just kind of laughed and certainly got his own back in that scenario, when he was able to win in a playoff there.

Yeah, that was one where I kind of stole it from him there, but then it was nice to see him get one back.

Q. You've talked about why this tournament is so special to you and the charitable involvement for Travelers, but obviously the strength of field this week is amazing. What makes it such a highlight for so many guys on TOUR?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think the back nine is just -- you can really go low on the back nine, lots of risk-reward, it's a really fun golf course to play because if you're on, you've got a lot of looks at birdie and even could have a couple looks at eagle.

Yeah, it's just such a great mix of shots when you get to really No. 8 through 18 that require working the ball both directions. A lot of precision with wedges. But you've seen, was it Streelman that birdied the last seven to win one year? You have a lot of fireworks that come down in the last three holes almost every single year. When that starts to happen year after year, players watch this tournament, those that are and aren't playing, and I know I didn't play the tournament for a number of years, and then it just seemed to be so much fun for everybody at the end, and the first year I played it, it certainly was that for me.

I think that has to do with it, also that it's the third week back after a long break. Guys have been anxious to play, and I think you're going to continue to see these fields for the rest of the season.

Q. The 15-and-a-half hole, hitting that umbrella,

have you ever done it before?

JORDAN SPIETH: Oh, yeah, I guess I did hit it on the green today. I don't know if I've even hit the shot every year. I normally have Michael do it. I wrote his name on my shots, too. But yeah, I hit it today, so I guess I can take that as some confidence. Michael has hit it a number of years. He normally actually gets it on. But that's even more fun in the practice rounds when you have people there, too, that are all talking smack. We just played it by ourselves this morning. But always a fun shot.

Q. The last couple of weeks, the last couple starts, there's been a lot of attention on Bryson and kind of the new bulked-up Bryson. I'm curious what your impression has been from what you've seen of him. He's been in the mix the last two weeks, as well.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think he's an extremely talented player, so I think whether he was 150 pounds or 250 pounds, he's likely to be in contention a lot because of the talent and the work ethic that he has. Clearly he's added a lot of speed, and it seems the last couple weeks from what I've seen he's hitting it very accurately, too, on two of the tightest golf courses and the narrowest fairways that we play all season.

I think the advantage for him will not be on the last two weeks those types of golf courses. It's going to be on your bigger golf courses and ones where you have a little more kind of open space to move the ball. I think the best is coming for him based on where he's at.

I don't know the science of it all. Clearly he does. I don't know -- at certain speeds you have to be really strong, really mobile. You also kind of have to have really kind of the Tom Brady kind of soft tissue to be able to, it seems, hold that kind of speed. But obviously if he feels good and he's continuing to ramp it up, that mass helps him absorb that kind of torque within his golf swing. If I swung that fast right now, I would probably be injured. But clearly I'm not at the same weight, I'm not in the same fighting class that he is right now.

Q. There's been a report that looks like they're going to postpone the Ryder Cup until 2021, and as somebody who's been passionately involved in that with the fans and whatnot, if that comes to fruition, do you feel like that's the right thing to do, given the fact there probably would not be fans involved?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think the Ryder Cup would be very difficult without fans. I think if players voted to have it without fans or to be able to postpone one year, two years or whatever it may be to allow for fans, I think that they would go for postponement. I think it would be

everybody would vote for postponement, especially the Americans being on home soil. The tricky part is then you go into a Presidents Cup year, and so I think -- I know for a fact that's not certain yet. Those are rumors. But I know that the one thing I would say about it is that I would rather wait and play with fans than play without fans and force a Ryder Cup this year.

Q. Did you come close to jarring the sand shot today?

JORDAN SPIETH: I just put it -- there was a tee there in the same position, so yeah, I mean, you just kind of -- it's an easy shot.

Q. Don't remind Berger of it too often.

JORDAN SPIETH: I do, as often as I can.

Q. I don't want to age you, but it feels like yesterday that we were talking about you as part of an exciting young group of players with Justin, with Rickie, with Rory. Now if you look at Matthew Wolff, Collin Morikawa, Viktor Hovland, it feels like the same discussion is happening again. Is that fair, and how excited should we be about the three of those guys in particular?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I think you left Collin Morikawa out, not that you meant to --

Q. I think I did mention Collin.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, there's certainly a number of them, Jon Rahm you could put in the younger category, too. And I've been -- this is my eighth year, so I don't feel like the first couple years anymore. It certainly feels very different.

And yeah, I think the game is getting better, younger. You're seeing guys in their early 20s, a number of them in the top 10 on a Sunday, guys that are not afraid to shoot 63-62 on the weekends of tournaments. I don't think that's going to be going away. I think it'll be interesting to see once we have all these major championships how that affects the younger guys, what kind of adjustments they made. I know I had to make adjustments after my first few in how I was approaching them especially on the weekend and in contention.

Without fans I think that becomes a lot easier. I think without fans -- in general it's easier to win on the PGA TOUR without fans is what I've seen the first couple weeks, just without -- it's easier to just be zoned in on pure golf.

But I think with these younger guys, it'll be interesting to see who kind of can maybe break away in the majors and make a significant impact, and we're going to have it looks like seven of them in 12 months to get a pretty good idea because they're certainly not too

young to be there on a Sunday afternoon, and they're very much talented enough. I think that'll be kind of the big tell on what will ultimately kind of write another chapter like we've seen over the last five, six years.

Q. Is there any reason it would be easier for these guys now coming out versus five years ago or ten years ago, given what some of them do before they come out?

JORDAN SPIETH: I felt more prepared I think than guys maybe five to ten years ahead of me just off the quality of the college and amateur golf, the golf courses that you're playing, the accessibility within different junior tours, to draw in the best talent from around the world, versus 10 years before me, and I know it's only gotten better since. I think guys are being able to see not only just the people that are within the states or countries that they grow up in but also being able to now compete with those that they see on the rankings that are from around the world on a tournament-by-tournament basis, almost like a PGA TOUR scenario within these junior golf -- the AJGA invitational events and then into college golf being very international and same with amateur golf. I just think in general the courses and the competition have gotten both tougher that allow the transition to the PGA TOUR to be a bit easier.

Q. I know it wasn't part of your journey specifically at the Travelers, but they have a history of giving their sponsors invites to young up-and-coming stars. We'll see that again this week. How important do you think that is that tournaments do sort of give some of these spots to guys that are on their way up, and what was it like when the Nelson did that for you, for experience-wise?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think it's great. I think the TOUR looking more towards the future than looking back is only going to be beneficial. Last week I saw a couple of college players teeing it up. I know the John Deere historically, they did to me, they've been probably the number one tournament at giving college players an option. It's great that it's happening here, as well.

All in all for me, that did wonders for me when I was 16. I had no idea how I compared to the professional game, and I was able to tell, yeah, I played well, but whether I played well or not, it's how I was -- when I was watching guys practice, when I was playing practice rounds and watching what they're doing in practice rounds, how they're preparing, where their risk-reward, kind of how they're weighing their options, I was learning a lot just within a week, and I would advise those that are getting these exemptions to play practice rounds with other guys, try and ask a bunch of questions, because guys are open to talking out here, especially for me I had a whole bunch of role models

that were open and willing to help in my first few years that made the transition very easy.

Q. I was curious if there were any additional conversations about the health protocols at the TOUR's policy board level in the days after Nick Watney's positive test.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, we've had calls every Monday, so we had one after Colonial and then we just had one yesterday, and I think it's going to -- we're going to continue to make minor adjustments. I think the idea of extra testing has come around. The idea of mandatory tests for anyone who was even within six feet, whether they made physical contact with somebody who had a positive test, making those kind of mandatory, because the testing is very, very easy. It goes very quickly. Sure, it's uncomfortable for a second, but being able to mitigate the risk is the number one priority. We've looked into having dinner options so that you don't have to go grab-to-go food to keep the bubble even smaller.

There are adjustments that are being talked about and will be -- they'll be made as we move on. When we run into potentially having fans, that'll change things up a bit, too.

It's certainly changing, and it's something that -- it's a plan to work on every single week. I think with Nick, the fact that there were no other positive tests was huge, clearly. But the idea that the systems in place allowed for him to test negative on a Tuesday, somehow contract the virus by Friday but not spread it to anyone including the people he's staying with means that there was something done right with what was in force at the golf course and how Nick was approaching it, as well. And I know he was one of the safest individuals from day one, so it's kind of unfortunate that it happened to be him.

To answer your question, yes, these are things we're continuing to talk about every single week.

Q. And you would expect some of these things would be implemented like piecemeal as time goes on?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, and even acting on a couple of them by today and tomorrow, different adjustments that will go out to the membership. And it's going to be -- these responses can be very immediate, and again, they're minor adjustments because overall we've seen the system actually go very well so far, and until that changes, they're going to be just little things that make it even safer and potentially -- yeah, anyway to mitigate the risk.

Q. You've now played two events with no fans.

Obviously it's different if an atmosphere perspective, I'm curious if anything has stuck out to you from an X's and O's perspective, different angles into greens, no grandstands, maybe even pace of play? It was a little surprising guys were able to finish last week after the stoppage. What's kind of stuck out to you after two weeks of this new normal?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, it's a good question. I think that it almost can be a little bit more challenging through the entire round to zero in on specific targets. You're used to having grandstands you can line up. It just provides more targets in the background, whether it's off the tee and you find something in the distance, someone has got a neon shirt on and you're like, yeah, I like dropping it on that line. Well, now you've got to talk through exactly where you're trying to hit it a little bit more. And then it's just bizarre; when I got on to the 15th tee here today, I could see the clubhouse. I can't remember ever seeing the clubhouse, and you're normally used to seeing thousands and thousands of fans, too. So it just visually has a very different look for it, and the only adjustments I would say with X's and O's is that, one, if you're hitting one through the fairway and you're used to potentially it being stopped by hitting a spectator it's likely going to go further off line, so you've got to kind of hit it a little straighter. And then second off, just maybe a little bit on kind of the visualization, trying to pick out targets. Most of the time there's something else, a tree or something you can aim at.

It's minor. It's not much with the X's and O's.

Q. Do you anticipate the difference being heightened or exacerbated at a major, when there will be no fans at a major?

JORDAN SPIETH: I don't think that'll change the X's and O's a ton, but again, like I actually mentioned earlier, I actually think it helps those who haven't -- I would imagine, now clearly there's no way of measuring this having not played a major yet, but I would imagine it would be easier to win kind of for your first time in a major without fans just because the atmosphere -- this Saturday and Sunday, Colonial I was in contention Saturday and Sunday, and it felt like I was playing Thursday's round. It felt no different. You start, you kind of know where you are by looking at the scoreboard, but without any fans and roars and that kind of stuff that make an impact, and then the settings on the last few holes that you normally get at TOUR events, it's very much different, and I would find it probably very -- I would think it's more comfortable coming down the stretch than it would normally be.

Q. I kind of think of you as sneaky long, but at any point did you feel that you needed to chase

distance, and how did you go about doing that?

JORDAN SPIETH: No, in an ideal world I'd hit 10 percent more fairways and that's all I'd care about. I've been in the top 10, 15 in total driving or strokes gained driving. I think my rookie year was maybe the only year I was in the top 20, and I hit it a lot shorter. I hit it a decent amount shorter than I did now, I just hit a lot more fairways. So no, I've tried to get stronger and more mobile just from an injury prevention standpoint and stability through my golf swing standpoint but not in order to chase distance, and in the process I have gained speed over the last few years but with no intention to.

Q. Do you think we'll see more players trying to do what Bryson has been doing?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think that -- I think you already have. I think Bryson certainly is on a different level, but I think guys going to the gym changed from Tiger, and I think that -- look at Brooks, right? Look at DJ. They're athletic. They're very, very strong. Rory is a gym rat. He's not a huge guy, but he has a ton of speed. I think training speed will be something that you'll continue to see, especially -- I mean, one thing I'd really like to see with golf courses is to grow rough up. I don't think it's that difficult to continue to grow rough up, and if the rough is down, all you've got to do is hit it really far, and it's almost better coming out of short rough than it is out of the fairway. You can control the spin. Distance is a massive advantage right now when the rough is down at a lot of golf courses like it was last week. This week has some rough, and certainly the major championships other than Augusta, you see plenty of hay and rough.

I think on a week-to-week basis, it's a huge, huge advantage, but in the biggest events, it's about golfing your ball, a combination of obviously having enough distance to have short clubs into greens, but most importantly hitting fairways.

Q. And what was your takeaway from your performance last week?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I thought that it was weird, I actually thought that my swing and my putting stroke actually felt better than the week before, but I really, really struggled on the greens and around the greens last week to hit it hard enough. I left everything short, whether it was a chip or a putt, and I lost 10 strokes compared to the week before to the field on and around the greens.

So I'm just trying to progress my swing along. It continues to feel better each week. It's in a position where I think I can win with it. And then just dialing in the control on and around the greens, which is normally not as much of a problem for me, as we adjust back to a lot faster-paced greens here and a

different type of grass.