

US Open Championship 2017

Monday, June 12, 2017

Jon Rahm

Press Conference



BETH MAJOR: We'd like to welcome Jon Rahm into the interview room here at the 117th U.S. Open at Erin Hills in Wisconsin.

Very happy to welcome this afternoon, Jon Rahm, of Spain, who is playing in his second U.S. Open. Last year he earned low amateur honors at Oakmont Country Club, finishing tied for 23rd. He won the Farmers Insurance Open for his first professional victory back in January. And has since that time recorded five more top five finishes, including a runner-up finish to Dustin Johnson in the match play a few weeks ago.

Can you give us your first impressions of Erin Hills? I know you arrived last night and played 18 this morning. Can you give us your first impressions of the golf course?

JON RAHM: Well, obviously, it's real easy to see it's not the usual U.S. Open golf course, the U.S. Open classic setup. It's more similar to Chambers Bay. And actually I absolutely love the golf course. It's a very long golf course, big greens, a little different to what it usually plays or last year played. I thought it was a lot of fun.

I enjoyed the golf course a lot. It gives you a lot of opportunities to hit the pin. You can be really creative. And I believe it will be a really fun week.

BETH MAJOR: Can you talk about your preparations, particularly with what you learned last year at Oakmont, your preparations coming into the week?

JON RAHM: Well, one of the things I did last year, I came Saturday, practiced Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Wednesday I was ready to go, I want to tee off. I had to wait all day Wednesday, and teed off on Thursday. I wanted to come in early this week. I wanted to get some rest at home, work out, practice on my game. And made sure I stayed patient, not get the anticipation built up too high. Played 18 holes today, get a feel of the golf course, get rest and play nine tomorrow and nine Wednesday, and after the nine holes try to get my touch around the greens which I think will be very important.

Q. What did you feel like your introduction to the U.S. Open last year, to open with a 76, how you felt about that and what kind of determination, I guess, you might have felt to finish where you did?

JON RAHM: Well, you know, I shot 6 over, I didn't feel like it. I played great golf, and it wasn't until No. 3, I made a triple bogey, I made a double on 4. Besides that I thought I played really good golf. It's just it's a U.S. Open. Mistakes are going to cost you. I let my guard down a little bit and it happened. We also had two rain delays. I was around even par when we got to 18, got a rain delay, three-putted after the rain delay. Then played 1 and 2, hit the tee shot on 3, rain delay, and after -- No. 3, 4, 5, those are not easy holes to play after not being able to warm up. That cost me a little bit.

But I learned. I think I teed off a little too on the defensive side. Tried to respect the golf course too much and not playing as aggressive as I did. Friday I needed another par round to make the cut, and that's what I did. I shot 1-under par. I thought I played a great U.S. Open. In three rounds, I shot 1-over, besides the first one, my first U.S. Open is not going to be that good. But I'm just happy to make the cut and gave myself a chance to finish best Am.

Q. Just some of your accomplishments this past year since playing a low Am at the last year's U.S. Open, talk about what this year has meant to you and how far you've come in the last year?

JON RAHM: Well, really, I mean, it's truly amazing to me to just look how things have changed. It's truly been one year. When the U.S. Open finished I was getting ready to go to Congressional. I was really thinking, well, I have six starts, hopefully I can get my seventh and maybe get my Tour card. That's what I was thinking or maybe get my Tour card. I wasn't thinking past Wyndham Championship.

The future was so unknown. There were so many options depending on how I did. To see how I've accomplished my goals on such a fast pace, faster than I thought, of course I wanted to be top 10 in the world some day. I didn't believe I could win, give myself chances to win Golf World championships, get into the top 10 in the same year. I thought after I won, but it wasn't in my mind at the beginning of the year. I accomplished so many things so far in this past year

that I can't help to be proud and thankful for the team I have, I wouldn't be able to do it without them.

Like I said, last year it was, well, let's go to Congressional, hope everything starts well.

Q. What does that do for your confidence coming into? Talking about the approach to this year, with those accomplishments under your belt as opposed to a year ago?

JON RAHM: Well, I would say I'm a much more experienced player. There's a lot of PGA Tour events that play really tough conditions, maybe not exactly U.S. Open-like, but playing tough conditions. So I think I'm maturing as a player, knowing more of my game and being able to make smarter choices. And I'm pretty sure that's going to help. The closest to a U.S. Open I had ever played was Nationals. And a lot of times you make decisions in NCAA golf, a lot of times you make decisions for your team, but not only for yourself.

I still had that college mindset that you have to the shoot 20-under to win, and Oakmont is not going to be a place to shoot any kind of under par really. So that's probably what's changed. I think I've learned a lot as a player. I gained a lot of confidence. My ball striking has improved a lot. So I hope I can keep it going.

Q. So this is a long golf course, if the USGA really wants they can stretch it out to almost 7700. As you approach tee shots, as you approach hitting into par-5s in two, what are you going to use to decide how aggressive you want to be in terms of how far you have to hit the ball, because I do have to hit the ball a long way in order to make a good score here?

JON RAHM: Well, I believe the wind is going to be an incredible factor. Those holes like No. 2, with no wind, someone with my length can maybe get over a little hill and hit it close to the green. But if there's wind involved -- sorry, you can choose to maybe go over or maybe be more conservative and hit to the right side of the fairway. When there's wind there's really not much choice. You're not going to get over, you have to hit driver. That will be a big difference.

If we're talking about par-5s, the risk-reward is something you need to think about. 14 is a great example. If they put the tees up, there's no wind, I hit a good drive, it might be reachable for me, but the odds of keeping that ball on the green are very, very slim, slim to none, because of all the slopes, how steep it is before. You can land it on the green and just go sailing past the green and go in the fescue grass and be in a horrible spot. You can end up in a water hazard. Unless it's a really good number, and I feel really

confident about it, I don't think it's a hole I'll go for. Unless they put the tee box 50 yards up, it would make it a lot easier.

The other par-5s, you have to analyze it. A lot of times it depends on how you feel at the moment. If it's 18 and I've been playing great all day, I've stroked my driver perfectly, well maybe I try to make an aggressive tee shot and see from there.

I can't tell you right now how things are going to work out because I don't even know. My caddie and I a lot of times make decisions, and then we go to a tournament and change the strategy completely because we feel more confident or less. Starting with the weather, and then par-5s, based on the tee shot, and risk-reward, obviously, you've got to see how penalizing a miss can be.

Q. You played a practice round with Mason today, future ASU player, someone who looks up to you a lot. What impressed you most about him and what advice did you give him as he prepares for play his first major?

JON RAHM: Well, we talked little bit. It was funny, because obviously he was quite nervous at first. I remember when I played my first U.S. Open or my first PGA Tour event I was nervous, as well. And I was talking to him and I was like, you know, Mason, you get to that first tee, you're going to be absolutely terrified, just assuming you're going to be terrified, it's going to be the scariest thing you've ever faced. I told him to grip the club soft and hit it as hard as you can. Get that first swing out of the way. Luckily for you it's a par-5.

I had a tee at No. 10 at Oakmont where you have to hit the fairway and it's not an easy shot. You're lucky you have a par-5 and have to hit a big swing. And also some things we all do, I just try to see -- maybe do too much, learn too much about the golf course, hitting shots there, here, two shots off the tee, two shots on the fairway, chipping and putting.

I told him, listen, this is a marathon, and the U.S. Open is like an uphill marathon. It's going to be mentally exhausting, it's going to be a long week. Take it easy. Play the golf course -- plan the strategy, don't -- if you want to work on your touch, maybe do it on the chipping green, don't play 18 holes every day, because you're going to run out of steam when you get to Thursday. And then the main thing at U.S. Opens, be mentally tough, stay patient.

Q. As you were practicing today what did you make of the rough? Is it fair? Is it something that you're going to be able to hit out of if you hit into it?

JON RAHM: You're talking the rough that's four inches

or the actual fescue grass? I didn't step in it. I'm like there's no need to injure my wrist this week before I tee off.

It really looks very penalizing. Unless you get extremely lucky where you might be able to move it 120 yards, it looks like a 30-yard chip out to the fairway. I mean I think we've all seen the videos on social media that Kevin Na and Rickie Fowler and other players posted. It doesn't look easy to move out of there. It wouldn't surprise me if someone losses a ball has to take an unplayable.

Q. Did you learn anything else about the course today, that you might not have known, anything else that you were surprised about, positive, negative, that you're going to have to be ready for on Thursday?

JON RAHM: Well, no. I feel like it's a course that, for what I've seen online it's a little bit -- it's like a links golf course on steroids, everything is a little bigger. What I do believe, but I think it's U.S. Open, they expect our best. It's big greens, big slopes, you have to be able to lag putt. With all the slopes going off the green, you might miss the green by three feet, roll off to 30 feet and being able to putt those, or even if you want to bump, run, chip it close, it's going to be important. We saw that at Pinehurst. It worked out pretty well that week. And they're probably doing the same thing, this is a different golf course and a different player. But I do believe having that feel for low putts is very important.

Q. Can you talk about what it meant for you to see Sergio win the Masters?

JON RAHM: Well, it was something incredible. I mean not only is he a friend, but it was a long time coming. And for him especially. He's been so close so many times. And I feel like two players, took a lot of majors to win for Padraig Harrington and Tiger beat a lot of people in those majors. But he's been so close so many times. With all the places, and all the possible days he could have won, being Seve's birthday at Augusta, I don't think you would ever get much more special than that for him, especially being a course where he struggled mentally in the past. He's expressed his thoughts and to be able to see him succeed the way he did, I thought it was absolutely incredible. To make that par on 12 and come back with birdies on 14, eagle 15. And finish the way he did. It was absolutely amazing. We all knew he was one of the best in the world, more than the best ever. And I think he's proven to everybody that he's much more than we all thought. He's always been one of my idols, one of the people I looked up to and I think he's probably taken a lot of weight off his shoulders. And as a Spaniard it was something amazing. I can't tell you how happy Spain was. I wasn't there, but I think it was

a huge moment, probably since Seve won the first major. It was almost 20 years, since 1999. So I was extremely happy for him. I can't really explain it of. It's hard to tell, because he's such a great guy, such a good player. I can't explain how happy I am that he was able to get it done and that I was able to be there to be able to see it.

Q. Can you talk about how it instills confidence in you, knowing him and seeing him break through, how it might have impacted you, besides your joy for him, for you as a golfer?

JON RAHM: It just motivates me. We've played together a bunch this year. I've played against him in the match play. He's beat me many times. I've seen him play. And I see what he can do. And I know what I'm capable of. It makes me believe that I do think I'll be able to win a major some day. And it makes me want to work harder. A close friend of mine winning a tournament motivates me. A Spaniard winning a major is always going to motivate me.

Q. You said a minute ago starting out the year, the U.S. Open last year a little too defensive, which is probably normal for people playing the first time. When you went to Congressional for your first tournament as a pro, did you find your way wanting to ease your way into it or were you wanting to kill everybody right away, literally speaking?

JON RAHM: I just wanted to play the best golf possible. Little did I know that I was going to be leading after the first round. Congressional has also hosted U.S. Opens, it was not an easy course, but after the U.S. Open at Oakmont it seemed like it. I know the rough is a little thick, but nothing compared to last week. So I got there, tried to hit every drive as hard as possible. Luckily for me I was hitting it great, so I had a lot of short irons in, and allowed me to be aggressive. I really didn't have anything in mind. I just wanted to play the best possible to get my Tour card.

Q. At what point over the course of this one year span did you find yourself feeling like you were expecting to win every week, wanting to win every week? Did it come right away or did it take Torrey or what point in the year do you think?

JON RAHM: I don't expect to win every week. But certainly a compete to win. When I showed up at Congressional I wanted to win. I think I also showed it on 17 when I was in the rough, one shot back of Billy Hurley, a lot of people might have laid up or tried to give themselves a better chance to make par, finish second or get almost all the money needed to take the card. I wasn't thinking about the card at that point. All I had in mind was winning the tournament. Same in Canada, when I hit the shot in 18, it was a 5-iron. I took it right at it, I didn't hesitate. When I'm playing I

don't think of anything else than doing the best I can do to win a tournament.

Q. This is not a U.S. Open question, per se, but is it true that when you first came over here to ASU, you didn't speak much English? How did you get so good at English so quickly?

JON RAHM: Well, I didn't know much English. I did make some extra effort in Spain to learn English, but my level wasn't good enough to be able to live a life in English. It was hard. When people talked to me it was a long process for me to translate that sentence from English to Spanish, understand it, think what I wanted to say and translate it from Spanish to English. It was at least a 10 to 15 second process where I just felt really awkward. A lot of times I responded yes or no when the question was nothing related to yes or no. And it really was a struggle.

I mean I'll never forget my first class, I went to micro economic principles, the class had about 365 students, the teacher was speaking with a microphone, I could not understand a single word. The first month, yeah, it was a little bit uphill.

Funny enough I was in business communications and I changed to just communications, as ironic as it may sound. One of my first classes was public speaking, and that helped me out a lot. All I had to do was just speak in public. It was a little harder for me, but I've never been shy to speak in public. So having to practice and all the reading I had to do in communications and all the writing helped me out to develop my English. And again, as weird and funny as it may sound, one of my teammates really got me into rap music, and memorizing those lyrics helped out with enunciation and pronunciation. Having to be able to say those words at a fast pace helped me out a lot. I'm not kidding.

BETH MAJOR: To be fair, I think macro economics would get a lot of blank stares from a lot of us, as well.

Q. You think you can do a demonstration of your rapping?

JON RAHM: There will be a lot of sensoring of the cameras if I have to say that. I'm not good enough raper to control myself from saying the bad words and I don't think I can do it now. I don't want to say the wrong things. I can't control myself, it's just what I have memorized.

BETH MAJOR: Jon, thank you so much for joining us today. Best of luck throughout the week.