

Desert Classic

Wednesday, January 16, 2019

Justin Rose

Press Conference



MARK WILLIAMS: We would like to welcome Justin Rose to the 2019 Desert Classic. You're coming in obviously as the reigning FedExCup champion, this is your first start of the calendar year, and also No. 1 in the world. Can you share your thoughts on maybe why you came to the Desert Classic and started your year this year.

JUSTIN ROSE: Absolutely. I played lot of golf towards the end of last year and needed a little bit of a break. My original plan was to play in Maui and keep the momentum going and then maybe take a bit of a break in February but, yeah, it just came around too quick. So I felt like the extra couple weeks at home, bedding in a little bit of new equipment, I just didn't feel ready to leave on the 28th of December down to Maui. So I also felt like it was important for me to play before getting to San Diego. That's an event that I've found is a tricky one to play for being your first event after a break. So this fitted in perfectly. Obviously it's great golf here in the desert, wonderful conditions generally to play in, the courses are in good shape, you can get a good read on your game and if can play well you get some birdies going. So I just felt like it was the perfect place to start things up.

MARK WILLIAMS: You mentioned the new equipment. You also have a different caddie from your regular caddie. You mentioned yesterday that Fooch was getting ready for surgery. Can you talk about that a little bit and how and if that will affect you this week.

JUSTIN ROSE: Well yeah of course there's a few unknowns, there's always a settling in period with change generally. Obviously I believe that I've made some good decisions and some good changes and I feel confident about things, but yeah you never quite know until the scorecard's in your hand. So there will be a lot of learning this week and potentially tweaking next week. So equipment-wise I'm in a great spot, now it's just about going out and playing and getting comfortable with it. Fooch, yeah, he's obviously undergoing a heart procedure tomorrow while we'll be on the golf course, that's obviously a difficult day for us, but couldn't have a better guy to help me out for the few weeks that I'm going to need him, Gareth Lord, who used to caddy for Henrik Stenson. As you know Henrik and I have gone head-to-head together and we have also been shoulder-to-shoulder in Ryder Cups and what have you and played the Zurich Classic. So

always felt like my pairing with Henrik wasn't just a two-man pairing it was a four-man pairing with Henrik, with Fooch and Gareth Lord as well. So he's a guy that I'm very comfortable on the golf course with and he's a great mate of Fooch's and I'm happy that he's doing us both a favor, me and Fooch.

MARK WILLIAMS: Questions, please.

Q. At what point in your career did you come to the realization that you could be the No. 1 player in the world?

JUSTIN ROSE: You always kind of hope and hope and believe in yourself and you always think that it's a possibility, but I think I never really gave it a lot of thought until about May last year where, at THE PLAYERS, there was a scenario that -- it was one of those unlikely ones but if I won the tournament and Justin Thomas and Dustin finished 45th whatever it was, that I could get to No. 1 in the world. And I was like, wow, I'm getting close. Once it's on the radar it becomes a goal. But obviously you only get to No. 1 in the world by playing consistently good golf and that's always been my goal is to try to get the best out of my game week-in week-out, but once it presented itself it became a big goal and it's been fantastic milestone in my career to have got there. But I feel like having got there now it's about sort of letting that -- letting it go a little bit in the sense of I need to focus on other goals now and if I achieve those other goals then I'll remain at the top. But it's certainly been, once it presented itself, I'm delighted I was able to get there.

Q. There's been a ton written in the last couple of years about the youth movement on the TOUR. Can you talk about the difference in the young players coming out on TOUR now from when you came, when you turned professional 20 years ago, is there a difference and I mean including your self too, is there a difference in the quality of players or the type of players who are coming out now?

JUSTIN ROSE: Well, I think for me when I turned pro I was 17, just about to turn 18 and the next youngest guy on TOUR at the time was Steve Webster, who I believe was 23. So there was a five year gap there. I can guys are turning pro out here and they have a few peers already, obviously even though they're rookies they will come out and there will be two or three other guys in a similar situation who they have played college

golf with. And also I think that they get to see success of guys they've been to college with who might be a year or two older. So they will see that guy kind of graduate and start to win on the PGA TOUR and they think, I'm as good as that guy, so that gives them a little bit of belief. But I also think we're sort of looking at an era now that's been heavily influenced by Tiger. These are the kids who when they were 7,8, 9,10 years old were watching Tiger dominate and play very aggressive golf. So their lens of what they think golf looks like at the top would have been shaped by Tiger and I think that's probably where they come out just probably a little bit more aggressive maybe and ready to go than it would have been sort of back in my day, so to speak, where maybe the mentality was you learn your trade a little bit more and you kind of get towards your peak in the 30s. But yeah, it's hard to know exactly why, but I think that they're spurring each other on and there's a great camaraderie amongst them, Jordan and Rickie and Justin Thomas. Obviously they're still the young guns but they're beginning to graduate now to the slightly older age of the young guns spectrum.

Q. You were almost 30 before you won your first event on the PGA TOUR. And now you've moved to that next level at No. 1. How difficult is it to maintain that level of play or do you need to keep do you feel in your mind you need to keep improving a little bit just to stay where you are now?

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, you have to keep looking forward. You have to keep trying to improve. When you asked me about my goals it's not about -- I can't control whether I win a tournament or not. Obviously you can come up against a guy who has a miracle week, he shoots 25-under par and he's hard to beat that week. But you can control -- you can only control the variables at your disposal. So when I look at my game I think there's, we call it filling the gaps, where can I fill the gaps. There's elements and you can use statistics or you can just use gut feel, but where can you get better. I always put a lot of hard work in areas that I can get better. Last year I put a lot of time and attention to my putting, that turned around, that really helped me play the consistent golf that got me to No. 1. So clearly you got to take care of what's working too and you need a good process to enable to do that. You need to understand what's working as well, so you kind of have to have the balance of, you can't just go out every day and sort of hope that it's going to be a good day, you need to know that you've taken care of business in all the variables in order to play consistent golf. And then when things line up and you have a little bit of luck as well those are the weeks that you typically win.

Q. You talked about taking a break at the end of the year. How long was the break and were you able to do enough work with the new clubs in there to feel really confident starting the year?

JUSTIN ROSE: So, yeah, so I played in Indonesia, which was until the 17th of December. Then went to Finland with the family to Lapland and that was five days. That was until about the 22nd of December. Then in London through until new year. So really didn't touch a club there for two and a half, three weeks. And the last week or so just been hitting balls. And so there's been very little time on the golf course to be honest with you. That's why I'm looking forward to this week and really getting out there. And the swing feels good, moving well, hitting the ball well, but it's now part of playing here is getting back on the golf course, getting tournament sharp again.

Q. Speaking of that, you did play here several times about a decade ago. But -- well except for La Quinta Country Club those were different golf courses. A lot of the younger American players played the Stadium Course in Q-School here. I don't think you've ever seen that golf course before this week, have you?

JUSTIN ROSE: No and I've seen it via golf cart and walking it. It's hard to it's a hard tournament to prepare for it's hard to go out there and play three practice rounds and do all your range work and all the other commitments that come along with it. So I think this week I'm going to rely a lot upon strategy, my caddie, the yardage book and building a plan as we go around it because, yeah, like I said, it's hard to learn -- it's tough to learn a golf course in a day anyway, so I think sometimes you are better off just having one clear visual, having one game plan and going out and committing to it rather than -- you never quite know the conditions that you're going to face on the day. You can play the practice round with a northerly wind and the next day you play in a southerly wind and it feels totally different anyway. So I haven't paid too much attention to try to learn each individual golf course. I'm going to trust the fact that on Thursday I'm going to be free and fresh and ready to play. But yeah I've always enjoyed this golf course, this tournament. I always enjoyed the Palm Springs area and the style of golf that it gives you. So La Quinta, I think is just one of the great courses. It's the kind of golf course that you would love to be a member of. You could play in two and a half hours, the tee boxes are right off of each green, it's just a great place to be.

Q. You normally have this weather though, right?

JUSTIN ROSE: This is perfect. Right on.

Q. When you look at last year what are some specific areas you do want to improve on?

JUSTIN ROSE: I think for me just my perception of short game and wedge play and maybe 150, 160 yards in. Iron play's always been a strength of mine but I felt like I can actually get a lot better at it. My mid to long iron play is really good. So I would say the scoring clubs really is what I feel I could improve on this year.

MARK WILLIAMS: All right, Justin, I appreciate you coming in. Thanks for being gracious with your time today.

JUSTIN ROSE: You got it. Thanks.

Q. And then where is the FedExCup at home? Do you have a trophy room or displayed somewhere or where is it?

JUSTIN ROSE: I got like a little bar upstairs and it's kind of had just cabinetry built-in there and it actually fitted in literally to the millimeter, you kind of slid it into the box in which it sits and it like scraped the edges either side. So it was like made to measure. I found a good home for it.

MARK WILLIAMS: Speaking of the FedExCup, what sort of reaction have you had from your peers since winning it. You said you've been on vacation a little bit, but tournaments you've played since then.

JUSTIN ROSE: Obviously it's a big deal. Everyone congratulates you and everyone is striving for it, it's a big deal on TOUR, it's a pig prize. It's the candy on, it's the cherry on top of a great season. So yeah all the boys congratulatory and slightly jealous, so it's good.

Q. I know that you're in Honma deal has got a lot of attention, but I noticed you had a new putter in the bag as well. Just curious how the partnership came about and what it is about that putter technology that you like, because it looks different than a lot of other putters that we see on TOUR.

JUSTIN ROSE: Yeah, whether I play it tomorrow still remains to be seen, but I'm feeling good with it. Asix1, it's a putter that basically has the center of gravity and the sweet spot perfectly in line which basically means it has zero twist, it wants to remain square to the plane in which you're putting all the time. A face balanced putter doesn't always mean that it wants to stay square, right. When you hold it, the face point to the sky. We don't putt to the sky, we putt with the shaft in a different plane to that. So it's got some great technology and that piqued my interest quite awhile back. Obviously being 14 clubs previously I couldn't use it, but that was one of the big reasons why I was looking for a bit more flexibility going forward, so I can move with the times a little bit. If there's areas of my bag that I want to experiment with I now have that little bit of flexibility in there to do that. And the putter was one part of it. So I've been working hard with Asix1 to make it look a little bit more come conventional than it used to. From a player's point of view you still need something that's confidence-inspiring to look down on. So that's been a process that's taken the best part of 18 months behind the scenes.