



Spanish pride

Two-time Major champion and Ryder Cup star Jon Rahm charges onward, driven by the pain experienced in Paris at the 2024 Olympic Games, writes golf expert *Brian Pinelli*

Fiercely, passionate, and proud of his Spanish heritage, Jon Rahm captivates audiences both on and off the course.

The 30-year-old professional golfer and former World No.1 ranked player has flourished at the game's greatest global events. Rahm, who hails from northern Spain's Basque Country, holds the distinction of being the only European golfer to have won both the prestigious Masters and U.S. Open tournaments.

Rahm wore his heart on his sleeve after narrowly missing out on Olympic medals at the Paris Games last summer. He essentially apologised to his entire country, after a disappointing tie for fifth-place finish, ending four strokes behind

Left: Rahm finished tied-14th, three-under par at The Masters in April 2025, recovering from a disappointing three-over in the first round to post one-under, two-under and three-under

Olympic gold medallist Scottie Scheffler and two shots from bronze medal position. "I don't remember the last time I played a tournament and felt this – I don't normally feel like I let myself down, but to not get it done for the whole country of Spain is a lot more painful than I'd like it to be," said Rahm, who was seeking Spain's first Olympic golf medal.

After shooting rounds of 67, 66, and 66, and entering Sunday's finale with a share of the lead alongside Tokyo 2020 Olympic champion Xander Schauffele at 14-under, Rahm closed with a disappointing 70. "I've gotten the question where this tournament would rank in my opinion or what it would feel like to win and I think by losing today, I'm getting a much deeper appreciation of what this tournament means than if I would have won any medal," he said.

For the world's premier golfers, it is not often that one represents their country or continent – only at select and infrequent events like the Ryder

Cup and Olympic Games. "I've been very honoured to represent Spain in many tournaments and to not get this done stinks," Rahm said candidly, about the result in Paris.

"What it represents and what it could have been for Spain is what makes it more painful."

But Rahm's Olympic faux pas in France was an aberration on an otherwise stellar career.

A master of scrupulous course management and posing a flair for the dramatic, Rahm seizes opportunities with the poise of a Spanish matador.

Rahm thrived at the 2023 Ryder Cup, having led Team Europe to a decisive 16½ - 11½ victory at the Marco Simone Golf & Country Club in Rome.

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The feisty Spaniard posted a 2-0-2 record, halving American World No. 1 Scheffler in the final round head-to-head match.

Nicknamed "Rahmbo," his magical ball-striking and mind-blowing talent was on display in his singles match versus Scheffler. He executed a seemingly-impossible 180-yard approach shot from a sloped lie in tricky rough and over a dangerously close wooden bridge on the 10th hole. With sheer power and ultimate confidence, Rahm sent the ball on a trajectory narrowly clearing the bridge and firmly landing in the center of the green. It was a match-saving escape that would have astounded Houdini.

Rahm shared his feelings about the significance of representing one's country as opposed to playing weekly tournaments offering multi-million dollar prize purses. "Two of the most meaningful weeks in my career are two events where you make no money – the Ryder Cup and the Olympics," he said.

"I feel like it's the ultimate prize representing your country and that's what makes it so special."

The Europeans will seek to defend their Ryder Cup title this September at the famous Bethpage Black Golf Course, just outside of New York City. ➤



Despite his heroics in Italy, Rahm is not assured a spot on the European squad. In a move questioned by many pundits in the golf world and despite his previous assertions that LIV Golf wasn't enticing to him, the Spanish megastar joined the PGA's rival golf tour in December 2023.

Rahm darted out to an auspicious start and ascended to become the 2024 LIV Golf individual champion. He finished among the top 10 in all 15 starts with the league over the past year and change.

Despite Rahm's strong and steady play, the former World No. 1 golfer has fallen to No. 69 in the Olympic World Golf Ranking (OWGR). LIV Golf events are not compensated with OWGR points, so players in the Saudi-backed league can

only ascertain ranking points while playing in majors or events on recognized tours, including the Asian Tour and DP World Tour. Data Golf – which has ranked LIV Golf players alongside those on the PGA Tour – has placed Rahm as the fifth-best golfer, currently.

In what has developed into a convoluted scenario, Rahm's golfing future hangs in the balance as he appeals potential sanctions levied against him by the DP World Tour for participating in LIV Golf events.

His pending appeal permits him to continue to tee it up on the European circuit. Ryder Cup qualification rules require a minimum of four starts on the DP World Tour for players to be eligible for the bi-annual team event. It remains uncertain when a third-party arbiter will issue a definitive ruling. "I don't know what's going to happen in the future, but I can tell you my plan is to be on that team at Bethpage," Rahm told reporters at the Hero Dubai Desert Classic, in January.

"I'm hoping they don't try to settle the appeal before the Ryder Cup. I don't think that would be good for anybody, but my plan is to be at Bethpage."

Reaching the pinnacle of his sport as the world's top ranked golfer in July 2020, Rahm enjoyed an ephemeral view from the top for a cumulative 52 weeks. He last relinquished the position to Scheffler on 21 May, 2023. Rahm is only the second Spaniard to accomplish the milestone, following his legendary countryman Seve Ballesteros, who first climbed to the top of the sport in April 1986. He currently has 22 career professional victories, including 12 on the PGA Tour.

Rahm has certainly overcome adversity in his ascension to becoming the premier golfer on the planet. Born with a clubfoot, a condition which ➤



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**Above: Rahm finished the 2023 Ryder Cup victory in Rome unbeaten, winning two and halving two, including his singles match with current World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler
Left: Putting out in Madrid**



required immediate surgery after birth and left him with limited mobility in his right ankle, Rahm has worn specially-adapted golf shoes since his youth. “I was born with a clubfoot on my right leg, which means that my right leg up to the ankle was straight and my foot was 90 degrees turned inside and basically upside down,” Rahm explained to Golf Digest. “So when I was born, they basically relocated, pretty much broke every bone in the ankle. I was casted within 20 minutes of being born from the knee down.”

Above: Rahm signing autographs prior to the 2024 PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky

Right: Winning on his way to a maiden European Tour title at the 2019 Mutuactivos Open de Espana, Golf European Tour played at Club de Campo Villa de Madrid

“I think every week I had to go back to the hospital to get re-casted. So from knee down, my leg didn’t grow at the same rate. I have very limited ankle mobility in my right leg. It’s a centimeter and a half shorter, as well.”

Overcoming the birth defect, Rahm prospered at an early age helping his native Spain win both the 2011 European Boys’ Team Championship and the 2014 European Amateur Team Championship. “I learned at a very young age that I’m going to be more efficient at creating power and being consistent from a short swing. If I take it full to parallel, it might create more speed, but I have no stability. My ankle just can’t take it.”

The long-hitting Basque golfer attained his first major title at age 26, winning the 2021 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines, in California. Rahm birdied the final two holes to edge Louis

Oosthuizen by one shot. He became the fourth Spanish golfer to win one of pro golf’s four majors, joining Ballesteros (5), José María

Olazábal (2), and Sergio Garcia (1). Rahm dedicated the victory to his idol, the late Ballesteros. His second major title came at Augusta National Golf Club, in Augusta, Georgia. In April 2021, he won the Masters Tournament by four strokes over multiple major winners Brooks Koepka and Phil Mickeson. The Spaniard once again demonstrated his resilience as he was forced to complete 30 holes on Sunday, due to a third round weather delay. Rahm won the prestigious Masters’ Green Jacket, despite teeing off early on Sunday morning, four shots adrift of Koepka.

No matter what the future brings for the iconoclast Spaniard, Rahm’s legacy within the sport is cemented. There is no argument there. And he has undoubtedly made his entire country proud.

Rahm, who played collegiate golf at Arizona State University, resides in Scottsdale, Arizona with his American wife, Kelley Cahill and their two young sons Kepa and Eneko. ■

