

ALTAF QADRI/Associated Press

Jon Rahm of Spain is one of the high-profile golfers who may have limited options as LIV Golf dissolves in bankruptcy filings.

Road for LIV players to return is under construction

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The end of LIV Golf is to be sorted out in a New Jersey bankruptcy court with the next hearing in just over two weeks. The future of LIV players could be even more complex, with so much to be determined 900 miles away at PGA Tour headquarters in Florida.

PGA Tour CEO Brian Rolapp previously scheduled a virtual news conference Nov. 17, the day after a board meeting. The topic is to be more details of the new competitive model for 2028, not how, when or why to bring back players from LIV.

So how long Jon Rahm's only option is the European tour or what becomes of Bryson DeChambeau are topics not likely to be discussed, much less decided.

Rolapp is big on meritocracy, and Adam Scott offered thoughts along those lines in Abu Dhabi.

"I think the fairest thing is that they all re-establish themselves in the system they want to go to," he said in an interview with Today's Golfer. "They left and gave up those privileges. I think they should re-qualify themselves, ideally. That's how I would see it. That seems logical and sensible."

Rolapp has not been willing to discuss the return of LIV players until they are relieved of their contracts. LIV said Wednesday in a bankruptcy hearing it would not go forward with a new version and instead begin the process of shuttering operations.

The same day, the judge approved Rahm's separation from LIV Golf. He's officially free and clear.

"I have yet to have a discussion with the PGA Tour to see if there's any path back for next year," Rahm said this week in Abu Dhabi, where he shares the 36-hole lead. Free, indeed.

The last public comments from DeChambeau came in a "Figuring Out" podcast released on Halloween in which the two-time U.S. Open champion remained bullish on LIV 2.0. "It's going to be done right and this is going to be a league that exists hopefully forever," he said.

Rahm and DeChambeau are the two biggest names. Often overlooked is Dustin Johnson, a former world No. 1 and two-time major champion and the one guy PGA Tour players said they missed. His manager, David Winkle at Hambric Sports, said Friday the 42-year-old Johnson has been testing equipment and is "hungry to play against the best competition available to him."

Rahm and Tyrrell Hatton, a four-time Ryder Cup player, have status on the European tour. DeChambeau and Cameron Smith, who won the British Open at St. Andrews in 2022, also have access to membership as major champions in the last five years.

They must decide in the next 10 days. For so many others, it's a waiting game.

PATH TO PGA TOUR

The tour currently has a one-year ban from a player's last LIV appearance, so that would be lifted on Aug. 24, 2027, assuming there are no other disciplinary matters. That could include being part of the group that sued the tour.

Where it gets complicated is the move to the new model in 2028. The categories for the Championship Series and the lower Challenger Series no longer include past champions — LIV had 28 players who have won on the PGA Tour.

There is a one-time exemption for top 50 in career money. Charles Howell III is currently at No. 42 with some breathing room. But to use that exemption requires 15 starts in 2027, and Howell won't be eligible next year.

There also is no mention of life members for 20 career wins — Johnson achieved that before going to LIV.

And while Rolapp has noted he wasn't around when players bolted from the PGA Tour to take the Saudi riches, he still reports to a wide membership, many of whom want to see defectors punished.

"There are 225 guys with tour cards," Xander Schauffele said. "And if you sat down and interviewed all of them, you're going to get probably three or four boxes of how guys feel. Some guys don't care, some guys are really ticked off, some guys want them to have a huge fine, some guys would let them back tomorrow."

PATH TO EUROPEAN TOUR

Hatton and Victor Perez have status in Europe from having won elite Rolex Series events. Adrian Meronk and Laurie Canter have status from winning tournaments with at least a $2 million prize fund, and lower down the priority list are David Puig and Elvis Smylie, who won tournaments with small purses.

The top 40 in career money, another category, is where to find the likes of Louis Oosthuizen, Sergio Garcia, Martin Kaymer and Paul Casey.

The European tour is making available sponsor exemptions to LIV players in run-of-the-mill events that wouldn't squeeze out loyal members.

PATH THROUGH EUROPEAN TOUR

With two tournaments left in the season, three former LIV players are in position to be among the leading 10 players in the Race to Dubai who get PGA Tour cards — Eugenio Chacarra, Patrick Reed and Bernd Wiesberger.

That seems like the prudent path — right now. Still to be determined is the outcome of a new PGA Tour alliance with the European tour that created that program. Early indications are there won't be that many cards offered for 2028.

UK

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the ball as good as anybody for sure."

Stein attributed some of Tennessee's dip in points to rule changes that have allowed defenses to substitute more regularly and slow tempo offenses. But those rules existed last season, too, when Tennessee ranked sixth nationally in points per game (39.8).

At least part of Tennessee's offensive dropoff — the Volunteers are averaging 72 fewer yards per game than last season — can be attributed to inconsistent quarterback play. Heupel has started two different quarterbacks this season and has yet to confirm a starter for Saturday game.

Sophomore George MacIntyre has started the past three Tennessee games but has thrown just two touchdowns with three interceptions and lost a fumble late in the South Carolina loss. Freshman Faizon Brandon opened the season as the starter but has not played since being benched Oct. 3 against Auburn.

UK INJURY REPORT

Stein acknowledged in his Tuesday news conference that if Kentucky had a game last week during the bye, the Wildcats likely would have been without multiple key players due to injury, but Wednesday's SEC availability report brought good news.

Backup defenders Antwan Smith, Jaden Smith and Grant Grayton, who are all dealing with longer term injuries, remain out. Freshman linebacker Justyn Hartley, who has primarily contributed on special teams, also is out this week.

Freshman cornerback Isaiah McMillian, who was injured on a play that was flagged for targeting against Vanderbilt, is listed as questionable. Outside linebacker Sam Greene, who missed the Vanderbilt game, is listed as probable.

Running back CJ Baxter, who did not play at Oklahoma and recorded just one carry against Vanderbilt before being sidelined by a shoulder injury, and right tackle Malachi Wood, who was sidelined in the Vanderbilt game, were not included on the report, signaling they are available for Tennessee. Long snapper Cole Marszalek and defensive lineman Tyler Thomas, who both missed the Vanderbilt game, also were left off the availability report.

The return of Baxter, UK's leading rusher, could be particularly important for the Wildcats' hopes against Tennessee's vaunted defense.

"He's not the only one across college football, even on our team, that has shoulder pain," Stein said. "I think everybody at this point in the year probably does, and he's going to be ready to rock and roll

"Thought he had a really good last week (during the bye). Had a good day today (on Tuesday). So, looking forward to him competing."



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Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland plays his second shot on the 7th hole Friday during the second round of Abu Dhabi Golf Championship. He recorded 11 birdies on the day.

Rory roars back with 11 birdies in Abu Dhabi second round

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — Rory McIlroy rebounded from his first-round penalty controversy by making 11 birdies and shooting 9-under 63 at the Abu Dhabi Championship on Friday, leaving him one stroke off the lead.

Jon Rahm, Tyrrell Hatton and Francesco Laporta were all 12-under overall to share the lead after two rounds at Yas Links.

McIlroy had said even if he were three shots behind it's still "a much better position than I thought I would be."

On Thursday, McIlroy was handed a two-shot penalty after his first round when officials ruled he had improved his lie on a hole where he made double-bogey. He posted a 2-under 70 to be eight shots back of first-round leader Laporta of Italy.

"Before I left the course, I made peace with it. I didn't dwell on it," McIlroy said Friday. "I'd much rather be two shots worse off than be called a cheat. At least I went out today (and) it wasn't playing on my mind. I had a clear conscience and I could just go and play."

The Northern Irishman's second round started with a bogey but he made three birdies through the next six holes before five straight birdies from No. 9.

McIlroy's second bogey — on the 14th — was followed by three birdies on the final four holes.

"I did everything well again. I drove the ball well. I hit my irons well. I putted a little bit better," he said. "I saw a few more putts go in, which is something that I haven't been seeing for the last couple months."

He said he worked on his putting last week with Brad Faxon.

Hatton made eight birdies in his round of 65 but missed a par putt on the 16th.

"Obviously there's been a couple of mistakes, but overall compared to where I've been at over the last month and a half, it's nice to put a couple of decent scores together again," the Englishman said.

Alongside McIlroy one shot back were Englishmen Matthew Jordan and Sam Bairstow, as well as Poland's Adrian Meronk, a recent winner at the Alfred Dunhill Links Championship.

The two-week postseason playoffs on the European tour began with the 224th-ranked Laporta shooting 10 under to take a three-stroke lead over three players. Laporta managed just a 70 on Friday.

The subplot in this next-to-last event of the 2026 season is the fight for the Race to Dubai title, which crowns the No. 1 player on the European tour each year.

It looks to be down to McIlroy, Patrick Reed and Eugenio Chacarra, the current leader in the standings.

McIlroy is seeking a fifth straight Race to Dubai title to move level on the all-time list on eight with Colin Montgomerie, who won the award when it was called the Order of Merit.

PROGRAM

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Kentucky Derby Festival race director. "From first-time runners to seasoned athletes, the program provides free resources and support to help everyone feel prepared and confident on race day."

Norton Sports Health has been the title sponsor of the training program for the past 15 years.

"Helping people live healthier lives is at the heart of Norton Healthcare's mission, which is why we are pleased to once again offer the free Norton Sports Health training program," Russell F. Cox, president and CEO of Norton Healthcare, said in a news release issued Friday. "As runners prepare for one of Louisville's most anticipated annual traditions, we're proud to provide resources, guidance and support that can help them train safely and successfully from their first workout to the finish line."

Weekly in-person group runs are conducted Wednesdays and Saturdays with Norton Sports Health team members, including stretching and cross-training opportunities

In addition to a one-page, quick reference Official Training Plan, the program offers a downloadable official training manual available online plus nutrition plans.

The first 1,000 to register will receive a free tech shirt. Registration will remain open after all shirts have been claimed, but shirts are only guaranteed to the first 1,000 registrants, organizers said.

The program kick off is set for 5:30 to 8 p.m. Jan. 7 at the Kentucky Derby Museum. Norton Sports Health training runs begin Jan. 9.

Registration also is open for the 2027 Humana miniMarathon and Marathon, scheduled for Saturday, April 24. This marks the 54th miniMarathon and the 26th run of the Marathon.

Information is available at DerbyFestivalMarathon.com.

