

THE PLAYERS Championship

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Rory McIlroy

Quick Quotes

Q. What's it like stepping on to the 17th tee here and playing that hole?

RORY McILROY: I think if it was surrounded by grass and not water it would probably be one of the simplest par-3s that we play all year. Obviously it's not, and you're standing there, and for a par-3 that's 140, whatever, yards, it's more mentally challenging than the physical element of it.

The wind can swirl a little bit in that corner. Especially now with all the hospitality stands and everything, I think the wind can sort of bounce around in there, so you've got to sort of hit it at the right time.

It's just one of those holes where you try to get it on the right level, whether the pin is on top or down below, and hit it to 20 feet and then take your chances from there.

Play that hole and make four 3s during the week, you're pretty happy.

Q. Yesterday Xander was in there saying that Jay still has a long way to go to regain his trust. Do you feel like he's the right guy to be sort of the CEO, the leader of this new entity?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think so. You look at what Jay has done since he took over. The media rights deal, navigating us through COVID, the strategic alliance with the DP World Tour. I would say creating PGA TOUR Enterprises, we were just able to accept a billion and a half dollars in the business, people can nit-pick and say he didn't do this right or didn't do that right, but if you actually step back and look at the bigger picture, I think the PGA TOUR is in a far stronger position than when Jay took over.

Q. Do you think he's had kind of an unfair shake then?

RORY McILROY: I think some of the reaction to June 6th was warranted, but I think at this point it's eight months ago, and we all need to move on. We all need to sort of move forward and try to bring the game back together.



Q. Where does the 17th rank, in terms of memorable? I don't know if it's your favorite, least favorite, middle, whatever, but in terms of memorable where does this rank, whether it's Augusta, St Andrews, Pebble Beach?

RORY McILROY: I think it's very memorable. I think because of where it comes in the -- it's the penultimate hole, and I think it's an iconic hole. People think about this championship and this golf course, they automatically think about the 17th here and the island green. It has, it's become one of the most iconic holes in golf because of that.

Yeah, you're standing there tied for the lead or you have a one-shot lead on Sunday, you've got to stand up and make a good swing and try to get it over and done with.

It's right up there.

Q. Have you changed from your initial perception of the hole until now?

RORY McILROY: I think when I first came here as a 20-year old, it was like, well, it's only 140 yards, you should be able to hit something in close there and make birdie more times than not, but I think you realize over time that taking the prudent approach and hitting it into the middle of the green, again, as I said, having 20 or 25 feet every time is probably the right play.

Q. Do you want a good week or do you need a good week?

RORY McILROY: Both probably. It's not as if they've been -- yeah, middle of the road, 20th places or whatever it is, I'm not missing cuts, but at the same time, with how I've driven the golf ball the last three weeks, I should be contending in the tournaments that I've played.

Yeah, a little bit of work to do with the irons and trying to get those straightened out, but I feel like every other part of the game is in great shape. I'm driving the ball well. I feel like I figured out my putting last week and I putted well the last three days at Bay Hill. It's just taking advantage of the positions I'm putting myself in off the tee.



Q. (On being a past winner).

RORY McILROY: Yeah, fortunately, there's not many places I go now where I'm not a past winner, so it's nice.

Q. You were saying that you had an incredible feel with your driver, but it maybe wasn't translating to your irons. I wanted to learn a little bit more about what's going on there.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I have this amazing feeling with my woods at the minute. I know you saw a couple of tee shots yesterday. But when I try to recreate that feeling with the irons, it starts left and goes further left.

I think it's to do with you turn harder with a wood and you're sort of clearing harder, and then I think sometimes -- it's really, it's a feeling at the top in transition, and when I try to do it with an iron instead of a wood, I think it just sort of drops behind me. I love this feeling of firing my right arm down the target line, and I can do that with my woods really well, but then when I try to do that with my irons, the club face closes over and goes left. It's almost like two different swings.

I have a swing thought for my woods and I need a different swing thought for my irons, and that's what I've been working on over the last couple days.

Q. I have a question about you suggesting Scottie use a mallet, on TV, and now that he won by five, how daunting is that to have a guy who has been so successful tee to green now seems to be feeling it on the greens. Secondly, how often do you give advice to another player? Not Scottie, necessarily --

RORY McILROY: I'm not going to give him any more advice, that's for sure (smiling.)

Q. How often do you think that happens?

RORY McILROY: So I was asked the question, and I basically gave a response that was -- it's very hard to talk about other players. You don't want to say anything that's -- Scottie has had enough criticism about his putting over the -- he doesn't need me to -- you guys talk about it enough.

It was me basically trying to talk about myself more than talk about Scottie. It was like, okay, when I putted with a blade, I struggled. When I went to the Spider, I found a little more success and I was a little more consistent. I didn't know he was going to put it straight in the bag and win by five.

If people ask for advice, I'll certainly give them -- I don't feel like I need to be guarded or -- I think over the years, coming up through the ranks, people have been good enough to me if I've asked them for advice to give me advice, so I think I should be able to repay that to other people if they come to me.

Q. How would you characterize the last year and a half for you, on the board, off the board, kind of spokesperson, trying to win the next major, all that stuff, and are there times where you maybe in a quiet moment want the train to slow down a little bit?

RORY McILROY: I want the train to speed up so we can get this thing over and done with.

Q. I mean personally, in your journey.

RORY McILROY: It's been an education. I feel grateful that I was on the PGA TOUR board at the point in time when I was. I feel like it will stand to me down the line if I ever want to get deeper into the business side of things, whether that's in golf or in other domains.

But yeah, I think that it definitely took a -- it didn't really take a toll on my golf because I still feel like I played really good golf the last couple of years, but it took a toll on my time, time that I wanted to spend maybe doing other things, and that was a part of the reason why I decided to get off.

It's been an education. I've said this to you guys. I like being busy. I just like being busy doing my own things. It just got to the point -- it's different now, though. You've got two boards on TOUR. One is really a business board, and sort of that priority is growing the growth of the business of the PGA TOUR, and then the policy board, which I was on, was about making rules and slow play and whatever else.

The business board to me would be something -- if an opportunity came along in the future and I felt like it was the right time, would maybe be something that I would like to get involved in again.

Q. You've pretty much won everything but that next major in the last 10 years. How much does that build up in the back of your head? I think you said the next major will feel like your first major. How much has that built up for you?

RORY McILROY: It does, but then at the same time, I look at my record in the majors over the last couple of years, and I've definitely started to perform much more consistently in them.

Look, I'm under no illusion that the clock is ticking and it



has been 10 years since I've won one of them, and I've had chances, and those just haven't went my way. I just need to keep putting myself in those positions, and sooner or later it's going to happen.

Q. You had a conversation with Jordan following his comments on the PIF a month ago. Felt like Tiger made some similar comments to that at Genesis. Have you spoken to Tiger about that?

RORY McILROY: A little bit, yeah. I spoke to Tiger at Genesis a little bit, just about sort of everything, whether it be the PIF negotiations or SSG and equity and okay, how are we going to -- not we, how is the TOUR going to grow and go from two and a half billion in revenue to four billion. We're all part of the business now. We've all got these equity grants, so how do we make that equity grow so it benefits the players.

Q. You expressed a desire for more Signature Events last week in Orlando, and it's received some troubling reviews from some of your peers out here on TOUR. Can you explain the difference between Signature Events and what we used to have for decades with the WGC? It feels like the Signature Events give more opportunity to PGA TOUR players than ever before, but there seemed to be a lot of consternation last week?

RORY McILROY: I think when you've got a members' organization that's been in existence for 60 or 70 years, and the first mantra of that organization is playing opportunities, whenever people are perceived to have playing opportunities taken away from them, they're not going to like it.

I can understand that, absolutely. I think it's just the TOUR has been a certain way for so long, but I also think that the TOUR hasn't necessarily evolved with the changing times to make it a more compelling entertainment product and sort of trying to fit in with the sort of modern media and sports landscape.

I think back to that meeting in Delaware, and I think, okay, did we push too hard, did we hold the TOUR to ransom too much, the top players. You look at -- I think the Signature Events or the designated events, elevated, or whatever it is, they really worked last year. If you look at the leaderboards, you look at the ratings, I felt like they really, really worked in 2023, and for whatever reason, they're not quite capturing the imagination this year compared to last year.

I think, if I were to put my own perspective on it, I think it's because fans are fatigued of what's going on in the game, and I think we need to try to reengage the fan and

reengage them in a way that the focus is on the play and not on talking about equity and all the rest of it.

That's why I said, the sooner that this is resolved, I think it's going to be better for the game and better for everyone, the fans and the players.

Q. From a business perspective, it appears to be a much better product, but from a player perspective, are you still in favor of the qualifying criteria with the 30, 40 churn each year?

RORY McILROY: Absolutely. I think the more churn the better. I said last week, this is supposed to be the most competitive golf tour in the world, and I think you should need to have to prove yourself over and over again. You look at -- I don't want to take from other sports, but you look at tennis, for example, they have a one-year rolling ranking, not a two-year rolling ranking like we have in the OWGR, and I think it just -- it incentivizes the players not to get complacent basically, and I think that's really what I'm trying to talk about. That's what I talked about last week.

I'm all for giving the young guys opportunities. Like, I think there should be more opportunities for PGA TOUR U. I think there should be more opportunities for the Korn Ferry guys. It's the guys that get on TOUR, get comfortable and don't really -- that's where I think that the TOUR could do a better job of bringing the new talent in and sort of having these steady pipelines.

Q. Back to what you just said, Jay made more than two dozen references yesterday to the fans and reinvesting in them for what this new entity is going to be moving forward. What specific examples -- because you're probably one of the cornerstones of this -- can fans be excited about? What is coming in the next two to five years that will capture the imagination of golf fans?

RORY McILROY: So I think probably -- geez, from limited conversations with SSG and sort of what they're thinking, I think the on-site experience is something that they're going to heavily invest in. So trying to get more -- I don't think every week has to be like a Phoenix Open, but I think having it be more of an event.

You think of like Formula 1, for example, and it's like, you go there and it's a weekend of racing, but there's so much else going on, and you get 400,000 people in through the gates on any given weekend. So creating more events like that where it's a way to enhance the on-site experience for a fan. Even fans that don't necessarily watch golf week in, week out, but you try to bring them to a tournament, get them introduced, and I think that's one part.

Then I think the television experience, and I think Jay referenced this with PGA TOUR Studios up the street -- if I were a fan, I would want to watch the best players compete against each other week in, week out. To me, that seems like the lowest hanging fruit -- well, not the lowest hanging fruit, but basically, I think if you just unified the game and brought us all back together in some way, that would be great for the fans, I would imagine.

I think that would then put a positive spin on everything that's happened here, and like okay, get together, we all move forward, and I think people could get excited about that.

Again, I don't know what that looks like, and that seems like it's probably further away than it should be, but that's my perspective on it.

Q. How much does the onus fall on players like yourself to be more open to these opportunities and to be part of these fan engagement experiences?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so to me, like this is the problem with a members' organization. Things are created for the members. Then once those things are created, you've got to go sell those things to fans, sponsors, media. To me, that seems a little backwards. I think what needs to happen is you need to create things for the fans, for the sponsors, for the media, and then you have to go sell that to the players, tell them to get on board with that, because if they get on board and we're all part of the business now, if the business does better, we do better. That seems pretty simple to me.

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