

# The Memorial Tournament Presented By Nationwide

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Dublin, Ohio, USA

Muirfield Village

## Rory McIlroy

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Rory McIlroy to the 2020 Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide. Making your ninth start here at the Memorial, top 10 finishes coming in two of your last three starts here, so just a few thoughts on being back here at Muirfield Village this week.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's always good to be back. Muirfield is always a course that I've enjoyed playing, and the Memorial Tournament is always a tournament I've enjoyed being a part of. Obviously Jack does a great job in setting the course up for us every year, and obviously this year difference circumstances having the Workday event last week and then obviously coming into this week.

A bunch of the guys, they've played a few rounds on the course already. I got here on Monday and played 18 yesterday. I'm going to go out and play another nine this afternoon. But yeah, not much has really changed. A couple little -- I think a few bunkers have sort of changed from last year, a couple of new tee boxes, but for the most part it's still the same golf course.

Yeah, I'm excited. It was nice to take a couple weeks off after the Travelers. I was actually -- I had planned to play the Workday, but I just needed to do a little bit of work on my game, so I got my coach, Michael Bannon, over last week. It was the first time I'd seen him since the start of February, so it was nice to spend some time with him and get some good work done and feel a bit better about my game and my swing going into this week, and then obviously looking ahead to the next couple of months.

**Q. It looks like four players have the opportunity or potential to take over world No. 1 this weekend depending on how they finish. How significant or how important to you is maintaining that No. 1 position, or is it more --**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think since I started back, obviously the rankings have been frozen, and look, it's a different year. I sort of -- this might sound a little bad, but

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looking back on the first three events that I played, two of the courses I hadn't played before or hadn't played in a very long time. I sort of treated them as sort of dipping my toes back in the water again and seeing how things were and how things felt in terms of no crowds and how different it was, so I think those three weeks definitely give me a better understanding of how it's going to be going forward.

And yeah, so the ranking I'm not even think about. I'm just trying to play well. I played a little better at the Travelers. I had a chance on Sunday to finish higher than I did. I had a bit of a bad finish. But I feel like my game is definitely better now after that week that I had with Michael than it was then.

Yeah, I'm excited to get going. Obviously if I play well, then the ranking takes care of itself, and all I'm thinking about doing this week is playing well and putting up some good numbers.

**Q. Last year you made a couple comments about the scoring on the European Tour, saying the setups weren't hard enough and you were tired of shooting 15-under and finishing 26th or whatever it was. I'm just wondering what are your thoughts on the setups recently on the PGA TOUR? The scoring has been quite low.**

RORY McILROY: It's been very similar. I feel like the setups the last few weeks -- and some of it isn't in their control. You've got somewhere like Colonial that's usually played in May. It was now being played in late June. It's hot, it's bent greens, they have to water them, so the course is playing slow, the greens are soft. There's no real penalty for a short-side, if you short-side yourself and you miss an approach. So that's why everything is so bunched, right.

That's why whenever I said that last year about the European Tour, any given Sunday you've got, whatever, six, seven, eight guys at 20-under par, and it's sort of a bond fight at the end. The golf course isn't giving anyone a chance to separate themselves with the difficulty of it, and that's sort of what I was alluding to last year when I made those comments, and definitely the first few events have been a little bit the same way. You've got Colonial, Hilton Head, soft, slow, no real penalty for missing greens in the wrong spots. It was sort of easy to get it up-and-down.

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Travelers was a little better, I felt, and then obviously I wasn't at Rocket Mortgage. Obviously Bryson and Matt Wolff were able to separate themselves a little bit.

And then last week they obviously tried to keep this golf course soft and slow and that's why the scoring was as low as it was.

But I think you're probably going to find the scoring is going to be a little different this week. They're going to let the rough grow up weather depending. The greens are going to be a little firmer, and I would anticipate the scores not being quite as low.

**Q. Tiger was talking in here yesterday about watching Sunday, for example, the playoff between J.T. and Collin without fans, and he actually kind of made the comment that you're probably dealing with less pressure and it might be a little bit easier. Would you agree with that as far as coming down the stretch and what fans bring to the experience?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I think it's -- you can look at that two ways, right; for me, what I've experienced, I haven't necessarily been in contention the last few times that we've played without fans, but if anything I've realized personally that it's very hard for me to keep focus out here. I feel like when there's fans and there's that energy and the atmosphere, it's easy to get into that mindset that you need to get into, right, like that's what we're used to, that's what we do.

But when you don't have that, I felt the first three weeks my mind was wandering a little bit. Sort of easy to lose focus, easy to lose concentration. I think some of the mistakes I was making were because of that. It could go both ways, but I think fans or no fans, if you're in with a chance to win a tournament, I think you're going to feel it regardless. I'm sure J.T. and Collin felt it coming down the stretch and definitely in the playoff last week. I thought it was some of the most compelling TV I've watched all year. It was pretty cool to watch. Yeah, that moment on the 18th green when they both made those birdie putts would have been way better with fans, but it was still pretty cool to watch.

**Q. On a similar theme, Harding Park is going to come around quite quickly. Given what you know, how different or difficult is it going to be without anyone in the galleries? And given what we know about California, what's your level of comfort about going there just now with how things stand?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so as I said, I think the first three weeks that I played, Colonial, Hilton Head, Travelers,

looking back on them, they were three really good weeks just to see -- I think, again, for me the first three weeks were good just to get a feel for what it was going to be like, and now someone like Tiger hasn't experienced that yet, and maybe he's going to find it a little weird going out there tomorrow and not having anyone, especially with the amount of crowds that he has to deal with all the time when he plays. So it was a good -- it was just a good look at what we were all going to expect going forward, and as I just alluded to there about losing concentration and losing focus, I think you just have to work really hard to keep your mind on the task at hand and not let your mind wander because there's so many opportunities for it to wander because we're in big, open spaces and you're looking around, and you don't have that sort of tunnel of people to keep your focus.

So I think it was good to play the first few weeks just to get a feel of what it's going to be like. Look, California, there's a lot of places in the United States right now that are -- there's a lot of cases, and whether we're seeing -- whether this is the second wave or still part of the first wave. But again, I think there's no substitute for washing your hands and social distancing and making sure that you're doing the right things, and I think if everyone does that and everyone is responsible, I have no problem going to California and playing a golf tournament there.

**Q. Obviously in different circumstances we'd have been at Royal St. George's this week at the Open Championship, and I just wondered if you could kind of given up some of what the Open Championship in normal circumstances as an entity means to you.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, it means an awful lot. It was the first major championship that I ever attended. I played the junior Open Championship in 2004 and then went and watched the Open at Troon that year. And yeah, I mean, being where we're from, it's the biggest golf tournament in the world. Whether you go and watch it in person or you watch it on TV, the big yellow leaderboards, the Claret Jug, everything that goes along with it, yeah, I mean, look, it's a huge sporting occasion every summer. The fact that the Open is not on, Wimbledon is not on, yeah, it's sort of put a damper on things for sure. But it's unprecedented times, and hopefully everything goes back to normal this time next year and we're able to play at St. George's, and yeah, get back to playing the oldest and arguably the biggest golf tournament in the world.

**Q. Rory, you said that you brought Michael over; I'm just wondering how difficult that was, if it was difficult, and also, what did you guys work on?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it wasn't difficult. We were able to

get him a waiver to enter the U.S. through the PGA TOUR, like some of the other foreign -- like my caddie Harry or some of the other overseas players have done, and he stayed in my guest house at home there, and then we practiced at the Bear's Club, so we didn't leave the confines of the community, I guess. So Michael wasn't really comfortable going out or doing anything, so we were on the range and then back at the house, and that was really it.

It was good to see him because obviously I've sent him videos over the last few months and he can see what the swing is doing, but it's hard for him to see what the ball flight is and just all the sort of stuff that goes along with being a golf coach. So for him to see how I'm hitting it, what was going on, it was just a great thing.

If I'm getting technical, my club face was getting a little shut going on, my right arm was getting a little too much on top of the shaft instead of letting my right elbow fold and getting a little bit of external rotation in my shoulder. So there's a couple little things that we worked on, but it was really good to see him and I think very beneficial that I was able to spend that time with him.

**Q. Getting back to the fan question, a point was made the other day, we were talking to a couple of guys about Collin's putt which obviously kept the playoff alive on Sunday. How much more difficult is that putt if the fans are still going nuts after Justin's 50-footer?**

RORY McILROY: That's a great point. You know, you think of the commotion that would have been happening around that 18th green had there have been fans there. It probably would have taken Collin an extra two or three or four minutes to hit that putt just to let everyone settle down. So I think that there was no fans there definitely made that easier. Yeah, there's no doubt about that. I'm sure Collin would tell you the exact same thing. So yeah, look, there are just the little nuances that are happening with no fans and especially when you have guys in contention like that, yeah, it's an interesting point. I definitely think that putt that Collin had to make on top of Justin was a little easier because he didn't have to deal with 10,000 people around the green having to settle down again.

**Q. You said you kind of used the previous tournaments to kind of dip your toe back in the water. Do you feel like this is the first tournament where you really feel like you're in position to compete to win this thing and that your game is ready for that?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I believed going into the previous three events that my game was good enough, and there was spurts of it that were, right. I

shot 63 at Colonial, I was sort of in the last -- I think I was in the third to last group on Sunday there. I got off to a slow start but shot a couple decent rounds at Hilton Head, and then I opened up with 63 at Travelers, as well, and played pretty nicely the rest of the way, just didn't quite go low enough.

So there was spells in that three weeks that I felt like my game was there. It was just maybe a little erratic. I'd make a dumb mistake here or there, and then thinking back on it, as I was saying, there were just lapses in concentration, so it was more a mental thing. Looking back now, it was a great three weeks' learning experience just knowing what I know now going forward. So yeah, and look, this is a huge event. I saw a stat yesterday that this field is stronger than the last eight Masters tournaments in terms of strength of field, so there's a lot of obviously World Ranking points, and there's a lot to be focused on this week.

Yeah, Memorial Tournament is one of the biggest events we play all year, and looking forward, we have this, we've got a World Golf Championship in Memphis, we've got the first major of the season, the PGA, so we've got some -- and then the FedExCup Playoffs, so we've got some big events coming up, so it's definitely the start of a big run.

**Q. I was talking to your coach Michael Bannon about early specialization and then kids playing team sports, and he was talking about how it was always important for you to have a variety growing up. I was wondering your general thoughts on when kids should be specializing, or as a parent when parents should be pushing their kids toward one sport or keeping them in team sports, et cetera.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, have you read the book "Range" by David Epstein?

**Q. Yeah.**

RORY McILROY: I actually just finished it. So it's interesting, I think looking back on my childhood, I feel like I'm very fortunate that I played a few other sports and it wasn't just solely golf. I think more so maybe my development in golf might have been a little bit faster if I just specialized in it, but I think mentally by the time -- if I think back and think if I specialized in golf purely from the time I was a young kid, at this point I might be burned out from the game and I might not want to play it anymore. For me it was important to play other sports. I think when I have kids one day, if they want to play a sport, I'll encourage them to play as many sports as possible because -- and different ones, whether they're individual sports or team sports. Team sports builds a lot of character, as well, having to learn how to deal with different

personalities and all sorts of stuff. I would definitely encourage parents and kids that don't -- I wouldn't specialize too early; put it that way.

**Q. Do you think those other sports improved your actual golf game, too, or mostly just keep you mentally fresh?**

RORY McILROY: I think more mentally fresh. Maybe coordination-wise it helps a little bit. But mostly just getting away from it a little bit. Even now, look, we all need to get away from what we do most of the time just for a mental recharge, and I don't think that's any different for a kid that's 12 years old. I think they still need to be able to spend time with their friends and be a 12-year-old instead of beating balls for eight hours a day.

**Q. I'm wondering as a kid, did you play golf courses that didn't have rakes in bunkers, and more recently during the pandemic have you been playing golf courses without rakes, and how do you feel about playing golf courses without rakes in the bunkers?**

RORY McILROY: So as a kid I never played a golf course without rakes. That was something that never came up. I mean, my home golf course in Hollywood, it was very important to replace your divots, fix your pitch marks, rake bunkers, show good etiquette on the course, so that was always sort of engrained in us.

And yeah, obviously playing golf in this day and age with the little foam things in the cups and no rakes and stuff like that, if anything it probably speeds up play. If you're in a foot mark you just take it out and you splash out or whatever, and you don't have to remove flags from holes and stuff.

Yeah, if anything it probably makes recreational golf a little quicker, which I'm all for. So yeah, look, extraordinary times call for somewhat extraordinary measures in golf, and if that means no rakes and not touching the flagstick, then I'm cool with that.

**Q. I can sort of guess the answer here, but would you consider joining my movement to get rid of rakes in bunkers altogether?**

RORY McILROY: No. No, I would not. You're barking up the wrong tree here with that one.

**Q. I don't know how much attention you pay to Twitter, but there seem to be a lot of people in recent weeks talking about how Bryson has transformed the game and have him winning the next three majors before a ball has been hit. Does that irk you at all, and do you**

**think to yourself, I'm still the No. 1 in the world here?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I haven't been on Twitter for a long time. I scroll through Instagram a little bit from time to time, but I learnt long ago that Twitter is a very volatile place, golf or otherwise. No, I mean, look, I've seen the videos that Bryson has been putting up, and he looks like he's turned his living room into a golf laboratory, but look, he's doing what he believes is the right path forward for him.

And look, length is -- we're here at Jack Nicklaus's golf course, and Jack was the longest in his day, and it was a massive advantage, right. Length will always be an advantage in golf. It's just the way it is. Even if some of these people that are talking about changing equipment or changing the ball, the longest are still going to be the longest, and the longest are still going to have an advantage.

What he's doing is very impressive. He always had speed. I remember playing with Bryson back in 2016 in Abu Dhabi. It was a sponsor's invite. I think he might have just turned pro, and he had speed back then. I mean, when he wanted to, he could hit it long. He's maybe put on a little bit, but I even -- at Portrush last year I think it was right in the infancy of this journey he's been on, looking at the -- they have the tracker on the range, and his ball speeds were up in the 190s then. So he's always had the speed. Maybe the mass that he's put on has helped him get a little bit more, but I don't -- I'd love to see what speeds he could get without him putting on the 40 pounds or whatever it is that he's put on. But look, more power to him. He's making golf interesting, and he's certainly getting people to talk about him. And look, he's already won. He's won already, and he's played some good events and been in contention, so it's working for him.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, as always, we appreciate your time, and best of luck to you this week.

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