

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



TOUR CHAMPIONSHIP

THE MODERATOR: This is your 8th start here. You're a two-time champion. Just what are you looking forward to about coming back here for the ninth time or the eighth time.

RORY MCILROY: I mean, I'm just happy to be here, to be honest. I was 28th going into the week last week at Caves Valley. I knew I needed at least a decent week to make it here and it turned out to be a bit better than that. I played, probably played some of the best golf I've played all year, not good enough to keep up with Patrick and Bryson, but certainly good enough to move up a few spots and get here this week.

So, yeah, happy to be here. It's, I think it's always a feather in your cap to make the TOUR Championship even though someone in my position is expected to and I obviously expect myself to as well. You look around this week and there's only 30 players here and you can single out every single player that's done something really well this year. So to be included in that group is nice and at least I have a chance.

I, it was funny, I saw Sungjae this morning at breakfast, and when I finished on Sunday, it looked like I was projected to start the tournament this week at 4-under and then Sungjae birdied 17, and then I was projected to start the week at 3-under, and then he birdied the last, and then I went down to 2-under. So even before the week started he cost me two shots.

But, no, it's -- and it's sort of, I think that's the fun thing about this format. You're always sort of looking at what the other guys are doing and seeing where you're going to start. But, yeah, just happy to be here and glad to have a chance.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. You touched on it there. How do you approach starting the week eight behind? Do you just think, that's just two shots a day, or do you just try and put it out of your mind until you get down to the business

end of it?

RORY MCILROY: Not really. I mean, I think East Lake isn't the easiest golf course in the world and it's certainly a, it seems to be a course that separates the field somewhat. So the way I look at it, if I go out tomorrow and shoot 6-under, for example, which is the score I shot last year in the first round, get to 8-under par, and some of those top guys shoot even par or even 1- or 2-over, all of a sudden you're right in it.

So it's a golf course that you can, I feel like you can make up a lot of ground quickly. You can also lose a lot of ground quickly as well, depending on how it goes. But I certainly don't feel like I'm out of it. I don't feel like I'm too far behind. Eight shots around this golf course doesn't seem like that much, so still pretty optimistic.

But, I mean, I think it just puts the impetus, especially for people that are in my position, the bottom half of the field, you just have to get off to a fast start.

Q. Jon has been kind of outspoken about the format for this week. He points out the fact that you come in having won, four, five times and a major and end up finishing 30th on the points list. And I know you've addressed this before, but there is a clarity for the fans, but that's offset by Jon's point, which I think a lot of people agree with. Do you have a thought on that one way or the other?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I mean I, look, the first year that it was played in this format I started five back, and I ended up winning the tournament by three. So, like, everyone gets here. The people that have played well have an advantage. It's not an insurmountable advantage like it has been in previous years where guys have turned up to the TOUR Championship not having to do anything to win the FedExCup and that's certainly, you don't want that to happen either.

So I mean, there's been a few iterations of it and I think this is definitely the best format so far. There's clarity for the players. There's clarity for the fans. It's, again, it's the playoffs, and I think everyone that's in the top-30 deserves to be here and then because of that everyone in the top-30 deserves to feel like they have a chance to win it all.

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So I can certainly see where Jon is coming from, especially with the year that he's had. But, look, I've went into two, I went into two playoff runs being No. 1 in 2012 and 2014 and didn't win either of them. So I've been on both sides of the coin here.

Look, it is what it is. I mean, the PGA TOUR wanted to create this playoffs format and by nature it is going to be volatile at the end of the year and I think most players have accepted that.

Q. I know you were hitting fades and hitting draws and trying to figure out which one made more sense. Where have you settled on that and why?

RORY MCILROY: I think it's shot- and hole-dependent. I'm going to try to hit a fade on holes that dictate that that's the way you should play the hole and I'm going to try to hit a draw on holes or hole locations where it dictates that you should hit a draw. I think I'm, most players in this field and most players on TOUR should be good enough to be able to work the ball both ways.

Certainly there is advantages of just having one shot shape. It takes the options or the choices out of your head somewhat and it simplifies the game, but I think I should be able to swing the club well enough and know what I'm doing that I'm able to hit both shots. I mean, I think for my swing pattern and when it gets off, I think the feeling of a fade is always a good one because it gets the club out more in front of me on the way down. So that's always going to be a sort of thought or a drill of mine is, like, just keep trying to get the club out in front of me and rotate and hitting those fades because I know if I can hit the fade pretty consistently, then I know I'm swinging well and the club's not getting stuck behind me, and I know how to hit a draw. I mean, I've done that my whole life.

So it's just a matter of managing your patterns somewhat and basically just hitting the shot that's required on the hole or, yeah.

Q. With two European Tour counting events remaining for the Ryder Cup, how do you see the Ryder Cup, European Ryder Cup team shaping up? Pads has got a pretty tough task in terms of phone calls before he makes the announcement of the wild cards at Wentworth on that Sunday night.

RORY MCILROY: It depends how Italy and Wentworth go, I guess, the next couple of weeks. Obviously, Bernd Wiesberger had a great chance to play himself into the team in Switzerland and didn't quite get it done but certainly has a couple more opportunities coming up in Italy and Wentworth to get over the line.

And then I think if that were to happen, if say someone like a Bernd or a Victor Perez or one of those guys gets, plays their way into the team, then I think it makes it a little more difficult for Pdraig because then say, for example, if Shane doesn't get on automatically, then you're looking at him for a pick or whoever else.

It's sort of, it's still all a bit up in the air. But I think at this moment in time, if the qualifications stopped, I think it's a pretty simple, I think it's a pretty simple scenario, but a lot can change over the next couple of weeks.

Q. Are we going to see you at Wentworth or not?

RORY MCILROY: No.

Q. Do you feel that fan behavior has become less respectful and if so what do you attribute it to?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I do, a little bit. I think I sort of know what you're getting at on the back of last week and some things that were said over the past few weeks, I guess. Yeah, a little bit. I think it's different. As golfers, there's a very thin rope that separates us from the fans, and then you hit a shot off line, and you have to go into the fans to hit it. So we get a little closer to them than some other sports.

Yeah, I think some of it crosses the line. I think there's a certain, I think certain other sports culture has fed into our game and fed into the fan base that's definitely affected it, and people will make the argument that, well, it happens in every other sport. But I would say that we're not any other sport and I think golf should hold itself to a higher standard. I mean, the players are certainly held to a higher standard than other sports, so why wouldn't our fan base be.

Q. Do you feel like you have to develop a thicker skin for the Ryder Cup?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, certainly, especially the ones that are played in the United States. But I think the best thing is to just not -- someone once told me awhile back, if you don't take anything personally, you'll live a very happy life, and I think I try to do that all the time. You just try to let it slide off, not take things personally and if you can do that and if you can train yourself to think that way, it certainly makes it easier.

Q. Everybody seems to be on Bryson's case at the moment. Do you feel any sympathy for him or do you think he brought it on himself?

RORY MCILROY: I certainly feel some sympathy for him

because I certainly, I don't think that you should be ostracized or criticized for being different, and I think we have all known from the start that Bryson is different and he is not going to conform to the way people want him to be. He is his own person. He thinks his own thoughts and everyone has a right to do that.

There are certainly things that he has done in the past that have brought some of this stuff on himself. I'm not saying that he's completely blameless in this. But at the same time, I think he has been getting a pretty rough go of it of late and it's actually pretty sad to see because he, deep down, I think, is a nice person and all he wants to do is try to be the best golfer he can be. And it just seems like every week something else happens and I would say it's pretty tough to be Bryson DeChambeau right now.

And I don't know if anyone else on TOUR has spoken up for him, but I definitely, I definitely he feel for him a little bit. And I agree, I don't think he's completely blameless in all this, but at the same time, I think he's trying to become better and he's trying to learn from his mistakes and I think everyone should give him a chance to try to do that.

Q. Outside observers can't help but note Patrick Cantlay's very calm demeanor on the golf course regardless of what the circumstances are. Is that something that the players take note of as well? And what other parts of his game might you point to, that's going to make him tough to catch this week?

RORY MCILROY: I mean, if he putts the way he putted last week for the rest of his career we have no chance. (Laughing).

Yeah, Patrick is, he's a very, what you see on TV is what you get in person. I mean, he's a pretty, he's a very smart guy as well. I think that's the thing. He's very, he doesn't say a whole lot, but you can tell that there's a lot going on in his head and he's an educated guy. And, yeah, I mean, the performance that he put in last week, I think everyone that, when he hit that shot into the water on 17 in regulation, we all thought, Well, this is Bryson's to win. But the resolve that he showed to get up-and-down to make bogey there, to birdie the last to force a playoff, and then everything that happened in the playoff, it was really impressive to see.

I think that was a, he's won some tournaments before and he's played well, but I think that was, I don't know if anyone's ever seen that side of Patrick Cantlay to that extent like we did last week and it was very impressive.

Q. You alluded to the Hazeltine Ryder Cup a little bit earlier and my read on that week was that you

expended a ton of energy winning matches early in the week and kind of carrying your team. Obviously, you had that huge energy explosion on the 8th hole against Patrick on Sunday, and then I thought maybe you kind of lost, like you had reached a breaking point almost at that point. I wanted to ask you if that was true, first of all, and then playing off of that, what would you tell, let's say like a Ryder Cup rookie or how would you advise them about the specific challenges of playing a Ryder Cup in the U.S. in this modern era where fans can be jerks and it's just like a crazy amount of energy that it takes from you?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, so you're completely right. That observation is, you hit the nail on the head. I expended so much energy during that week, not just competing on the golf course, but also just everything else that was going on that, everything sort of reached a crescendo on that 8th green on Sunday, and I think both of us, I think both Patrick and I, we certainly didn't keep that level of play up for the entire match, and I think we both sort of came down a little bit from that, but he was just able to -- he made birdie at the last and ended up winning 1-up.

And but, yeah, it was certainly, I took a lot from that. I learned a lot from that and I hopefully won't make the same mistake again this year because you can only, you only have so much energy, and you can only use it for an amount of time. And I think what I would tell a rookie going into a Ryder Cup, especially on the road, is, yeah, conserve your energy. You don't, like we're there from the Monday, the matches don't start until the Friday, I mean, I would Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday do just enough to feel like you're prepared, but don't do too much. Don't play 18-hole practice rounds every day. Don't kill yourself in the gym. Don't like, I mean, do what you need to do to get yourself in the right frame of mind and the right space physically to go out there and play.

And the thing, as well, is if you're called upon to play all five sessions, that's a long week. It's tough and it's physically draining, but also mentally as well, trying to focus on the job at hand and not get distracted by the crowd or anything else.

So it's a pretty tough task, I think, for a rookie coming into that environment that's going to be the toughest week of their golfing life and they have to be prepared for that and all I would say is conserve your energy and put it into the three days.

Q. You said if you don't think anything personal, you'll never be upset. How do you put that into practice when you're in the thick of it and the things people are saying to you are intensely personal?



RORY MCILROY: I think you just have to, you have to think about, Okay, if I were to sit down and have a beer with this person, would they think the same thing, would they say the same thing? And of course they wouldn't. You go, if someone says something to you and you go up and you confront them about it, they're not going to say the same thing as either, right? It's a -- it's just a weird dynamic between fan and competitor and they're doing it to try to help their own team. They're doing it because they're from the United States and they're trying to -- and I think if you -- I think I've tried to train myself to think about it and think on purpose rather than react, and I think the more you react to it, the more it gets at you, but the more you actually think about it and break it down and it just, it becomes less meaningful and you can just sort of let it roll off.

And I've tried to do a really good job of that over the last few years of not react and just try to think about it a little bit more and try to just try to put it in a better perspective, I guess.

Q. It sounds as if you're on board with what Jay told us yesterday about the fan behavior stuff. But just curious your thoughts on just enforcing that, the difficulty of actually calling people out and maybe asking, booting them or ejecting them in such a situation. Is that realistic?

RORY MCILROY: I think as I said at the start, as golfers I feel like we're held to a higher standard than other sports and other athletes and I think because of that the people that come to watch us play should be held to a higher standard as well. And enforcing that, I think it should be -- there's no room in golf for people to abuse someone on the golf course when all they're trying to do is do their best and win a golf tournament and follow their dreams. So there's no place for that in our game and that might sound a little stiff or snobby or whatever, but that's golf and we have traditions and we have -- you look at like a First Tee Program, for example, what are they taught through golf? They're taught respect, sportsmanship, etiquette, how to treat others the right way, and that's everything that we try to do through golf. They are the values of our game and that's, people need to understand that and they need to try to adopt those same etiquettes and those same beliefs and values when they show up at our tournaments.

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