

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome three-time FedExCup champion, Rory McIlroy, to the media center here at the 2023 TOUR Championship.

Rory, you enter the week, you're No. 3 in the FedExCup, actually your highest position since 2019 entering the TOUR Championship, and you have two Cups to show for it since that time. So just start off by a couple of really good finishes so far in the playoffs. What's the overall mindset entering the week here?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, you know, I think going back to last year and -- we were just at a breakfast with some of the sponsors earlier, and I said, I fell 11 shots behind Scottie after two holes of the tournament. So if I can come back from 11 shots, I feel like everyone in this field should feel like they have a chance to win.

So, yeah, look, it's always great to make it to the TOUR Championship. It means you've had a really solid year and you've played some good golf. This has been a good place to me over the years. At the start of my career, actually, when I came in, I think I came in to the TOUR Championship No. 1 twice in 2012 and 2014 and wasn't able to win and then, yeah, since then I've just sort of figured out a way to play this golf course and get myself into contention.

Yeah, no, I've had a great run here over the years and obviously in a great position to try to add another FedExCup title to the mantle piece.

THE MODERATOR: Perfect. We'll go right into questions.

Q. You're playing good golf. It's been a really good stretch. How would you compare your emotions, your energy levels, right now compared to at this point last year?

RORY McILROY: I think last year, I was probably energized by everything that was going on in the world of golf. I felt like we were maybe in a bit more of a state of flux. I sat up here at this table this day last year talking

about designated events and getting all the best players to play together and all that stuff.

I feel like everything's a little more settled. You know, I remember this time last year being on a board call at 7:30 in the morning on the Tuesday trying to get all that stuff ratified and get it passed through the board. I've been able to focus a little bit more just on golf and my game and even able to take two days at home between Chicago and here, getting to spend some time with the girls. That's been really nice.

So, yeah, I would say everything's just a little more balanced and a little more calm this year.

Q. We saw you out there yesterday on the putting green. It looked like maybe you had gone back to the Spider putter. Do you know what you're going to have in the bag for the putter this week?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, more than likely I'll probably go back to the Spider. I figured a couple things out last week, just with, like, aiming and some of the shorter putts and, you know, there was a lot of putts last week that had a lot of break on them from short distances, and I felt with the shorter line on the putter I just couldn't trust my aim as much as when I have the spider and have that slightly longer line.

So, yeah, I practiced with it a good bit yesterday and it's a familiar feel. I've done really well with that putter over the last few years. I've had some of my best putting weeks of my career at this golf course on these greens with that putter, so hopefully I can rekindle that again this week.

Q. You mentioned this year seeming a little bit more calm around now, but I guess around here it seems like things still really are in a state of flux. Do you think you're just a little bit less involved or less emotionally involved or do you have a better sense of where this thing is all going this fall than maybe we do?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, maybe less emotionally involved. I last year it was to do with how can we make the product of the PGA TOUR better, and I think I was really invested in that. So when it comes to, like, governance and investment and all that, like, that doesn't really -- not that I

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don't care about it, but it doesn't excite me as much as making the product better and how can we make this the most competitive landscape to play professional golf and how can we get all the best players to play together.

Like, that's the stuff that excites me. The stuff that's going on right now, look, I'm on the board and I have to be involved and whenever something's brought to the table I'll vote on it yes or no. But, yeah, maybe just not as emotionally engaged on all of this other stuff.

Q. I don't know if you saw what Jon said yesterday about gambling and the affect that's having on spectators, what they're saying in the galleries when you're playing. Obviously there was an incidents with Max on Saturday and Sunday. Are you aware of that and is it something the sport has to be a little bit careful with going forward?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think when sports betting has become more widely legalized in this country, I think it's -- we've talked about this at the board and the PAC level for a few years. And it is a bit of a slippery slope because I don't think there's any -- maybe basketball and you can sit courtside, but I think it's a different environment where people can really affect the play out here.

So, look, as long as it's policed the right way and as long as there's measures put in place for hopefully things like what happened to Max Homa last Saturday not to happen, because look, we're all for people out here having a good time and being able to put something on an outcome, but as long as they don't feel like they can come here and influence that outcome, I think that's important.

Q. (No Microphone.)

RORY McILROY: I think for me my biggest pet peeve is when you're reading a putt and someone that's been sitting there all day is like, it doesn't break as much as you think or whatever. Like, you know, to me, I just think, like, shut up and don't be a part of the show, just enjoy watching the golf, right?

But I wouldn't say that's to do with gambling, per se, but, yeah, if I was here as a fan, I just want to go out and try to watch the best players in the world and have a good time doing that.

Q. Since you have that more relaxed or hands-off mindset now with the off-course activities, the 2024 schedule is out, are you just relatively pleased with where that's at with signature events and what that could mean for 2025 and beyond?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I'm interested to see how it goes. I think the one thing that we talked about this time last year was guaranteeing the product, guaranteeing that the best fields are going to show up. Obviously that mandatory part has been taken out. So it will be interesting to see what happens and see how many guys show up and how that all goes.

I think there's incentives now for the signature events for everyone to show up because the FedExCup points are higher and you really get a -- you have an advantage being in those fields by finishing in the top 50 the previous year. So I'm excited to see how that all plays out.

But, yeah, I think the schedule looks good. I'm excited about Pebble Beach being a signature event and having all the best guys go there. That will be a cool thing, one of the most iconic golf courses in the world, and having a big field like that will be cool. And I've said this, I would like to see more of an international flavor going forward, trying to incorporate some of the -- you know, with this strategic alliance with the DP World Tour trying to incorporate some of the other -- we've got the co-sanctioned Scottish Open, but it would be great to see Wentworth or Ireland or something in continental Europe, whatever it is, I think that would be hopefully something that happens in the future.

Q. The forecast is looking like the heat is going to be nuclear this weekend. How does heat and humidity affect your game and what precautions are you taking for it?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, we got a good warmup in Memphis a couple weeks ago. I think we're used to it. As an outdoor sport, I mean, we sort of chase the sun all year round, so I don't think it's something that we're not used to. We're used to playing in heat.

But when the heat index is going to be over a hundred for three of the four days that we're playing, it's a lot. So just staying as hydrated as possible and just keep reminding yourself to drink. Even if it's uncomfortable drinking that much, just try to keep sipping on water and electrolytes and keeping yourself going. But, yeah, again, we have played in a lot of heat here before in Atlanta and I'm sure we'll be okay.

Q. Kind of a two-parter on length off the tee. I've tried to read complex analysis of why you can hit it so far. I'm just wondering if you could dumb it down for me, simply how can you hit the ball so fricking far; and B, is how difficult has it been to strike the balance between gaining length every year and keeping the ball in play all the time.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, there's definitely a balance in doing that. So there's a couple of different things. You have to train it, you have to train moving the club. The faster that you can move the club into the ball, the faster the ball's going to come off the face and the further it's going to go. So you train for that and whether that's in the gym or if that's -- I wouldn't say I necessarily do any sort of speed training anymore, but I did do some previously that I think increased my baseline speed, I guess.

Before doing it, I was probably, like, a 178 to 180 sort of ball speed guy when I was not trying to hit it flat out, and I feel like my -- I guess my floor now is more like 184, 185, and then if I can crank it, I can get it up close to 190.

So, yeah, I've probably added a good four or five miles an hour of ball speed over the last few years. Again, I think it's getting your -- it's getting your body in the right shape, but it's also getting your mind in the place where you can see like, okay, I can move the club this fast. The more you do it, the more comfortable you get with it.

But I think as well, like, if you see -- again, unpopular opinion, but if you see the jump I made from, like, 2014, 2015 to where I'm now, like, I've gained nearly 20 yards in driving distance. And, yeah, a lot of it is to do with training and a lot of it is to do with working on it, but there's also partly to do with technology and how far the drivers go now and the ball goes. So there's two parts to it. So, yeah, it's a combination of both.

Q. Just looking ahead to the Ryder Cup, just out of curiosity, do you have a problem with the Americans being able to select LIV guys, and Europe's not, or it is what it is?

RORY McILROY: What guys?

Q. For the Ryder Cup. The Ryder Cup being able to take guys from LIV, the Americans taking LIV guys and Europe not.

RORY McILROY: No. I don't think it would make a difference for us.

Q. Do you have a thought on who the Player of the Year should be right now and how could that change over the next four days?

RORY McILROY: It depends what you value. I think Scottie's won twice this year, Jon's won four times, Jon's won the Masters, Scottie's won THE PLAYERS. If you go on total wins -- it's hard because how can you not -- it's going to be really difficult because Scottie's had -- he could end up with the best ball-striking season of all time. He's

hit the ball as good, if not better, than Tiger hit it in 2000. Which is the benchmark for all of us. But I think Jon probably has a little more to show for his year. But I think it could come down to this week and who performs. But it's a two-horse race between Jon and Scottie.

Q. When you try and improve your game or get yourself out of a slump, whether it's putting or whether it's aspects of your full swing, how do you determine when you need to improve your technique and your swing and how maybe sometimes you might be better served making an equipment change?

RORY McILROY: So this happened to me this year at Oak Hill. I mean, I think when you play as much golf as we do, your subconscious knows what shots you can hit and what shots you can't. And I was over my second shot at Oak Hill on 18 on Sunday, not really -- like, didn't have a chance to win the golf tournament. I was in the top 10. But, I mean, whether I made birdie or not on that hole it wasn't really going to make a difference. The pin was on left side of the green, and I just sensed myself aiming further and further right as I got over the ball. So I just couldn't trust that I could hit the shot that I wanted to hit.

And when I got in after that, I was like, I need to do something here because I'm not able to hit -- if I can't hit a shot under basically zero pressure to a left pin how am I expected to do it when -- so that was really just -- that's when it's, like, this is purely technique. I need to go and work on some stuff. I think the little bit of work that I did around, like, after PGA before that Memorial, Canada, U.S. Open, Travelers stretch, like, that really helped me go on to play some really -- basically after that -- even though I played okay at Oak Hill, I wasn't terribly comfortable, but I went on a really consistent run after then, and just that little -- just that little bit of, like, self-reflection and being like, yeah, that wasn't a good feeling and knowing that, okay, I need to get my -- I need to work on my technique a little bit so that I can trust what I'm doing a bit more.

I think it always comes back to that. Like, you can make some equipment changes to try to freshen it up or try to just get a different look, but for the most part, it's the person at the end of the club swinging it that's usually the problem.

Q. From strictly an equipment technology perspective, from the time you turned pro in 2007, what do you consider the greatest advancement?

RORY McILROY: I would say the aerodynamics of the ball, so the dimple pattern of the ball at that point. And I would say the use of multi-materials in drivers, so carbon crown, titanium face, carbon face, that I think. The arrow

of the golf ball combined with the multi-materials being used in the drivers and the adjustability -- I think the adjustability of drivers, I think those are the three biggest things.

Q. The format this week, it seems like it's close to being as good as it can be, all things considered. Is there any way it could be improved going forward, do you think?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. I think there's a lot of people that have different opinions on what it should be. Like, I certainly see the reasoning of trying to have it all one competition this week and not having two winners, one wins the TOUR Championship and one wins the FedExCup. I do like it this way. I think it gives the guys that have had the better years an advantage going into the week, which I think they should have.

If anything, like, Scottie this year, he probably should have more of an advantage than a two-shot lead. But it makes it an exciting week, you know, if guys feel like they have a chance to win. Of all the iterations of the TOUR Championship and the FedExCup playoffs, I think this is the best one yet. I can't sit here and say that I've thought of something better at this point. I'm sure if it needs to be addressed in the future, it will, but I think it works pretty well right now.

Q. If it were addressed going forward, what would be more important, entertainment or fairness?

RORY McILROY: Well, it needs to be both. But, again, going back to my previous comments of the PGA TOUR as a product and being able to create an entertaining finale that has some drama and has a lot of high stakes, I would say both. Like, the players have to feel it's fair as well. But if I'm thinking big picture, I would say entertainment has to be a big part of it.

Q. We're not that far off from the launch of the TGL. Just curious, how involved are you week-to-week, day-to-day in preparing for that? And then how will you approach competing in one of those events compared to how you approach competing at a Regular Tour event?

RORY McILROY: So, yeah, I think, you know, I was, I feel like once everything sort of got up and running with the innovation lab and making sure that all the technology is humming along and working together. I get probably weekly updates on it, but I wouldn't say that I'm hugely -- I think I'll become a lot more involved once we're able to get into the arena, start testing the stuff, start to try to figure out all the little glitches that are bound to happen before the

start in January.

So I would say at this point it's been about trying to sell the team franchises. And that's been going really well and there's been a lot of interest created trying to fill the rosters, trying to get people on board. And that, you know, that's not my job, that's the CEO and the guys behind the scenes. But I think sort of post-Ryder Cup and once we're able to get into the arena in October time, I think I'll become a lot more involved and just making sure everything's sorts of set up the right way.

And then, approach-wise, I think you can have a little more fun with it. You can be aggressive. Yeah, it's going to be a more lively atmosphere. We're going to be mic'd up. We're going to be able to maybe say some stuff there that we wouldn't necessarily say out here.

So I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be a different format. It's going to be hopefully entertaining for fans and exciting to watch. Maybe some formats that people haven't seen before. So it's going to be cool. It's going to be interesting. A little more of a team element, which I think will be cool.

Q. Two quick things: Is it too early to say if Tiger's had much influence on the policy board? I mean, it was just announced a month ago or so. And secondly, is it your understanding that if and when the framework agreement gets to the finish line that all of the player directors have to be unanimous?

RORY McILROY: I don't think all the player directors have to be unanimous. I don't think it has to be a unanimous vote. It just has to be a majority. And I think Tiger being on the board, you know, he's, I think it's meaningful that he's on it, that he's engaged. He's certainly been spending more time on it than I have. He's been talking to some people. He's been talking to a lot of people. He's really engaged in just trying to get the best outcome for the players on the PGA TOUR. So I think his difference has been felt already. I think it will only continue to, his presence on there will only continue to grow as we head towards that December 31st deadline.

Q. You mentioned Scottie's ball-striking season. What makes him such a good ball-striker and have you seen anything different this year than years past with him that's led to these incredible stats?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. Because like you watch Scottie hit a ball and the feet are going everywhere and it's just so -- but he just, he's not afraid to hit shots. Like he'll hit little bunt cuts with the driver. He'll hit big high draws. He plays around with the golf ball a ton. He's got

unbelievable hands. Yeah, he's a pure feel -- he's a -- I see him work really hard on the range and I see him work like doing his drills and doing all this stuff. But then I feel like once he gets on the golf course he's able to just let all that go and just become so reactive and instinctive and just a pure athlete on the course. So it's really, really cool to watch. Yeah, like as I said, the numbers that he's put up this year are phenomenal. Like unbelievable. Like to be able to gain over a shot with both your driver and your approach play, I don't see how you're not the No. 1 player in the world when you do that.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Rory, thank you so much for the time. Best of luck this week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

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