

Waste Management Phoenix Open

Open

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Scottsdale, Arizona, USA

TPC Scottsdale

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Rory McIlroy, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. I heard quite a nice little roar from a group of kids out there as you were making your way into the virtual press conference, which is always a great thing to hear.

I know you've probably seen a lot of this Waste Management Phoenix Open over the years on TV, and had a chance to get out and play nine holes. Just a few thoughts on being here for your first start here.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's good to be in Phoenix finally. First time here, and there is always -- whether it's been I've been playing in the desert in the Middle East and haven't been able to make it over here, schedule just hasn't quite fit. I was over here anyway; played Torrey Pines.

You know, I've always been told that this course in Scottsdale would be a good fit for my game, so thought I would try it out this year. Yeah, excited to be here. From what I've seen of the golf course, I like it. I like the fit of it.

Looking forward to getting out there, and, yeah, playing it this week. Going to be good fun.

THE MODERATOR: You're off to a good start because you mentioned Torrey Pines, coming off tied for 16th last week; four top 20s in five starts this season. Assess the state of your game so far this season.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, Torrey on Sunday was funny. I got myself into a decent position. If I had played the last six holes even par I would've finished second, but I played them 3-over and finished 16th.

I don't think the 16th really told the whole story of the week. I felt like I played okay. Just a bit of a bad finish on Sunday.

Yeah, game feels pretty good. Had a decent start this year over in Abu Dhabi. Saw some good signs last week. It was tough, like the greens got real bumpy over the



weekend at Torrey with that rain on Friday.

It was hard. I actually felt like I putted terribly on Sunday and I ended up gaining .7 of a shot on the field, so it sort of showed how everyone else was struggling with those greens on the weekend, too.

Yeah, I feel good about my game and excited to get here this week. The golf course is in mint condition; greens are perfect. Be nice to play on a golf course and putt on greens that are so good.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Rory, good to see you. I heard you say you were a little nervous to be playing in front of some fans for the first time in the year. What was it like to have some people out there today, and do you see a point in your career where you'll come back here when I guess it's more normal?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think I have to experience a real Phoenix Open at least once in my career. I think it's important to do that. I'll definitely be back when things are more normal.

Yeah, look, it's just nice to have some people around, playing in an atmosphere like that. Even in a Wednesday Pro-Am, to have a few people out following and clapping after shots, it's quite nice.

I'm excited that there is a few people here this week. Should make it a much better atmosphere than what we've been used to playing in over the last few months.

Q. Just to his question a little bit, can you imagine what it would be like to play 16 with those stands full of people and not just pictures of people? Have you watched it enough on TV to get a sense, or do you feel like you have to experience that specifically?

RORY McILROY: No, I mean, like I've played in what, five Ryder Cups. I think I've experience that atmosphere before on a first tee. Even though this is unique for an individual event, I'm pretty sure I've played under that sort of environment before.

Q. And then just real quickly, we're coming up to

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another PLAYERS, which you're defending, sort of. Can you take me through your most indelible moment from that week, whether it's golf related or pandemic related or whatever just stands out from that week?

RORY McILROY: The one -- this one that was just canceled?

Q. Yeah, the PLAYERS that was canceled.

RORY McILROY: So I played Thursday afternoon and played, got done, and obviously had an early tee time on Friday.

I went to bed long before the tournament had been canceled or postponed or whatever. I woke Friday morning early, hadn't looked at phone, jumped in the shower and got dressed into all my golf stuff, and was about to walk out the door and I looked at my phone. I was like, Oh, guess we're not playing today.

So I probably found out a little later than most. Yeah, I was ready to go play Friday. Yeah, I was expecting it to be weird, no fans there, but still playing, and then obviously I looked at my phone and saw the text message from the TOUR that the tournament had been canceled.

Then it was just a matter of getting changed back into like casual clothes and going and picking my stuff up at the club and making the four-hour drive back home to Jupiter.

Q. You said earlier that you like seeing fans back, but with only 4,500, is there a point where there is too few out there? Does that affect how you play, sight line, whatnot?

RORY McILROY: Not at all. I think one is better than none. So like Abu Dhabi a couple weeks ago there was maybe 100 to 200 people out following on the course, and that made a huge difference. It's just a little bit of buzz, a little bit of clapping after shots.

It doesn't have to be much. I definitely don't think there is too few to make a difference. Zero isn't great, but if we can get as you said, 4,500 in this week, that will make a huge difference.

Q. A little bit off topic, you played with Bernhard Langer in the Masters last year. What was it like playing with him? What did you learn about him and did he help you at all on the course?

RORY McILROY: I think you look at -- like I don't know how old Bernard is, in his 60s I guess, 65-ish?

Q. Yeah.

RORY McILROY: And, you know, the fact that he obviously doesn't hit it a very long way anymore, but he can still get his way around that golf course and make the cut every year and play well. He just manages his game so well around there.

I think it helped. I think he was number one or two in putting that week as well, so that helped obviously.

But, yeah, it was cool. I mean, just really cool to see. There are so many -- I think that's the thing with golf. There are so many ways to play the game and so many ways to be effective, and that's a prime example of it right there.

Q. First time here. Did you not come before because of the crowds, like some other guys have?

RORY McILROY: It's definitely a part of it. I think this year with less fans here it was certainly -- I think certainly a more attractive option in terms of like introducing myself to the tournament. It was my first time playing, get a feel for how the course is, and if I like it -- and I love the course -- then I would be more willing to come back.

And after seeing the golf course, I do love the golf course. I think it suits me really well. Yeah, I mean, as I said at the start, I think I need to play at least one and get the real experience.

Q. Part of the scrutiny on this Patrick Reed situation in the last week came from social media and posts from his account, other accounts. You're someone that used to dive into the fray of social media a bit more than you do now. I was wondering, do you miss any of being on Twitter, or did you just see it as more trouble than it's worth?

RORY McILROY: It's way more trouble than it's worth. I just -- it's just not -- it's stress and hassle in my life that I just feel like I don't have to deal with. Yeah, I obviously got dragged into it last week a little bit because of what happened with me on 18 on Saturday, which now it's funny.

So what's came to light is -- so on 18, as we were searching for my ball -- well, it wasn't apparent at the time, but an email was sent to the TOUR on Monday saying my ball was stepped on to be found, but the volunteer didn't tell me that on Saturday.

So that's why I took embedded ball relief, because it was an embedded ball, but I didn't know it had been stepped on

at the time. So obviously the video came out on Sunday with my ball bouncing and then going in, and at that point I'm like, well, it must have went into its own pitch mark or something, because the ball was obviously plugged.

Then it came to light on Monday that a volunteer had stepped on it and hadn't told me, and that's why the ball was embedded. I went to bed Sunday night sort of questioning whether I had done the right thing after seeing the video.

And then it's so weird, the TOUR got an email on Monday from a volunteer saying that he didn't tell me at the time and he should have, but he stepped on the ball to find it, and that is why -- and I guess at the end of the day I almost took the wrong relief because I should have taken relief for a stepped on ball, which means you can place it instead of drop it. At the time I didn't have that information.

I at least felt better about my actions knowing I did the right thing, that I did take relief for a ball that was embedded or stepped on. So it sort was nice that that came to light, because I was questioning myself on Sunday a little bit. It's funny how these things all work out at the end.

Q. It's funny, do you start questioning whether what you thought you had seen was what you actually saw?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, pretty much. I sort of, did I do the right thing? Did I play by the rules? Did I see something that wasn't there?

It was a bit of a rough Sunday night. I just started to doubt myself a little bit, which is not like me. But I was convinced that it was an embedded ball. Then it's funny, the TOUR got an email on Monday that it had been stepped on and the volunteer said something like, I'm so sorry that Rory is being dragged into this scenario, but I didn't tell him that I actually stood on his ball to find it.

Yeah, there you go.

Q. Wondering if you could take us through first of all your decision making process to play in this event for the first time; secondly, do you think it's something that you can recharge your batteries, reenergize? You haven't won in 15 months, and maybe it takes a place that you don't know as well to refocus you a little bit.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I think one of the big things that -- so I use a statistics analyst at TaylorMade who has basically been telling me for about five years to play this tournament. All the stats and analysis say this is a perfect setup for you.

Because of schedule and a few other things I just haven't played it. So I guess one of the reasons was that the stats suggest that the way I play the game and as far as I hit it off the tee and the strength of my game it should suit this golf course.

And then I was already over here. I played Torrey Pines. Obviously having this tournament without 300,000 fans, whatever it is, that made it, again, as I said at the start, a little for attractive at least for a first-time experience at this place.

So those are really the two factors that went into me playing here, and the fact I was in the area basically.

And, yeah, I haven't won in 15 months, but I think I've played good enough golf to win or to at least challenge, which I have done a few times. And, yeah, as you said, could take something like a new venue this week or a reenergizing with a few fans here that gets me over the line.

There is a lot that goes into winning golf tournaments. 72 holes is an awful a lot of golf. Yeah, the most important thing for me right now is at least putting myself in a position. I've sort of put myself into position the last couple weeks, and I need to do the same thing again this week.

Q. You mentioned that the volunteer felt bad for dragging you in. Just wondering how you felt about being dragged into the situation by Patrick Reed, and if you've had any conversations with him already.

RORY McILROY: Not sure it was Patrick. Could have been someone from the Reed family, but I don't think it was Patrick.

Q. Okay. I saw you out there talking with Commissioner Monahan walking the fairway a little bit, and you're up as one of the people running to be the head of pack. Just curious why that's something that interests you.

RORY McILROY: You know, I think it's important to me. I feel like I've been on TOUR long enough now that I sort of know the ins and outs of the goings-on of day-to-day TOUR life and the business of the TOUR, and I think I have some pretty good ideas.

I think with this new strategic partnership, alliance with the European Tour, you know, knowing those guys as I do, you know, being close with the leadership of the PGA TOUR over here, I think I could help in some ways. I think I could facilitate something.

If I am elected, I would be very honored to do the job. It's something that I feel quite passionately about. Yeah, hopefully people see that and they vote for me. It would be an honor to represent the players on the advisory board.

Q. Do you see this tournament in any way being able to help you in your preparation for the Masters and other majors this year?

RORY McILROY: Not really. The majors are so far away. I'm focused on this week and trying to get my -- trying to keep the parts of my game that are strong, keep those going, and chip away at some of the weaknesses that I've shown over the last couple weeks.

Yeah, it's all just about trying to get a little better each week and putting yourself in position to win golf tournaments.

Q. Can I ask you, you played with Adam Scott last week at Torrey Pines. Did you know he was using to the \$700 AutoFlex shaft?

RORY McILROY: Don't get me started about that shaft. All I heard about at Christmas dinner from my dad was this AutoFlex golf shaft. All I heard at Christmas dinner was my dad saying, Can you get me one of these? Everyone is hitting it 20 yards longer. I swear, it's all I heard about.

So first thing I said to Scotty when I saw him last week, I said, All I heard about at Christmas dinner was about this golf shaft. It was pretty funny that I got to play with him on Sunday.

Yeah, I think I've tried it. It's different. Like I tried one of the member's at Seminole, and I didn't have the stiffest one, like the one that Adam plays, but it just felt so -- I felt if I swung hard I was going to break it. I felt like it was going to snap.

But he definitely gained some speed with it. Adam was hitting it a long way on Sunday.

Q. Having been over in Abu Dhabi a couple weeks ago, you come up against Robert McIntyre. Wondering your thoughts on him as a prospect inside the top 50, and also maybe (indiscernible) making his way to Wisconsin.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, Bob is a great player. I got to play with him last year at the Scottish Open I think. Yeah, look, I think it's a huge milestone in anyone's career to crack the top 50.

Obviously it was a bit of a consolation for him last week. I am sure he would've rather won the tournament in Dubai.

But I remember when I got into the top 50, and it's a big deal. You get into all the majors, WGC. It's like a different level to the game, I guess.

So, yeah, look, he's obviously with Ryder Cup points starting again he's made a good start. I think with all these guys, especially guys that haven't made a Ryder Cup before, like you just have to not let it get into your head. Just go and play. Try to do well. Those Ryder Cup points will take care of themselves. If you play well enough, you'll make the team.

Q. Rory, off topic, working on a bunch of stories on DJ going into the Masters, and on Sunday of this past Masters, one of your final questions, you told us, He's smarter than you think, he's switched on more so than he let's on. I'll just put it that way. Can you expand on what people are missing about DJ's IQ, and basically how he goes about his business mentally and what led you to say what you said?

RORY McILROY: I think sometimes in the media and the sort of the public DJ gets a bit of a bad rap for just being not -- I don't know what the word is, but just like he -- his golf is IQ is through the roof, and when he wants to engage with you and have a proper conversation about whatever topic it is, he can have it.

He just would rather not have it with you guys. That's basically what it is. He saves that for his inner circle and the people he trusts and the people that he likes. Just because he doesn't give you guys the greatest interviews doesn't mean that he isn't there. You know what I mean?

I think some people's personalities are to be standoffish and just give a little bit of themselves to the media. I think that's what he does. Whenever you're friends with him and you spend a lot of time with him, he's much more engaging than a lot of people think.

Q. Why is his IQ off the charts in golf?

RORY McILROY: He manages his game so well. You think about it, he came out on TOUR and he hit a big drive -- he had a hook for the first couple years he was on TOUR, and he's completely changed his game. He hits cuts all the time.

He can still turn it over sometimes if he wants to, but it's completely changed his game to have more control, and look at what's happened since. Since he started hitting that little cut shot he's won two majors, been No. 1 in the world, won a FedExCup. He's basically done everything there is to do in the game, and he's done that by basically changing his game after turning pro. That's huge

compliment. Not a lot of people can do that.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, glad you're here. We appreciate your time.

RORY McILROY: No one asked me an equipment question.

THE MODERATOR: Well, we can open back up the mics if you like.

RORY McILROY: Sure. I would be here all day for that.

Q. Rory, how come your dad can't buy his own shaft?

RORY McILROY: He can. I think it's just the access that he's struggling with. I think it's just sort of -- I think the equipment companies have a little better access to them.

Q. What did you think of that equipment?

RORY McILROY: So I think the authorities, the R&A and USGA, are looking at the game through such a tiny little lens, that what they're trying to do is change something that pertains to 0.1% of the golfing community. 99.9% of the people this play this game play for enjoyment, for entertainment. They don't need to be told what ball or clubs to use.

We have to make the game as easy and approachable as possible for the majority of golfers. Honestly, I think this distance insight report has been a huge waste of time and money, because that money that it's cost to do this report could have been way better distributed to getting people into the game, introducing young kids to the game, introducing minorities to the game. I heard Mike Davis say something about we're trying to protect the game for the next hundred years.

This isn't how you do it. This is so small and inconsequential compared to the other things happening in the game. It's the grassroots. It's getting more people engaged in golf. That's where they should be spending their money, not spending it on the distance insight report.

Thank you for asking the question.

Q. Should there be a situation where the professionals play by different or local rules? Would you be for that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I would be all for that. If they want to try to make the game more difficult for us or more -- try to incorporate more skill to the game, yeah, I would be all for that, because I think it only benefits the better

play, which I feel like I am.

It's just not -- I think maybe they said that in terms of local rules and maybe some sort of bifurcation, but we we are such a tiny portion of golf. Like golf is way bigger than the professional game. Golf is like -- we're such a tiny part of it. It's the other stuff that really matters, and that's the stuff they need to concentrate on.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. All right, we will let you go, and we do appreciate your time and chiming in on that as well.

RORY McILROY: Thank you. I'm glad someone asked me.

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