

# Arnold Palmer Invitational

Thursday, March 4, 2021

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

## Rory McIlroy

### Quick Quotes



#### **Q. Quick start today. How would you break down your Thursday performance?**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, it was good. It wasn't like that quick, obviously in total the 66 is a great way to start the tournament, but the first few holes were a little slow going and I made a really good birdie on 14 and that sort of got me, got the round going. The two 2s on the back nine were great. Coming off last week where I really struggled on the par-3s, and today I played them in 3-under par, so quite a turnaround.

But, yeah, I played well after that and hit some really good shots, some good drives, I saw a lot of really positive signs out there today, which was, which is really encouraging.

#### **Q. What sense did you have that 66 was out there from what you saw earlier in this week and a chilly start and breezy morning as well?**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I mean, breezy, the greens are still pretty receptive, so if you hit it on the fairway you have got some birdie chances coming your way. I played the two par-5s well on the front side, so two easy birdies there.

But, yeah, I mean I expect tomorrow afternoon, I don't know if there's going to be quite as much breeze, but the golf course will get a little firmer, so I don't think it will be quite like how it was here last year when it played really tough, but this course always provides a really good test.

#### **Q. Four top 6 finishes in your last four starts here, including a win in 2018. Why do you seemingly play so well at this venue?**

RORY MCILROY: I feel like you don't have to do anything special to shoot a good score here. You can be really conservative off the tees if you want to be. There's a bunch of irons that you can hit off tees. Take care of the par-5s -- I think the toughest thing about this course is the par-3s and I played them in 3-under today. So that was a bonus.

But I've watched Tiger enough here over the years and the

way he played this course was, he played it very conservatively, he took care of the par-5s, and that was usually good enough to get the job done. So sort of take a little bit of a leaf out of his book.

#### **Q. You touched on it a little, but this place makes a lot of people uncomfortable with the wind and the rough up. You seem to have such a great comfort level here. Is that just from the start or something --**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I've always felt comfortable here. I think that I saw a stat the other day that this course more than any other one the PGA TOUR the correlation between strokes gained off the tee and performance at this course is higher than anywhere else and obviously myself and Bryson No. 1 and 2 in strokes gained off the tee for the seasons and we both shot two good scores today.

I think it is. It's one of these places where there's a lot of holes where everyone just hits it in the same spots off the tee, but then when you can give yourself an advantage by taking driver and getting it up there, tee shots like 3, tee shots like 6, where some of the shorter guys are having to go up the sliver of fairway up the right when longer guys don't have to really worry about that.

#### **Q. How much better do you feel about your game this week as opposed to the last couple weeks and when is the last time you felt this good about your game?**

RORY MCILROY: It's feeling -- the nice thing is it's feeling better and better basically every time I go out there on the golf course. I felt pretty good about it, even like in Abu Dhabi I felt pretty good about my game because I knew it maybe it wasn't perfect technically but I knew that I had one miss. And I think that's the last thing the last few weeks I've sort of had the two misses going on.

But I saw a lot of golf shots going out of my, in the window I was looking at today, so that gives me a lot of encouragement going forward.

#### **Q. No. 6, a lot of people having fun with Bryson about that about giving it a go and whatnot. Is there any thought on your end, if you have a good down wind**



**there to do that?**

RORY MCILROY: No, no chance. I mean, I don't have that 200 ball speed in the bag that Bryson has. I mean, I can hit it good and get it out there, but I'm -- today I hit 7-iron in, I'm very happy hitting into that green with a 7-iron every day.

**Q. Over there did you mention this you felt like this was the best round you played all year?**

RORY MCILROY: Pretty much, yeah. Just for the -- I opened up with 64 in Abu Dhabi, which was really good, but I just think with what I've been working on over the last few weeks it's just started to feel a little more comfortable today, which was nice to see.

**Q. Of the par-3s, obviously there was a bomb on one of them, but what was the most pleasing to you and why?**

RORY MCILROY: The two shots -- because they were all into the wind -- so the two 5-irons I hit on 14 and 17, just little draws into the wind, flighted it the way I wanted to. Those shots last week that I was trying to hit were missing the target 20 yards left. So it was nice to just see them coming out in the window I was anticipating.

**Q. Secondly, your career is notorious for having these little mini slumps out of nowhere, even when you were winning majors, frankly. I don't get a sense that the struggle you had recently was like those.**

RORY MCILROY: No, I don't think it's been like that for awhile. No, it hasn't been like that for awhile where I've had these huge highs and huge lows. I sort of, I feel like I've become a little more consistent in my game over the last few years. But like even somewhere like at 2012, which is nine years ago, believe it or not, in that run in the summer where I won the PGA and the playoff events and stuff, I missed five cuts in the space of like nine events. So it was a little more feast and famine back then. I think it's a little more consistent as I'm getting a little older and having a few more gray hairs.

**Q. No disrespect, but why did it take you that long to figure it out? I mean, that is a key, isn't it, to be able to**

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RORY MCILROY: A hundred percent. I don't think -- I mean, I think it was sort of more -- like if you look at my like cuts made since 2014 onwards, that's sort of I feel like where I've been very consistent since then, I think. I've had a couple little slumps or injuries, like 2017 wasn't a great year, I was dealing with that rib pretty much the entire

year. Even like 2018, 2019, last year, there's not a lot of like really bad golf in there, there's some mediocre stuff and you end up finishing 30th or 40th, but, yeah, the really bad stuff is -- I've just learned to manage my game a little better, I guess.

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