

# Arnold Palmer Invitational

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

## Rory McIlroy

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and get things started. We would like to welcome the 2018 Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard champion Rory McIlroy here to the media center.

Rory, you're going to be making your eighth start here. What is it like to be back, especially as a past champion?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, it's always good to be back at Bay Hill. I didn't play this event for the first few years of my career and finally came here in 2015, and I don't think I've missed a tournament since.

We all know what Arnold Palmer means to the PGA TOUR and to the game of golf in general. So it's always nice to be here and try to sort of remember his legacy and remember what he meant to everyone. He was probably the catalyst with maybe a few other guys of why we're here today and why the game of professional golf is at such a high level.

So nice to be here, nice to pay our respects. Looking forward to another good week.

THE MODERATOR: And as you stated, you haven't missed a tournament since you started, have five consecutive top tens here. What about this course and this tournament really clicks with your game?

RORY MCILROY: It's one of these courses that I don't feel like I have to do anything special to compete. I can play within myself. You take care of the par-5s here. You play conservatively the rest of the way, especially how the golf course here has been set up the past few years. You play for your pars, and then you try to pick off birdies on the par-5s and some of the easier holes. If you just keep doing that day after day, you're going to find yourself around the top of the leaderboard.

Yeah, it's been a course that's fit my eye from the first time I played here, and just one of those courses that I enjoy coming back to and feel like I can contend at.

**Q. Rory, congratulations on finishing third, I think, on the PIP.**

RORY MCILROY: Thanks (laughter).

**Q. Do you understand exactly why you ended up third, and were there any surprises on the list for you when you saw the top ten?**

RORY MCILROY: Not really. I mean, you look at the ten guys that are on there, and they're the ten guys that have been at the top of the game or have been around the top of the game for a long time. Obviously, everyone's seen the five metrics that go into it and how everyone ranked in those metrics. I feel like it's a pretty self-explanatory system. That's how the numbers sort of rolled out.

Yeah, it's certainly not something that I'm checking up on every week to see where I'm at, but I think it went the way most of us expected it to go.

**Q. The second shot you had at 9, just for example, is the rough here as thick as you've seen in the years you've played?**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, it's a different course setup this year. I don't quite -- not understand, but it's a departure from what they've done the last few years. The rough is thick off the fairways, but then what they've done is they've taken out a lot of these runoff areas off the greens where historically it's been you'd miss a green and run off and you'd still have the chip off short grass, for example, and now that's all been filled in with rough.

So even like left of the 1st green, sort of right -- yeah, there's just so many areas that there were runoffs and sort of tight areas, which I think lends itself to the better chippers of the golf ball, and that's been sort of taken away this year. I don't quite understand why they've done that, but it's definitely a different test than one in previous years.

**Q. Also, as you ramp up for this big stretch of golf tournaments, what are you kind of waiting to see in your game. What is it you're kind of looking for as you do the run-up?**



RORY MCILROY: Just consistency. I mean, I felt like the three tournaments that I've played this year, I've played pretty well. I had a pretty solid week at Riviera without doing anything really special. I had a good weekend.

I think just more of the same. I've driven the ball pretty well. I've seen a bit of improvement in iron play. My short game's been really good. If anything, just getting the consistency to a point where I feel like I can play like that day in and day out.

But the game feels good, so just sort of trying to keep doing what I'm doing.

**Q. I'm just wondering if there's anything specific in your golf swing that Michael's helping you maybe get back to or work on technique-wise?**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, just trying to get the club a little more neutral at the top, trying to feel like I sort of have more awareness of what my left arm is doing in the backswing instead of why I felt like I've got so right-sided in my thoughts recently. So trying to initiate the backswing with the left arm, the club going back and just letting that left arm sort of rotate up onto the plane. That's sort of what I've been trying to feel.

**Q. I asked Sahith this yesterday, and I wanted to find out from you as well. Obviously, there's usually a level of prep that each player goes through. I wanted to find out from you is there any particular difference in the way you prepare for Arnold Palmer given how special this particular competition is and how historic this one is?**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I think, as it was alluded to, this is my eighth start here. So the golf course doesn't change that much year to year. So you sort of know what you're getting into or what to expect. But as I just mentioned, the golf course is set up a little differently than it has been in previous years. So chipping out of that longer rough around the greens, I think, is something that needs to be an area of importance in preparation.

So something where I'll probably go to the chipping green after this and just get comfortable chipping out of that longer rough because the previous events that I have played this year I haven't really had to deal with that too much. So I guess it's just adapting to the conditions this week and trying to be as best prepared for those as possible.

**Q. Rory, given your stature and success in the game, it gives you a voice. Do you feel though that, even if**

**you weren't a world renowned golfer, you would still speak out about injustices you see? And why are you that way?**

RORY MCILROY: Look, I'll only voice my opinion on things that I believe I'm educated in and believe that I have a right to talk about. So there's certainly things that I won't get into just because I'm not completely educated on that topic and feel like giving an opinion probably isn't the right thing to do.

But when it comes to golf and PGA TOUR stuff, I feel like I'm pretty educated on that stuff. And I guess with that voice comes responsibility to try to do the right thing. That's all I try to do. I try to make comments or speak about things to do the right thing, and that's the reason I'm maybe a little more outspoken than other guys in our game.

Again, it doesn't go much further than the game of golf because I feel comfortable talking about that, but when you sort of delve into other things, I don't think it's my place to get into that.

**Q. The golf course you mentioned and you said you don't have to do anything special, easy for you to say. But I think five straight years the scoring average has been over par. What do you think the difficulty of the course is for a lot of players?**

RORY MCILROY: So I think, if you look at the last couple years, the course conditions have got very firm. It's been dry, and it's been windy. Then that's lent itself to the course firming up and playing very tricky over the weekend.

I think, if you look at the progression of scoring over the last couple of years here, the scores have got progressively higher each and every day because the course has firmed up, it's got trickier. Hole locations go in tougher spots. And then obviously you have guys in the weekend playing in and around the lead, and that's obviously more difficult to play with the freedom that you want to.

So all of that combined, it's become one of the toughest tests that we face all year. Then this year with the rough being as long and as thick as it is, it just adds another dimension to that.

**Q. Speaking of education, I thought I read something about you once that you wanted to drop out of school in like the fifth grade?**

RORY MCILROY: I did drop out of school in -- well, not

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the fifth grade (laughter). I dropped out of school pretty early, yeah.

**Q. What does that say about you, if anything, that you've got this appetite for knowledge, for learning, for reading, and hated school?**

COACH: Learnt my lesson. I didn't have -- I just had no -- I had no academic ambitions when I was a youngster. I don't know, I think I got to a point in golf where I was pretty -- all I wanted to do when I was young was play golf. Didn't care about school. Didn't want to go. Wanted to just go practice, play golf. And now all I do most every day is go practice and play golf.

So I have other things I want to do and hobbies. I think as you get older, you get interested in more things and maybe just become a little more curious. I've sort of become that way. But, again, I'm the first one to say I don't know -- I know a little about a lot, but I'm not as smart on a lot of things as I am maybe on golf and things in and around this world.

**Q. One more golf question. Finchem probably back in '10 had talked about this idea of somewhat of a world tour schedule and also how difficult it would be to put together. They've been trying for a long time. Do you get a sense that, given the dynamics of golf right now, that it could be getting closer to that and that it would still be just as difficult to implement?**

RORY MCILROY: So I certainly think there's been steps taken that have got us closer to that point. Obviously, this strategic alliance between DP World Tour and the PGA TOUR, PGA TOUR buying a stake in European Tour Productions, Jay having a seat on the board in Europe, they're certainly working much closer together, which is a great thing. I think it needs to be that way.

The game of professional golf, everyone needs to be trying to pull in the same direction instead of pulling against each other. I think we're getting closer to that spot. I think it would be easy for -- it's not as simple as this, but the guys at the PGA TOUR could just literally walk down the street to the guys in the ATP and just have a chat about what they do.

It's two very, very different structures and different schedules, but I think there is a path where one day there could be -- it might still be two Tours running side by side parallel to each other, but basically for -- it would be a global tour, a global schedule.

**Q. Would it be important for Europe's identity?**

RORY MCILROY: I think so. I think there's quite a long history and tradition and heritage there. You go back to -- yeah, the formation of the European Tour wasn't that long after the PGA TOUR. I think European Tour was in the '70s, and PGA TOUR was in the late '60s. So there's history there that you would like to keep.

**Q. Just a bit off topic, for next week it's generally accepted that the scariest tee shot is 17. I've talked to a bunch of players that say the second scariest is the 18th tee. Can you talk to me about how scary that is and the challenge of the tee shot on 18.**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, it's -- I would argue 18 is scarier than 17. You've got to commit. I feel over the years -- it's not a bail-out to the right, but I think, if you do hit it down that right side and avoid the water, you can still get it up around the green and try to make a 4, but it's an intimidating tee shot. It's what Pete Dye does with his golf courses. He makes it very visually intimidating.

I've always played that hole aggressively because I'd rather have to hit one very difficult shot to make the hole play easier than have to hit two difficult shots, like guys hit a 2-iron off that tee and they're still left with a 5-iron into that green. I'd rather hit driver and a wedge, but it just means you have to hit a really good drive.

So that was sort of my strategy when I won there in '19. And if you do bail out to the right, I feel like you still have a decent chance to make a 4.

**Q. Rory, the tee shot at 6 here is one of those that invites you to bite off as much as you can stomach. What's your comfort zone on that tee? And then as you get to the tee every day, what's the thought process as whether to move forward, move back, that type of thing?**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, so I would love this, the wind that we have at the minute, this north wind to continue to keep blowing. I know it's going to switch. At least with the north wind, it's back into the wind. So you know you can't go as far left as you want to. So it makes the decision for you. When you start getting it downwind, that's when you've got some decisions to make.

Yeah, and it's almost -- it's tough, that downwind because you want to take on an aggressive line, but then if you hit it good, you're going to run out into that thick rough on the other side. Yeah, for me, it's all wind dependent. Even Bryson last year, I mean, it was pretty heavily downwind and he was able to take the line that he took.

I think it's one of those you hit where you're comfortable

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with off the tee. You try to get that ball on the green in two. You take your two putts and make 4 and get out of there. It's one of those holes that you keep it dry, you play pretty conservatively, and you're going to walk off with birdie more times than not.

**Q. What yardage do you like to leave yourself for that second shot?**

RORY MCILROY: The last two days, I've had 5-iron in, sort of been right around 200 yards front, 205 front, something like that.

**Q. In the years that you've gone to Augusta prior to the Masters, have you gone there on a scouting mission, or has it been more to just enjoy it and take it all in and have a good time? Also, are you planning on going this spring prior to Masters week?**

RORY MCILROY: I used to go on scouting missions and go for prep, and now I usually just go for the wine. They've got a nice wine cellar there.

I probably won't go up early this year. Plan next week -- in fairness, I do have two weeks off after THE PLAYERS before San Antonio. I might find my way up there at some point. And as well, there has been a couple of changes on 11 and 15 that I've heard about that I would like to see, and especially not getting in playing the week before and probably not getting in there until the Monday. I might go up there for a night or two and have a little look around, but I haven't made any plans yet.

**Q. When you do go just to -- maybe if you're dad's with you or whatever, do you find those some of the more enjoyable times? Or do you have a hard time not thinking about the tournament?**

RORY MCILROY: No, they've always been my favorite times at Augusta is going up with members and playing with my dad and putting the jacket and tie on and going for dinner in the clubhouse at night. Those are great experiences. I think that, along with probably a few other clubs, they're the best experiences in golf to share those with friends or family, with my dad and stuff like that.

I enjoy going up there, and I can definitely separate the two. I can enjoy my time there and just play the golf course and have a good time and separate that from what I try to do one week every April.

**Q. Are you surprised that so many golfers and sponsors have separated themselves, distanced themselves from Phil, who's one of the legends of the game, or do you think his comments were so volatile**

**that that was necessary? And how unfortunate is the whole situation?**

RORY MCILROY: It is unfortunate. I think Phil has been a wonderful ambassador for the game of golf, still is a wonderful ambassador for the game of golf. It's unfortunate that a few comments that he thought he was making in confidence or off the record got out there and were -- not used against him, but this whole situation is unfortunate.

Look, Phil will be back. I think the players want to see him back. He's done such a wonderful job for the game of golf, and he's represented the game of golf very, very well for the entirety of his career.

Look, we all make mistakes. We all say things we want to take back. No one is different in that regard. But we should be allowed to make mistakes, and we should be allowed to ask for forgiveness and for people to forgive us and move on. Hopefully, he comes back at some stage, and he will, and people will welcome him back and be glad that he is back.

**Q. Rory, to Doug's point about your schooling, I think the headmaster at Sullivan told me years ago that you scored 1310 on your SAT.**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, but that's -- yeah. I was going to say something. I'm not even going to go there. That's fine. Something like that, yeah. I did take the SAT to get into college over here in America. Then I thought better of it and decided that I wanted to make money sooner.

**Q. I know you to be a student of the world and what's going on and you've traveled all over the world. The world is such a tender place right now. What do you do to sort of put that aside so you can focus on your day job?**

RORY MCILROY: I try to look at the news once a day and sort of leave it at that. You sort of try to keep up to date with current events and everything that's happening. I guess I have to understand that sitting in my position right here in Orlando, Florida, there's not much that I can say or do that's going to help the situation. So I can just focus on what's most important to me, which is my family and my golf, and live my life.

**Q. Rory, I saw the video of your win here. I was watching you put on that red cardigan, how happy you were. Can you explain what it was like to put that on, and where is that sweater now? What occasions have you maybe broken it out to wear since then?**

RORY MCILROY: So it's in my wardrobe. I have not broken it out since then. It's a little scratchy. It's not like -- it wouldn't be that comfortable on the skin, but it's obviously very, very nice to have in the wardrobe.

Yeah, the tradition, the cardigan, I think it's one of the coolest trophies that we have in golf. I wish Arnold would have been around to be with me on the 18th green then. That would have been the icing on the cake. But I got to spend a couple of years with him here in 2015 and 2016, and I'll always appreciate those times that we did spend together.

**Q. Rory, do you think all PGA TOUR players should take a turn being a member of the Players Advisory Council? Do you think that would be a good benefit for everyone's understanding of how the business of the TOUR operates?**

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I think so. Like I've been a member of the PAC now for a few years, and worked my way up to the policy board this year and for the next few years. Yeah, it's been an education for me. I certainly know a lot more about TOUR business now than I did before I started. It gives you an appreciation. It gives you an appreciation for how hard everyone back in Ponte Vedra works, all the things they do for PGA TOUR members, the pension plan, deferred compensation. It's the best structure in sports for a league of athletes or members.

Yeah, it's just been a real education. I think the more people that want to get involved in it and learn about it, it's just -- I think it would be very beneficial. I don't think it should be something that should be forced upon the players, but I think maybe the TOUR doing a better job or being more forthright or whatever, I think having two or three mandatory player meetings a year maybe isn't quite enough to get the points across that they want to get across.

I think that's the other thing. For PGA TOUR members, they have to realize that the PGA TOUR executives and everyone that works back in Ponte Vedra, they work for us, and they're trying to do the best job for the members of the TOUR and all the net revenues flow to us. But at the same time, we have to keep them accountable and make sure they're doing a good job.

From what I've seen over the last few years, they handled the pandemic well, probably better than most other leagues did. They came out of that financially very, very strong. Probably 2021 was their best ever year in terms of financials. There's more and more revenues flowing to the players each and every year. I feel like they're doing a

really good job.

I would be the first one to put my hand up and say if they weren't, but right now I appreciate the job that they're doing. I hope most people on the PGA TOUR appreciate that too.

THE MODERATOR: That's all the time we have for questions. Rory, we thank you for taking the time to talk with us, and we wish you the best of luck this week.

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