

# Abu Dhabi HSBC Golf Championship

Wednesday, 6 November, 2024

Abu Dhabi, UAE

Yas Links

## Rory McIlroy

### Press Conference

CLARE BODEL: Welcome back to Abu Dhabi, Rory, at the start of the season you had a win in the UAE, and now you have a chance to have another couple of victories in this area. What do you enjoy about this part of the world?

RORY McILROY: I enjoy all of it. You know, I first came to the UAE as a 16-year-old amateur and played in the Desert Classic. Since that year, I think I've come back every year since. I've been coming to this region for nearly 20 years, and got a lot of friends here. I obviously lived in the UAE for four years, as well. It is just is a very familiar and comfortable place for me.

And then I think when you have those good feelings, it's probably a little easier to play good golf, and I've had success here. I think that's made me want to come back each and every year. They are some of the strongest events we have on the DP World Tour and I want to come back, and not only support them, but come back and win them. Because I know every time I come here and tee it up, I have a good chance to win because I'm so familiar and comfortable with the golf courses as well, maybe apart from this one.

Yeah, good to be back. And obviously excited about the next two weeks and what that could mean and going to try to win a second Race to Dubai and equal Seve. Pretty cool things on the horizon.

CLARE BODEL: With that in mind, the season-long race has come to an end. Hitting such a milestone, equalling Seve, chasing Monty down, is it difficult to put that to the back of your mind and focus on the next two weeks?

RORY McILROY: A little bit but if I go out and win this week, obviously you know, it makes it a bit boring next week. But I won't find it boring; it will be lovely.

But yeah, all I can focus on is the task at hand and trying to play as well as I can this week, and if I can do that, I'll give myself an even better chance. Yeah, try to stay focused this week and play as well as I can, and you know, give



myself another chance to win. I've had a lot of good chances this year. I've converted a couple.

But I've let a few slip away. Try to give myself another two chances to win golf tournaments that are important to me.

**Q. I know one golf course where you have always played well, but not won, and another was Abu Dhabi Golf Club, as well, you have always had great results over there. Now that it has shifted over here, and I remember you playing really well at the Abdullah Al Naboodah Invitational over here with your father. Do you think that changes something in your head when you come into the same tournament at a different venue?**

RORY McILROY: Well, a little bit. I think the last time I played here was the start of 2022, and it was very windy that week. Doesn't look like it's going to be as windy this week. It's very different conditions. I think the scoring will be quite a bit lower this week than it was then. A bit of a different test.

But yeah, I mean, I'd like to think that no matter where a golf tournament is being played and what golf course it's on, that if I play to my capability, I'll have a chance to win.

And yeah, I've only played one tournament here at Yas Links compared to maybe some of the other guys that have played a couple more. But I feel like I've got a pretty good handle on the golf course and what the strategy should be and how I should play it.

**Q. And if I can ask you a bit of a local question, you know Colm passed away, and Colm and Gerald Lawless were such supporters of yours. I just wanted to know about your relationship with Colm in supporting your foundation and things like that?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, absolutely. So yeah, Colm, and obviously Gerald, have been huge supporters of mine. Jumeirah, when Gerald was the CEO, was my first sponsor. And I've known Colm and his family for a long time from coming over here.



I think what they have done in this recent region in Dubai in familiar and especially with Dubai Duty Free and with the support they have give sports back home in Ireland. They sponsor a lot of the horse racing.

And obviously they sponsored The Irish Open when I hosted it for a few years. Their support was amazing. It bumped the prize fund up of The Irish Open. It enticed a few more players to come and play the event that wouldn't necessarily play the event.

Colm was a great supporter of sport and golf in Ireland, and obviously built an incredibly successful business here in the region and he'll be dearly missed. He was a great man.

**Q. Obviously you've tied Seve, and to pass him would be great. But what keeps you so interested in The Race to Dubai? Is it the legacy of the whole thing of getting to beat Monty and Seve?**

RORY McILROY: Not necessarily that, even though that would be nice. I pride myself -- I'm a European player. I would like to go down as the most successful European of all time. Obviously Race to Dubai wins would count to that but also major championships and hopefully I've got a few more Ryder Cups ahead of me as well.

So that's something that I would like to, I think is a goal that's quite attainable over the next ten years.

I'm very proud to be from Europe and have sort of, you know, played on this tour and played on this tour consistently.

Yeah, it's something that I'm very proud of and I just think of the greats of European golf that I grew up watching, whether it was Faldo or Woosie or Langer or just sort of the really heyday of The European Tour in the '90s, I guess.

And yeah, I remember when I got my -- not even my European Tour card. I remember when I got my first money clip just when I signed up to be a member and that was a really proud moment for me. That's something that I've always been proud of and something I want to continue to do.

**Q. Obviously we don't know what's going to happen, but do you think it could get back to those glory days, heydays, if European Tour does get this patch at the end of the year?**

RORY McILROY: I think hopefully we'll get more than just the patch at the end of the year. There has to be some tournaments dispersed throughout the year for the Tour to

stay relevant, not just in a four-month window but a little bit more than that.

Yeah, look, we'll see what happens. I think I've articulated that I think The European Tour is in a good spot because it might have a couple of different options going forward.

**Q. Welcome back to the UAE. Good to see you here. Your last event was the Alfred Dunhill Links in Scotland. That's quite a time. Are you energised? Rusty? Fresh? How do you feel?**

RORY McILROY: Probably all of the above a little bit. Yeah, I had four weeks off, but I was keeping pretty busy in those four weeks.

But four weeks off from tournament golf. I feel good. I've done some work on my swing that I felt like I needed to do. Still probably a ways to go. But it will be nice to test it out in competition and see how it holds up.

But yeah, it's been a long year. I think this is my 26th event of the season. Next week will be 27. So it was nice to have this little break coming into these events to I guess reinvigorate myself a little bit.

It's nice to come here with motivation of trying to achieve something and give -- put all my efforts into the next two weeks, and then I can have a nice little break over the holiday period.

**Q. How does a prolonged break affect your practise and time to implement some of those changes?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I sort of committed after the Dunhill that I wasn't going to watch my ball flight for three weeks. So locked myself indoors in like a swing studio for three weeks and just hit balls into a blank screen or net and just focused on my swing and focused on the movement of my swing and focused on movement of my body patterns, I guess. Had a live feed on a TV in front of me of where the club was, and just sort of trying to get the reps in of making the motion that I want to make.

Then over the past ten days now, sort of from last Monday, started to see the ball flight and get a bit more comfortable with what the ball was doing in the air. Still trying to focus on the move that I want to make.

But I think those three weeks were important. I had not had time to sort of do that over the past 18 months. So I thought it was important to get in there and do that.

And for me that's the only way that I'm going to make a swing change. Because if I just hit balls on the range, I'm

just going to react to whatever ball flight I've just seen.

So to not see the ball flight for a while I think has been really important to try to implement some of those little changes, and it's definitely something that I'll continue to do after these two weeks into December and going into the new year as well.

**Q. Obviously the last time you were here at Yas Links, the weather was adverse, to say the least. How different will the golf course play this week compared to then, and then also just in terms of the condition of the golf course, how does Yas Links compare to the other venues you visit across the year?**

RORY McILROY: The condition of the golf course is absolutely incredible. It doesn't feel like there's a blade of grass out of place.

Yeah, the fairways, they are so tight, even for me. I'm worried about duffing a wedge shot. But fairways are incredible, tees, greens. The condition of the golf course is amazing.

And the conditions are different. It's much hotter. Not as much wind. As I said at the start, I think if the weather continues to be like this, the scoring is going to be quite a bit lower than it has been here. The par 5s are reachable. Greens are still really receptive because of the humidity.

You know, the wind might get up a little bit but I expect quite a few low scores this week.

**Q. I'm not sure if you've seen but there's been a few reports of done deals and negotiations being successful. Can you shed any light on that?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's the first that I've heard of it. I know Jay was in Saudi Arabia last week at the FII and was having some meetings. But no, I think I would have heard if there was.

I know he's briefing the transaction committee tonight. So maybe some news comes out of that.

But as far as I'm aware, I haven't heard a thing.

**Q. Would you be surprised? Because there seems so many loose ends.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I would, but then obviously given today's news with what's happened in America, I think that clears the way a little bit. So we'll see.

**Q. There's probably bigger things at play, more**

**important things, but if the DOJ was certainly more amenable, that would be a big moment, wouldn't be?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it would be. It would be a huge moment.

**Q. Can I just ask you a couple of questions on what you said about not looking at your ball flight? Where was this studio? And when you ended it and when you started looking at your ball flight, did you see any difference or did you feel happy about it? What did you find out?**

RORY McILROY: So the studio was at home in Florida, the Bear's Club. And then I was up in New York for a few days and found a swing studio there in the city to practise at for a little bit.

So I think it's not necessarily that I couldn't make the way I was swinging work. It was just that it relied a little bit more on timing and match-ups of my transition and a bunch of different technical things. I just wanted to clean it up a little bit. Clean up the motion to make it a little more efficient.

And when I'm in the studio and make my rehearsals of what I want to do, I like the way it looks. It looks a little bit more the way I want to swing and the positions that I want to hit.

And then I would say in terms of when I started to hit balls again outside and look at my ball flight, I think it just brought my start lines in a little bit, which is a good thing. Sometimes when my swing goes off, I can hit draws and fades, but I'm having to aim further right and left for those draws and fades to make sure that I do it.

So instead of being able to hit a three-yard draw it's more like an eight- or ten-yard draw; and I'm the same way the other way with the fade. It's just into these extremes a little bit, instead of, you know, if you can tighten up your start lines, it means that your aiming points are much tighter and then your dispersion isn't quite as wide.

So make just a little bit of a difference with start lines. But look, it's a work-in-progress. For me, it's something just to make my golf swing more efficient, and then if it is more efficient, then it means it's not going to break down as much under pressure. If I look at my year, the one thing that I would criticise myself on is the fact that I've had these chances to win.

But then when I've had these chances to win, okay, some may have been because of the putter but others have been because of my ball-striking letting me down as a crucial point. I think just trying to clean all that up so that

whenever I do get under that pressure, you know, I can have a hundred per cent trust in my swing and know what's going to happen.

**Q. What started this? Because it's very -- you don't see a professional actually not trying to see his ball flight for such a long time.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, you would be surprised. I think swing work in a studio without seeing your ball flight is very helpful, especially when you're just focused on your swing. I think a lot of guys do it.

For me, I just haven't had the time to focus on it. It's been a busy 18 months and I've played a lot of golf. But I just tried to commit to that move October that I was going to knuckle down and try to change a couple of things.

It's probably still not -- you know, when I'm out there playing on the course, it's probably still not quite where I want it to be compared to where it is inside. But you have to find that balance between, you know, making the motion that you want, but also trying to hit the golf shot that you want as well.

So that's why these two weeks will be a good indication to see where I'm at.

CLARE BODEL: Thank you, everyone, and thank you, Rory. Good luck this week.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports