

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Wednesday, 25 January, 2023

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



BRIONY CARLYON: Delighted to welcome back world No. 1, Rory McIlroy to the Hero Dubai Desert Classic. It's great to have you here. Last time we were in Dubai, you were Race to Dubai Champion, and you've had a bit of time off, and return here to an event you've won twice as well. Give us a sense of what it's like to be back here.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it is. It's really nice to be back. You know, I've had a lot of great memories here and success over the years at the Emirates but feel like I have a little bit of unfinished business with how the tournament ended for me last year here. Wasn't quite the way I wanted to finish it off.

But you know, I went on from that week and played really well and had a great year, as you said, but it's been nice to try to take a little bit of time away, and try to sort of distance myself from the game of golf for at least a month or two, and sort of recharge and reset and try to start 2023 with renewed optimism and a sort of full tank and ready to go.

BRIONY CARLYON: Wonderful. We're going to open with questions from the floor.

Q. I walked with you a few holes yesterday and I saw you playing. Could you talk about your game, how it is, how it fits this course?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think after The Race to Dubai, I played that match on the 10th of December with Tiger and J.T. and Jordan, and then I put the clubs away for a few weeks after that. I was pretty mentally and physically drained after the year. So I didn't pick the clubs up again until the new year, so it was nice to sort of put them away for a few weeks.

I've been obviously practising at home and practising well but it's always first tournament of the year, getting back on to the golf course, just trying to get comfortable again with shots on the course and visuals and all that sort of stuff. I'm sure it will be a little bit of rust to start the week but hopefully I can shake that off. I've got a great record here,

so I have great confidence in that.

But yeah, it's a long year. I'm starting slowly. I'm not really -- you know, there's a lot of golf to be played, and just sort of trying to build myself up gradually for obviously the meat of the season in a couple of months' time.

Q. Sorry to bring up the bad memories, first of all, but last year what you did on 18, would you do it every time again that you know it isn't the range?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, 100 per cent. It wasn't a bad decision. It was just a bad swing. It was a bit of a hanging lie. The group in front of us were taking their time on the 18th green, and I had quite a bit of a wait, and that's not really -- that's not an excuse. But yeah, it was just a bad swing at the wrong time.

Yeah, I certainly would make the decision again. There's so much room behind that green. There's a backboard. Yeah, if those hospitality units were out-of-bounds posts, yeah, maybe I'd think about it differently or have a different decision to make. But you can literally walk it into the hospitality and take a drop and try to make your four that way. I hit a bad shot and mis-struck it. Obviously the miss was long and I missed it short.

Q. A little while ago, I was telling you about your records here, nine top 10s in a row here and an excellent record at the DP World also. What is it about Dubai that makes you and your game click?

RORY McILROY: I first played this tournament in 2006. So I've been coming here for a long time, 17 years. I've got a level of comfort here. I like starting my year here. I have a lot of friends. I called this place home for four years.

So yeah, I just have a level of comfort. I like it. I get great support here with the crowds that come out, and just you start -- you play competitively around a golf course for such a long time. It just feels automatic, where you hit your tee shots, where you remember certain things about certain shots and different putts and all those things play into it. Yeah, just a real level of comfort.



Q. There's been suggestions that Patrick Reed wasn't very happy yesterday that you declined to acknowledge his attempt to shake your hand. Can you tell us exactly what happened?

RORY McILROY: I didn't see it. I was down by my bag and he came up to me, and I was busy working and sort of doing my practise, and I didn't really feel like -- I didn't feel the need to acknowledge him.

So I didn't see a tee coming my direction at all, but apparently that's what happened. And if roles were reversed and I'd have of thrown that tee at him, I'd be expecting him a lawsuit.

Q. You didn't duck then, Rory?

RORY McILROY: I didn't duck?

Q. You didn't feel the feed to duck?

RORY McILROY: I didn't see, it, no. My back was turned to him.

Q. Just without moving the point, a guy who has landed you with a subpoena, do you think he's probably not entitled to expect you to greet him with open arms?

RORY McILROY: I mean, exactly, right. Like that's -- I mean, I got a subpoena on Christmas Eve. I mean, I don't see your -- like you can't pretend like nothing's happening, right. I think that's the thing. Like why -- we are living in reality here. He's -- no, so...

Q. Sorry to take this subject with Patrick on the range yesterday a bit further, but Patrick Reed said to you, he shook hands with Harry, wishing him a happy new year, put his hand out to wish you a happy new year, in a goal, sort of approach to try and mend bridges, there was no tee throwing. He just turned his back, had a tee from his pocket and threw it down in disgust, as probably anyone would do when you approach someone and don't get an answer. Can you see yourself maybe one day mending those bridges with Patrick -- not at the moment, but he said he was trying to make an effort.

RORY McILROY: (Incredulous facial expression.)

Q. In terms of your schedule this year, obviously there's the designated events which then you know kind of dictate very much what you're doing. You didn't play in Hawai'i at the start of the year. So

knowing what your ultimate priorities are, how is scheduling going to be for you in the current environment, or the new environment?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's fine. I mean, look, I'm playing a couple of events that I don't normally play. But it's good. I mean, I think we all understand that this is what we all agreed to, and I'm happy to do it. If it makes the Tour and the world of professional golf a better product, I'm happy to do it.

Obviously as you said, I got my one opt-out out of the way early in Hawai'i. It's not a tournament I've historically played. I've played it once in my career. I like to start my seasons here in the Middle East, and yeah, I mean, now everybody knows what tournaments I am playing, right. There's no real guessing. It's just you know what the designated events are, and you know that I'll be there.

Q. Can I just ask you for your reaction, it looks like there's been sort of various bits of movement with LIV that has been portrayed as strengthening Greg Norman's position in the top of that organization. We all know what you said when you were back here in November. So I just wonder if you have any reaction to that.

RORY McILROY: I mean, if the Chief Executive doesn't have an executive team, I don't know how strong that is.

Q. So if I could just follow up on that, do you see that as some kind of level of weakness?

RORY McILROY: Yeah.

Q. Because?

RORY McILROY: I mean, he can't do it himself. He needs to rely on a team just like all of us rely on teams, right, to do things.

You know, you sort operating in a silo, it starts to get pretty difficult.

Q. When you mentioned being mentally drained at the end of the year, how much of that is from all the extracurricular stuff that you're doing with LIV?

RORY McILROY: All of it. All of it.

Q. Are you happy? It's worth that?

RORY McILROY: I mean, I think there is -- on reflection last year, I felt like I needed to take on quite a lot.

But I think getting the wheels in motion of how hopefully the new system and the new -- yeah, I keep calling it a product, but the new structure of professional golf, like getting those wheels in motion, it look a lot of effort last year, but now those wheels are in motion. We just have to try to tidy up the schedule for 2024. But I feel like most of the heavy lifting was done last year.

We still have quite a bit of work to do, but you know hopefully this year it won't be quite as taxing.

Q. Jon Rahm seems to be winning a title every other hour at the moment. What do you make of his start to the year? Obviously --

RORY McILROY: Amazing.

Q. He can usurp you on world No. 1 on Saturday because they have an early finish. It's a he will had of a run, isn't it?

RORY McILROY: It's unbelievable for Europe's Ryder Cup chances and just morale in that, I thought The Hero Cup was a great thing a couple of weeks ago for our Ryder Cup chances. You see Jon play the way he's playing; it's amazing.

Like we all know Jon is one of the best players in the world, whether there's a 1 beside his name or a 2 beside his name, it doesn't really matter. He's won four of his last six events. He's playing some of the best golf he's played in his career. He's not had a long career but all of his career, he's played consistently at a very, very high level.

So I think we all know that Jon Rahm is one of the best players in the world, so I don't think that's a surprise. But it's been amazing start to the year, and I haven't watched that much. I watched a little bit of Hawai'i. I didn't really watch much of the American Express last week. But he started off the first two tournaments of the year shooting 27-under at both of them. That's pretty impressive.

Q. Keith Pelley said Monday as honorary member, Sergio García could be picked by Luke Donald in the next Ryder Cup. I want to ask you if you think it's a great -- to fix your relationship, thinking The Ryder Cup in the future, in the next month?

RORY McILROY: No.

Q. No way?

RORY McILROY: (Shaking head no.)

Q. About the BBC in the U.K., there's a report

overnight that they are not going to be showing any of the Masters this year onwards. Do you think that's a bit of a shame to lose that terrestrial presence in the U.K.?

RORY McILROY: I mean, it is. You know, I think if you're thinking nostalgically, yes, it is, growing up watching the Masters and The Open on BBC.

I just think the landscape of sports and media and entertainment as changed so much over the last ten years that it's not the model anymore, right. It's either SKY in the U.K. or it's streaming services. And the rights to these sporting events have just become so expensive that it's just not feasible for companies like the BBC to pay that sort of money.

Yeah, is it unfortunate? Yes, but I'd say that the majority of the households in the U.K. have SKY and people are still able to watch.

Q. You mentioned The Hero Cup earlier. Obviously Luke, in addition to Thomas, he had Paul McGinley, Thomas, and Chema there, as well. What do you think the young players are going to take from that week just being in their company and being inspired about The Ryder Cup?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I think The Hero Cup was a wonderful exercise. I played the Seve Trophy back in the day in 2009, and it gave me a slight glimpse of what the Ryder Cup could be like and spending time with people that have played and spending time with people that would become captains of Ryder Cup teams. I think it's great for the young guys to get that experience.

I think, as well, a lot of the matches were very tight, so it was great for the vice captains and the captain to see who excelled in those scenarios, who thrived under that pressure coming down the last few holes trying to win a match.

I mean, it wasn't -- from what I have heard, it wasn't all buddy-buddy. There was some pretty -- there's a bit of tension going on, which is good. I mean that's what we need. It's a great exercise. It will definitely make the people that -- it will distinguish the guys that have a chance to make the team and are going to shine in that environment.

BRIONY CARLYON: As always, thank you for your time and all the best this week.

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