

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Monday, 30 January, 2023

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



Q. Many, many congratulations, that was an extraordinary day of golf. Just give us an idea of the stress levels and all that went into it from your point of view.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, look, it's never easy closing out a golf tournament. There's always going to be people that make runs, and you know, playing when you're defending a lead or have a lead, you're always going to play a little more carefully than the guys that are coming up behind you.

Obviously I felt them closing in, and obviously on the back nine when Patrick sort of drew level with me, I really needed to dig deep. I thought I had sort of blown my chance with the bogey on 15. But thankfully, he bogeyed 16, and then I played a great last couple of holes, great tee shot on 17, good 2-putt and got up-and-down at the last.

Mentally it was very tough today. Like I felt like I could have let my emotions get in the way. I really -- I expended a lot of mental energy today trying to focus on myself and focus on shooting a score and trying to reach a number.

I sort of set myself a target of 20-under at the start of the day. That obviously would have been good enough; 19 was enough in the end. I thought I did really well mentally today. I didn't have my best today. I didn't have my best stuff all week. But I managed my game well and being able to putt it in good spots and get up-and-down when I needed to. So yeah, like overall, it's been a pretty draining week as the first week back out. But obviously ecstatic to get the win.

Q. Everyone is going to say, of all the people that it could be that would be pushing you hardest is Patrick Reed, and we know the nature of the week that both of you have had. So that's interesting, you saying that you did have to work very hard to just kind of divorce that emotional aspect to it?

RORY McILROY: No, 100 percent. Yeah, I did. I had to work really hard to forget about who was up there and just

try to focus on myself.

Q. And for you to win first tournament out for the first time in a year as world No. 1, having come under pressure from Jon Rahm as well that must be very, very satisfying?

RORY McILROY: It is. I think again the most satisfying thing to me this week is I haven't had my best, far from it and to be able to win when you don't have your best, that's the sort of like Holy Grail of what we are trying to do.

Really pleased with that side of it but definitely there's a ton of room for improvement going into the next few weeks.

Q. The putt to win it, the feeling when it disappeared?

RORY McILROY: I had a similar putt -- I held a putt at Bay Hill a few years ago to win, sort of downhill left-to-right. That sort of popped into my head as I was reading it, so I had some pretty good memories to draw on, and thankfully same result.

Q. Huge release when it disappeared?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, big release. Again I sort of had to bottle everything up today, and then was finally able to let it all out on the 18th green.

I've already had so many wonderful memories around this golf course and Dubai in general, so to create some more today, it's just -- it's really cool. Dubai has been a big part of my career and my journey, and you know, to put my name on this trophy for a third time today, to join Ernie Els, is a pretty cool feeling.

Q. You exercised great patience on the front nine after the turn after things turned into a dogfight. Was it easy or tough to see what was materializing ahead of you?

RORY McILROY: It was tougher in a way because I knew that I had the chances coming up 10, 13, 17, 18, but it's tough when you see the person right in front of you birdieing those holes, eagling those holes, whatever it is.



So yeah, I felt the pressure, and for the most part, I did answer. But I always felt like with the way the back nine is here, my length would give me a little bit of an advantage with the par 5s, and then with 17, the drivable par 4.

Q. You'll be forgiven for having a little bit of scar tissue from the 18th. It's hard to see on the coverage exactly what kind of lie you had. What was the options realistically?

RORY McILROY: I didn't really feel like there was an option. It was a tale of two lies. Behind the ball it was all sort of downgrain so I could get into the back of the ball okay with like a five or a six fire but there was a big tuft of rough out in front of the ball which was going to kill any speed the ball had coming off the clubface. The only realisation I had was to hit a wedge and try to get it up-and-down to get the win.

Q. You come into this week admittedly with a little bit of rust, not your A Game. You must walk away with incredible positives?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, massive positives. I think the way I managed my game week, I think the short game display that I put on this week was as good as I can remember. Some things I need to tidy up with the long game but overall, if I can win golf tournaments of this calibre not having my best stuff, it gives me a lot confidence going forward.

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