

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Wednesday, 17 January, 2024

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



A Rolex Series Event



BRIONY CARLYON: We are delighted to welcome Rory McIlroy to the Hero Dubai Desert Classic. Rory, we're celebrating the 35th edition of this tournament here in Dubai. Of course it started in 1989, and I don't want to make you feel old, but on the year that you were born.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

BRIONY CARLYON: You debuted here as an amateur yourself in 2006 and you've also won this event on three occasions. How nice is it for you to come back to Dubai and just kick your year off and get excited about the golfing year ahead?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it is. I feel like this tournament has been a sort of staple in my life for at least half of it. You know, I've been coming back to this tournament for 18 years, so over half my life. So yeah, wonderful memories of Dubai. I feel like it was a place that gave me one of my first opportunities to come out and play on this tour. My first sponsor was from here. My first win was here.

So you know, a lot of firsts for me in this region, so yeah, it's been an incredible journey, and I'm always excited to get back to Dubai with the success that I've had here on this golf course and over at Jumeirah Golf Estates, too, at the end of the year.

Yeah, I've always liked kicking my year off here. It's a familiar place for me, and I feel like if I can play well here, it's a really good sort of steppingstone to the rest of the year.

Q. You always seem to have a stutter the first week in the UAE but the second week has always been really good. Just look back at that week, one bogey, three-putt from two feet. You seem to have gotten all the bad stuff out of the way.

RORY McILROY: I hope so. I'd like to think so. Yeah, look, I haven't played a ton of competitive golf since -- I've played four competitive rounds. When did the Ryder Cup end, the 1st of October? From the 1st of October until

whatever that was, the 12th or 13th of January, I only played four competitive rounds of golf. And those four competitive rounds in Dubai at the end of last year, I wouldn't say I was 100 per cent motivated.

I feel like I've had a three-month off-season, basically. So I think once -- you're going to come back and play. You're going to make some of those mistakes early on, and you know, it's good to play an event like last week where you can learn from them and try to put those things right this week.

And in the bigger scheme of things, you know, with this being a Rolex Series Event and the success that I've had here, look, I would have loved to have won last week.

But even with all those mistakes I made, the fact that I still had a one-shot lead going down the last, you know, it says to me that my game is in really good shape, and I should be quite excited for this week.

Q. And can I ask you about the golf course? The guys are talking about the greens being in really immaculate shape, the best they have seen over here. What do you think of the golf course and any of the changes?

RORY McILROY: It's fantastic. I think the course setup is wonderful. I think it's quite penal off the tee. It's quite penal when you miss your second shots and miss greens. The greens are starting to get firm already. As you said, the putting surfaces are perfect, yeah. It's the best shape I've seen the course in quite a while. It's very good.

Q. That Monday here last year was probably one of the most entertaining days of the golfing year for all of us. What are your memories of that and what it meant and what it stood for and what you were involved in?

RORY McILROY: What I remember, I remember standing on the 10th tee and I think Patrick had just made eagle and I'm just like (dropping head), "Had to be him."

But I think just the sort of mental fortitude I showed on that back nine to not sort of let my emotions get the better of me and really stay focused, and yeah, just to make that



birdie on the last to win by one, yeah, it meant -- in the grand scheme of things, are people going to remember my third Dubai Desert Classic, I don't know.

But it meant a lot to me. I felt like I came through a bit of, not adversity, but I really just had to control my mind and my thoughts and my emotions on that back nine. I felt like I did a really golf club of that.

Q. When a player plays as you've been playing superbly, you know, there's also a sense of freedom. Is there a sense of freedom in you, you're non-golfing responsibilities have been greatly reduced going into 2024. Do you feel a bit more free to look at bigger things?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think I've certainly got a little more time to putt into my game I think.

Yeah, and I'm probably a little unburdened with some of the things that I was going through over the past couple of years.

So yeah, to me, I feel like my focus is firmly back on stuff inside the ropes, and that is a really nice feeling.

Q. Just kind of following up on that in terms of coming off the policy board, just as a European player, do you have any concerns that there isn't any European representation on that board as we kind of potentially are nearer a conclusion to at least getting a pathway forward?

RORY McILROY: We do have Adam Scott, which is an international representation, which I think is important. But I think you'd be -- I think Keith was saying to you guys yesterday, I think the opportunity here is global, and I think you'd be very naïve to not think that way.

Especially if you see, you know, even you look at the event at Kapalua a couple of weeks ago, which is supposed to be one of the big signature events and you see the ratings that that did on TV, it's not -- you know, I would say they were quite underwhelming compared to some of the other events.

I think the opportunity here is global. Look, they are still massive events in America and I think they have huge history and tradition and they need to be kept. But there's a lot of opportunity elsewhere, and I think with Adam being on the board and seeing maybe the bigger picture of things, I think that's a good thing.

Q. So you feel confident that Europe is not going to get left out in all of this?

RORY McILROY: I certainly hope not.

Q. You're probably aware there's been quite a bit of debate about the relevance of Sports Personality of the Year back home, which you were obviously involved in especially after failure to get nominations for Fitzy. I just wonder if you're one of the people who questions his relevance these days?

RORY McILROY: Actually, whenever the results, I forgot I was nominated.

Q. Really?

RORY McILROY: So that's how much I think about it. It's not -- it's a popularity contest, and I think it's just not really -- it's not what it once was.

Q. But do you think that it's also reflective of your attitude in this debate, the fact that there say feeling that BBC, you've got to be really good investigator to find live golf these days?

RORY McILROY: Just buy SKY Sports, I guess.

Q. Last week, you laid out a dream scenario of a global golf tour, and Keith kind of reiterated that yesterday. What would you say is maybe the biggest barrier to the game getting there right now? What's maybe holding it back from that?

RORY McILROY: I think just different interests. There's a lot of different interests in the game, and that's the -- I think what we need to do first is align interests, align interests of the players and the business and the fans and the media and try to get everyone's interests aligned. And then once you do that, then you can move forward.

So it's the aligning of interests, which is the big key to trying to get to that dream scenario.

Q. Do you do any campaigning on that front with your fellow tour pro and definitely fellow elite tour pros trying to align interests?

RORY McILROY: I'm done with that.

Q. Just on David's question again, do you think it's a shame that terrestrial TV doesn't have much golf, you know, when you're talking about that awful phrase, "growing the game," and all of that, do you think that's a shame or what do you think now with the new way?

RORY McILROY: I think legacy media is not what it once



was. Terrestrial TV, print media, no offence (laughter) but we are transitioning into a different world and I think people just excuse me their content differently than they once did.

They want things on their phone. They want things on their iPads. It's just different. The consumer now compared to the consumer 20 years ago is just very, very different.

Q. And just on SPOTY, if you completed the career Grand Slam or anything, would you consider turning up?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I don't know. That's a hypothetical. Depends what my chance were of winning it, I guess.

Q. Do you ever think about things like that if you win this week, you will be the most successful player of the Dubai Desert Classic with four titles, one more than Ernie? Do you ever think of those kind of things going into a week?

RORY McILROY: Look, my focus is firmly on the Dubai Desert Classic this week. It's not -- I want to carry on the go golf that I played last week, and I want to go out here and play well again.

But I think if you play good golf and you play the golf that you feel like you're capable of, then you can sit back and reflect and be like, oh, that's great. I've won one more than Ernie or whatever it is, but I certainly would never think that way going into a tournament. Just trying to go out there and shoot best possible score I can and see where that leaves me at the end of the week.

Q. I noticed that Sergio in response to you talking about an IPL and cricket competition probably being a good thing; said they deserve to be more important than a month. Is it going to be difficult to get a scenario where everyone is going to be happy?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, Sergio feels he deserves a lot of things.

Again, it's trying to align interests, as I said to Sean, and I think right now it's just very, very hard to align everyone's interests in the game.

Q. I can't help asking about Asia. This year, probably the DP World Tour has one much its strongest Asian Swings. With some of the elite golfers there from the DP World Tour or maybe even the PGA coming there would help the sport in that part of the world, which is obviously the most populated.

RORY McILROY: Absolutely. I spoke to Dr. Munjal on the course about it today. You know, if this global tour somehow comes to fruition in the next few years, could you imagine bringing the best 70 or 80 golfers in the world to India for a tournament or, you know, that -- that would change -- I think would change the game and the perception of the game in a country like that.

So again, there's so much opportunity out there to go global with it, and I've said this for the last few months, but golf is at an inflection point, and if golf doesn't do it now, I fear that it will never do it and we'll sort of have this fractured landscape forever.

As I said I hope it all works out.

Q. Has Dr. Munjal invited you?

RORY McILROY: We've talked about it. But look, with how the golf calendar is at the minute -- and that's the other thing that needs to be looked at. There's so many different golf tournaments that happen at different times, and it's going to be very hard for everything to piece together but it's a country that I've never been to and one that I would like to visit at some point in my life.

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