

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Wednesday, 15 January, 2025

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



CLARE BODEL: Rory, you've been voted Player of the Year for 2024 picking up the Seve Ballesteros Award, and we'd just like to welcome Javier to come in and present it to you.

(Award presentation.)

Let's talk Hero Dubai Desert Classic and the event that started off your year that led to this award was right here being won at the start of the season. Talk to us about how much you love this event. Because you've won it quite a few times.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's always been nice to start my year in Dubai. It's something that I've done most of my professional career. There's a couple of times where obviously when Abu Dhabi was at start of the season, and this was usually the second event. But the last couple years to come here to Dubai, open the season, have success, obviously it's really nice to get off to a strong start to the season, and I've been able to do that the last couple years. And obviously that's the plan again this year.

Q. Before we get to questions about Ryder Cup, etc., a year ago at this same place, I asked you what chances of you ever teeing up in India, and now we have rumours of Rory McIlroy probably coming to India in October. How true, how much possible, and anything else?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, look, I sat here last year and said that the Indian market is a very important market for golf. You look at what's happening next week with the International Series, you've got Bryson and a lot of those guys going over to play.

India is a country I've always wanted to visit. I've never been there before obviously I know that there's discussions ongoing about an event that may be played later in the year. But I know that they are at a delicate stage. So I don't want to put the cart before the horse and say anything that I shouldn't.

Obviously I'm hopeful that things go the right way and that I have maybe an opportunity to be there. But I think to say anything else at this point would be a little premature. But certainly would obviously love to go to India one day and play there, whether that's this year or sometime down the line. But it's certainly something that I want to do.

Q. You played 27 events last year, and you spoke about trying to cut that down this year. Do you have it worked out in your head what that might look like, and will there as many Tour events?

RORY McILROY: I think I'll probably play like 12 total for the year (laughter).

Yeah, I'll probably play, including the Ryder Cup, something like 22. I'd say my DP World Tour schedule will be pretty similar to what it was last year. Obviously we don't have the extra event here in Dubai this year, but I'd imagine that my schedule sort of after the summer will look very, very of the same.

Yeah, if anything, I'll play a similar schedule here, and just shave off some events over in the States.

Q. Not sure if you realise, but if you win again this week, obviously you know it would be three in a row, a hat trick. Doesn't happen very many times in regular events. I think Faldo in The Irish Open in '93 is the last. Tiger has done it tons of times in the WGCs but that's Tiger. What would that mean to you?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think I talked about it the end of last year, and obviously winning the Seve Ballesteros Award, I think to be able to put my name up alongside the European greats of golf, Seve, Faldo, Langer, Woosie, Lyle, like all these guys, it's amazing.

And I don't -- like I don't go out there, that's not my goal. My goal is to go out and try to get the best out of myself and play as good as I can, and thankfully that's ended up in winning a few tournaments here and there.

But my mindset has never been, Oh, if I do this, I will equal him or if I do that. I want to win tournaments, and it's really



cool on Sunday nights to sit there with a glass of wine and look at all the names that are on the trophy and think that my name is alongside them. That's really cool.

Q. Jon Rahm was in here yesterday and said we're in a Golden Era for golf with endless possibilities. I wonder what your take on that characterisation is. Is it something you agree with?

RORY McILROY: Very rose-tinted glasses if you ask me.

Yeah, look, I think what I would say is with everything that's happened in the game over the past two or three years, I think what I maybe could envision is that the domination of the American side of things might come back a little bit in terms of, not that the game has never been global, but you know, sort of trying to build on the opportunities globally. So I think where we are, I think we are in a good position to try to grow that part of it.

There's amazing players, right. There's amazing players that play in all different tours and parts of the world and everything, which is great. But at the same time, it's become too fractured and too disjointed.

I would share his optimism if the game wasn't as disjointed and as fractured as it was. You know, maybe we'll get to that point sometime in the near future, and if we do, then I would say, I would share that optimism.

Q. First thing, I've been involved in a few of these in the past but congratulations from the Golf Writers Association on winning yet another Golfer of the Year Award.

RORY McILROY: Thank you. Looking forward to picking it up in Portrush.

Q. When you talk about going down a path that you're not certain about at this stage and what's going to happen, can I be bold enough to ask you a similar sort of question, what was your reaction what you heard about a Hollywood Golf Club member talked about joining the rival tour?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, look, I have known Tom since he was 10 years old, 11 years old, and as soon as he got the offer, he rang me. I just landed in New Zealand. We had a really good conversation. And I talked to him multiple times over the course of December to sort of get a feel for, you know, what he was thinking, and obviously what -- you know, yeah, basically what he was going to do. And all I could do is give my perspective.

I really like Tom as a person, as a player. I think he's got a

ton of potential. Look, I said to him, if I were in your shoes, I would make a different choice than the one you're thinking of making. I think, you know, working so hard to get your Tour card in the States, something that he did, to achieve that goal last year was a big achievement.

I think what he potentially is sacrificing and giving up with access to majors, potential Ryder Cup spot, depending on, you know, how he would play, it just wouldn't have been -- you know, depending -- look, I don't think anything is official yet.

But if I were in his position and I had his potential, which I think I have been before, I wouldn't make that decision.

But I'm not him. I'm not in his shoes. He's a grown man at this point and can make his own decisions. All I can do is try to give him my perspective.

Yeah, look, it would be -- personally for me it would be a little disappointing if it were to happen but again, it's not -- I made it perfectly clear: I am not going to stand your way if you need to make the decision you feel like you need to make for yourself.

But at the same time, I feel like he's giving up a lot to not really benefit that much, you know.

Q. Just quickly as a follow-up, did he seem pretty headstrong that he wanted to go to LIV?

RORY McILROY: No, very open. Very open to hearing my perspective and I appreciated him calling me to get it, as well.

But again, as I said, at the end of the day, he has to make his own decision, and when he does, whatever way that goes, I'm always going to be a fan of his. I'm always going to try to help him in whatever way that I can.

But you know, whatever way he chooses to go, you know, he's going to live with it, which is totally fine. I think we all see the potential that he has, and I definitely think he can be a Top-10 player in the world. But obviously his ranking won't show that for the next couple years if he makes one decision over another.

Q. If you go back 18 months or so, your head was all over the place with everything that was going on in the golf world and the role you took on. How clear is that head now, and how important is that for you going into this year?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's really nice to just focus on the golf. Yeah, look, I feel like everything that's happened over

the last few years, I've learnt from it and I've been through it, and it's been a really good experience in some ways.

But yeah, I think it's time now. I'm still young-ish. I feel young. I'm at a point in my career where I really just have to look after myself and I really care about myself and think about myself, and that's what I'm doing going forward. It's nice to knuckle down. I feel like my game is in good shape. I've been close to doing some really good things in the game of golf over the last few years. I have done some really good things.

But I understand that the window is very slowly closing, and I want to make sure I do everything I can to have the best career I possibly can.

Q. Obviously you've had a bit of time off. Just wondering, is there anything in particular that you've been working on, or has there been any changes to the game or to the swing?

RORY McILROY: No, I've been working on having fun. Took a couple of trips on my time off. Went to a Borussia Dortmund game on Friday night. Just doing things that I've always wanted to do. You know, went to New Zealand for a few days, which was a lot of fun which I've wanted to do for a while.

Honestly just trying to enjoy myself. It's the only part of the year I feel like I can really unwind and do that. There's plenty of time from now until April to knuckle down and get the game in good shape, and I just wanted to make the most of the time off.

Q. Just to go back to Tom's position for a moment. It looks from the outside that you've put quite a bit of effort into being a mentor for him along the way, and I wonder if it's even more disappointing when the sums are not quite as eye-popping as they were a year or two years ago, especially spread over two years.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, no one knows exactly how much he's going to get.

What I would say is, there is still a ton of money to be made on the PGA TOUR and the DP World Tour. There is so much money in the game, and some would argue too much money in the game for the eyeballs that we attract.

So, yeah, again, as I said, I think that for whatever the benefit may be, I don't think it's worth the sacrifice to what he's potentially going to give up.

Q. You had a couple of hits around the golf course this year, and I was speaking to a couple of players

who had some very good things to say good the conditions of the golf course. Would you give me your opinion on how it is playing and if there are any changes that met your eye?

RORY McILROY: It's amazing. I love the setup. The one thing that I've always -- I've probably slightly criticised the European Tour on their setups is if you look at, like out on the 9th green there, the fringe here over the years, the greens got smaller and the fringe got bigger.

So say you had a pin that was cut three off the right-hand side of the green. Well, it's really cut off that -- it's really six yards until you get yourself into trouble whether it's a bunker or the rough or whatever. I find it very -- it wasn't easy to short-side yourself.

So it made around the greens like a little easier, and then I think what happens then, it really bunches the field together. Where if you look now, the fringe have been shrunk. The rough has come closer to the green. There's more of that element of short-siding yourself. So then that goes back to the approach play. Players are going to think twice about taking on a shot. They are going to play a little safer into the middle of the green, and I think it becomes a really good test that way.

So I love the thick rough. I love the setup of the golf course. The greens are quite a bit firmer today than they were on Monday. So as the week goes on, I think it's going to be a great test of golf, which I think we all want to play and I think that's what you all want to watch.

Q. You have shown many times your respect for Seve and his legacy. What does the trophy that you just got today mean to you? And my second question very quickly is, what do you guys expect from the course set up for the Ryder Cup in New York, and also, how do you plan to manage the pressure received from the crowd?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I would say that the Seve Ballesteros Award is special, as well, because it's voted on by your peers. They are the ones that have been out there on the course with you week-in, week-out, playing the same golf courses, competing.

So to get their vote is very meaningful. And I said to Javier up here, the legacy that his dad left on not just European golf but global golf, I mean, it will live on forever.

Our whole motivation, our whole thing that we rally around on the Ryder Cup Team is Seve, and we feel like we have an advantage because of that. Because honestly, the Americans don't have a character like that to rally around.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

So I think we're very lucky that we've got Seve to do that with.

And then to the setup at Bethpage, I would imagine it would be similar to the two parkland setups that we've seen -- that I've seen before when we played an away Ryder Cup. So Medinah in 2012 and Hazeltine in 2016 where they will cut the rough down, it seems. You know, their players are arguably a little longer than us. So they are going to try to take advantage of that length.

And then looking at the stats, a lot of these things, the reason we set the course up and run the way we did is because we knew they were slightly better wedge players than us. So we made some of those par 4s that you would hit wedges into drivable, so we made them go for it. That's the great thing about the Ryder Cup. You can do that when you have that home-course advantage.

They are going to set it up to their strengths, and it's up to us to try to beat them at what they are strong at, alongside dealing with the crowd and dealing with all of that that's going to bring its own pressure. It's going to be an incredibly difficult task.

I think from here for rest of my career, one of my career goals going forward is to try to win another away Ryder Cup. I've experienced it once, and it was absolutely amazing. And I would love to experience it once again. And it's getting harder and harder to do.

We've got a great opportunity this year, and I think the guys that played the Team Cup last week really enjoyed some of the things that Luke was talking about. Yeah, we're already trying to get prepared and get ready for the last week in September.

CLARE BODEL: Thank you, Rory. Thank you, everyone.

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