

# Horizon Irish Open

Wednesday, 6 September, 2023

*Straffan, County Kildare, Ireland*

*The K Club, Ryder Course*

## Rory McIlroy

### Press Conference



BRIONY CARLYON: Delighted to welcome back Rory McIlroy here to The K Club for the Horizon Irish Open. It was 2016 and some lovely memories when you walked away with the title. Just give us a sense of how nice it is to be back here in Ireland.

RORY McILROY: It is. Good to be back here at The K Club where I've had by far my best finish at The Irish Open.

So yeah, it's been good to get back and sort of try to refamiliarise myself with the golf course. A lot's happened in the last seven years, so I actually struggled to remember quite a few holes when I played this morning, but it's also started to come back.

Nice to come back, good memories, and just happy to be here and sort of try to keep up the good play and run that I've been on the last couple months.

#### **Q. What do you remember from that fantastic finish you produced in 2016?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think I was one behind going into the 16th behind Russell Knox and that second shot on 16 changed obviously the whole outcome of the tournament. I ended up making a 4 and Russell ended up making a 6, so two-shot swing and I went one ahead.

Yeah, the two shots I hit on 16 and two on 17, and then the two on 18 that's the way you want to try to close out a golf tournament. Yeah, it was amazing. I think the one thing I remember from it was when the ball hit the green on 16 with the second shot, the roar from the crowd on the right side, and they set up like sort of a bar thing over there and I just remember the roar from over there was pretty cool.

It was a great finish, and yeah, it was nice to, I said for as long as I can remember since I was a child, the only tournament my Mum ever wanted to see was The Irish Open. So for her to be there and for me to win it, it means a lot to her obviously and a lot to us as a family.

#### **Q. Speaking of that, has anyone tried to talk you out**

#### **of coming?**

RORY McILROY: I'm sensible when I need to be. 48 hours, nice little trip, and probably needed it as well, from here to practise in Rome next week to Wentworth. I get back into London on Wednesday evening and then four good days in London to practise and get myself ready to go to Rome.

#### **Q. Can I ask the chronology of the back?**

RORY McILROY: It's okay. I would say it's at 90 per cent, 95 percent. It's not a hundred per cent better. I just happened to take care of it a little bit but it's not preventing me from doing anything I want to do. Just being a little mindful, I guess.

And the chronology, I got back from the TOUR Championship and then just started to do some rehab exercises for it. Went to see the physio a couple times. I hit balls once on Saturday before we left, and we flew and we spent a couple days in London before we came here.

So yeah, I hit balls on Saturday and then I practiced a bit yesterday on Tuesday. I'm a bit limited in what I've done but I sort of needed to rest it and take care of that as the priority. I was saying to Harry and Michael, during the FedExCup Playoffs, it was so hot those weeks that I didn't really feel like I practised. It was just sort of warm up, play. Didn't really hit balls after the rounds.

So I didn't feel like I practised since the week before the Playoffs, whenever that was, the first week in August.

So it will be nice over these next couple of weeks and obviously the week leading into Rome to sort of feel like I've spent some time refining a few things in my game and working on some stuff. I'm excited to spend the next few weeks over here and do that.

#### **Q. You obviously weren't here last year. What are the factors in deciding to play The Irish Open?**

RORY McILROY: I think schedule has a big part to do with it. It's been a hard one because you know, when this



tournament was grouped with Wentworth in May, something that I always came back for, and then that July date is probably a decent date in terms of weather and for the tournament.

But in terms of getting at least a good European field, I felt like it was -- you know, I always would have loved the Scottish and the Irish to maybe alternate every year. So one year the Scottish would lead into The Open and the other year the Irish would. I think it would give us a better chance of getting a better field but obviously The Scottish Open doesn't want to give up that date. It's a great date on the calendar.

But yeah, that's really the reason. I think with it being in September, you know, it's nice to come over here for two weeks and play here and then play Wentworth next week, as well.

So yeah, as long as it fits what I'm trying to do, as well and I got off to a great start this year in The Race to Dubai, I want to try to win that. So every event I do play in Europe is sort of getting me closer to that goal as well.

Yeah, I'd like to think that I'm going to come back most years to play The Irish Open but I'm not going to guarantee that I'm going to play every single year. It just has to fit with what I want to do and fit with all the other things that I've got going on in my life as well.

**Q. Do you feel pressure or obligated at all?**

RORY McILROY: I have before. I felt pressure to turn up but at the end of the day I can only do what I think is right for myself. But I certainly think by having the tournament at this time of the year it will be likelier that I will come back to play in September.

I thought, again, the July date was okay, but I think this date for most Europeans just works, depending what's happened with the FedExCup schedule and how deep guys go, but certainly, I think it works for Shane and for myself and for Seamus, at least for the top Irish players that the crowd come to watch.

We've got some really good players here, which is good for the tournament.

**Q. I just noticed your interaction out there with Make-A-Wish, what perspective does that give you with your family?**

RORY McILROY: I've done a few different things over the years with Make-A-Wish and different children's charities, and it's always been very fulfilling to be able to do it.

But I think when you've got a child yourself, I feel very fortunate that we have a healthy little girl that's very happy. There's a lot of people in the world that would give up everything to obviously have what we have in terms of a healthy child.

Yeah, it puts a lot of things in perspective and just makes you very grateful for what you have.

**Q. Just on the golf course here, what sort of challenge does it have?**

RORY McILROY: It's set up pretty close to what I think we're going to face in Rome in a few weeks' time. You've got to drive it well here. The rough is very thick, so there is very much a premium on getting the ball in play off the tee.

But then from there, it's not the longest golf course in the world, so you can score. But to me, it's all about putting the ball in play off the tee here this week because the rough is pretty penal.

**Q. What do you make of the team in the end? Pádraig was in here yesterday. He was pretty bullish about the team saying maybe we're back to where we were in the '80s with sort of the top players in the world on the team.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I would have to agree with that. You look at Viktor end of the season; with what Jon Rahm as has done this year; myself; Tommy Fleetwood back to playing some of the best golf he's played in a while; Tyrrell; Shane; Rosey.

I think you've got a nice blend of experience and youth in the team. I think everyone that everyone who has followed golf over the last few months has known the potential that someone like Ludvig has had. You just have to watch him hit balls on the range at a PGA TOUR event. I mean, he's special, he really is. He's an unbelievable ball-striker.

I don't think people maybe from this part of the world recognised it because he's played all of his golf in college and in the States and then played a lot of PGA TOUR Stuff. But he came over here and finished fourth in Czech Republic and won in Switzerland. He proved to a lot of people that he's worthy of a pick. I honestly think Luke was going to pick him regardless but he obviously his job easier when he won on Sunday.

**Q. Obviously it's a team event, but do you know your own Ryder Cup record and what do you make of it, 50 per cent in singles, are you pleased with that?**

RORY McILROY: I think everyone thinks they could probably be doing more. Yeah, 18 holes, match play, it's certainly not tossing a coin but you're going to come up against guys -- I've had some Ryder Cup Matches where I haven't played very well and I've been able to win them, and then I played some great Ryder Cup Matches that I've ended up losing.

There's two different ways of looking at it. I feel over the course of the six Ryder Cups that I've played that I made a good contribution to most of The Ryder Cups that I've played. I think last year was the first time that I had a losing record in any Ryder Cup that I played. I think even going back to France, Hazeltine, Gleneagles, Medinah, Celtic Manor, I'd won more than I'd lost, which was good.

I think last year maybe excuse the numbers a little bit but yeah, I think it's important to feel like you're doing your bit for the team. As everyone saw last time, I didn't feel like I did what I was supposed to, and obviously trying to putt that right this year.

**Q. Just to quickly go back to the back thing, have you pinpointed what the problem is or where it came from, and is it something that you worry about going forward?**

RORY McILROY: No, not at all. I've had much worse. I had much worse back issues when I was 21. So this is fine. This is a bit of tightness, a bit of a muscle spasm. This is nothing compared to some I've had. I've had a herniated disc and I've had stuff that would be a lot more worrying than this it, and I've got really good people around me that know what to do. It's fine. It's totally fine.

**Q. It's just an old man's back?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I may be don't heal quite as fast as I used to but it's all good.

**Q. How important is it to have two good weeks this week and next if you want to win The Race to Dubai?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've got a nice little cushion in The Race to Dubai at the minute. Depending on what happens over these next two weeks, that will go a long way in where are I end up going into Dubai.

Yeah, these two weeks are important. I want to play well for a number of reasons. I want to feel like I'm confident and in good form going into the Ryder Cup obviously. But yeah, I think it would be a pretty cool achievement to win The Race to Dubai for a fifth time and start creeping up on Monty.

**Q. Was the finish to win here in 2016 better than the finish this year to win The Scottish Open?**

RORY McILROY: To be honest, I think the finish at The Scottish Open this year was better just under the circumstances. You know, I had -- here, I had two par 5s to play and two good chances. 17 and 18 at the Renaissance, I think they were playing two of the toughest holes on the day.

Both just as meaningful for different reasons, but well, and probably 2016 was more meaningful. But I'd say the finish, whether the 2-iron on 18 in the Scottish Open and the 3-wood here on 16, it's a toss-up which one of those is a better shot but nice to be able to compare them, I guess.

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