

Amgen Irish Open

Tuesday, 10 September, 2024

Newcastle, County Down, Northern Ireland

Royal County Down GC

Tom McKibbin

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: How much are you looking forward to this week, Irish Open at Royal County Down?

TOM McKIBBIN: Really excited for the week, especially here at royal County Down, a golf course that's very prestigious and very special. Yeah, I think it's going to be a pretty cool week.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously a big part of the season, Back Nine, looking ahead to the Playoffs, nice to have big tournament after big tournament?

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, every events is a big event and a lot of points at stake. A lot of big, big trophies, and yeah, I think every event is important coming in now. It's important that we continue on to play well.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about this golf course and how special it is.

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, it's a pretty special place. I think it's a golf course that you learn to respect a bit more and appreciate the more you play. I think the first couple of times I had ever played it, I found it too difficult. I didn't really enjoy it that much. But as I got better and played it more, I've come to appreciate it a lot more. It's a very hard test of golf; a lot of blind tee shots with majority of crosswinds.

So I think it will be a very difficult test out there.

Q. What will be the secret to scoring? How will you course manage?

TOM McKIBBIN: I think it's really just you've got to get the lines off the tee right, especially off the blind tee shots, and then don't really try and shoot a score.

I think you've just got to be real patient and keep the ball in front of you. I think par is going to be pretty good this week and I think trying not to force it too much is probably the key out there.

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Yeah, it's a tricky one. Obviously weather dependent.

Q. Do you have to adjust your game when you come to a links course, Troon and here, and everything else?

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, it's obviously a completely different sort of style of golf than what we normally play, and I find it quite difficult. A lot of the time, it's obviously different to see the ball move so much in the air than what you're used to. A lot of different shots are required.

I would say I have to try to change a little bit. It's sometimes quite tricky, especially this week where it's quite cold, things don't feel the same, and it takes more effort to hit certain shots.

Q. I see you're 12th in the DP World Tour/PGA TOUR eligibility. Have you been paying attention to that at all? Is it something that you look at and keep an eye on?

TOM McKIBBIN: A little bit, but now to the end of the year, the points have gotten so much bigger that I think there will be a lot of back and forward between everyone. So obviously want to push on to the end of the year and try and get one of those spots.

I think if I can just play well and keep playing well till the end of the year and just see where that leaves me at the end. As I said, there's a lot of points up for grabs, and I think if you can take advantage of those, they are pretty serious.

Q. Obviously Ryder Cup points have started as well. Is that something that's caught your attention?

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, I mean, of course, I think all of these things sort of grab everyone's attention. But I think once you get out there and you start playing, I think those quickly go -- for me, anyway, they quickly go out of my mind. I just go out there and play the golf course and see what's the lowest score I can shoot.

Obviously all these tournaments from now till next year, I'll have those points. Obviously every tournament is very

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important, and I think sort of just keep trying to rack up the points will be important.

Q. Is that a goal of yours, making the Ryder Cup Team next year?

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, I think so. I think -- I don't really know. I wouldn't really say I've set too many big goals like that. Obviously just try and let it happen.

But yeah, I think sort of maybe the way the points system works now, the way they have it structured, I think there's a good opportunity from playing over here to try and do well.

Q. You made a little change recently in your team. Dave is no longer on your bag and you have Ricky McCormick. Tell us how that came about and what Ricky gives to you. Has he caddied for you before?

TOM McKIBBIN: No, he has not caddied for me before, before this. Yeah, just needed to switch it up a little bit. Obviously I had been playing well all year but yeah, I needed something different.

And Ricky, and I've known him or 10, 11, 12 years. Someone that knows my game quite well, and he's caddied for me before. I think bringing him out here, I'm very comfortable with him, and he does a good job for me.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to spending more weeks with him.

Q. Given the location, what would it mean to win an Irish Open?

TOM McKIBBIN: It would mean a lot. I think it would mean a lot no matter where it was, but here at County Down would be even more special just because of the prestigiousness of the course and how special it is. It would probably be the biggest achievement of my career, and it would probably stay there for ever.

Yeah, it would be pretty special. It would be pretty cool.

Q. Do you allow yourself to think of that? I know how tough the course is, but in a quiet moment, does that run through the head?

TOM McKIBBIN: Not really. Again, maybe the odd time you think how cool it would be. But I think the golf course is so hard, I would be probably more nervous playing the golf course thinking about all these out comes.

So I think it's just trying to keep the ball in front of you and see where that is at the end of the week.

Q. Do you bounce any ideas or advice off Rory or anyone this week?

TOM McKIBBIN: No, I've been on my own. No, I haven't asked him anything about this week or anything.

Q. You're a great driver of the golf ball. Does this course set up for you in that department?

TOM McKIBBIN: For the last two days, there hasn't been too many drivers off the tee. I've been lucky enough, obviously I played here before. I think I might know the lines a little bit better. I wouldn't say I'm certain on them, but I'd say I sort of know my way around the course, and you can know the misses quite well.

I think, again, it's so hard, there's crosswinds, you get the ball going slightly the wrong way and it moves a lot. I think if I can just keep the strength of mine up, which you say is driving, it should maybe help me a little bit.

Q. You mentioned about the Ryder Cup, but obviously Luke Donald is here as well. Does that begin to factor into the head of the likes of yourself that he's casting his eye over everybody at this stage?

TOM McKIBBIN: Not really, no. I mean, I know that's why he's here and he's obviously here as well to play. He's still a very good player and I've been lucky to play with him. For me, no, not really. Obviously he's here to have a look at people, and that's what he's here to do.

Q. Every press event you do, you maybe get asked about Rory in some shape or form. Does that ever get tiresome or do you ever like think --

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, a little bit. A little bit annoying now, but yeah, it's a little bit -- I obviously hear it nearly every time.

So it's a little bit annoying but it's not too bad. Obviously chatting about him or things about him, means I'm doing something wrong.

Q. The Team Cup in January, would you be looking at that?

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, definitely, I think that would be something I would love to play. Seeing it the last time it was on, I think, yeah, I'd love to be a part of that next year.

Q. When was the last team event you played, Lahinch?

TOM McKIBBIN: Probably, yeah. Probably, yeah. That probably was the last.

Q. Are you comfortable enough with Rory that you can send him a text after a disappointing week, U.S. Open or whatever, so close to winning another major, do you sort of say chin up or anything like that, or do you just leave him to his own devices?

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, I can if I want, I feel comfortable to but I'm sure he gets tortured by enough people. Just leave it. I'll see him in a few weeks.

Q. Is the switch to Ricky a permanent one, or is it just a trial period at the moment?

TOM McKIBBIN: Permanent.

Q. And have you been getting any texts from any other players asking for advice, where to go in Newcastle this week?

TOM McKIBBIN: No, nothing at all. No.

Q. Have you played anything here before?

TOM McKIBBIN: No, never. No, I've only ever played it casually. I think I had only played it maybe three or four times before this year, and then I played it twice before this week. No, I've never played any championships or tournaments here.

Q. What's your favourite hole on the course?

TOM McKIBBIN: I think 4 is pretty special, the par 3 obviously is an iconic hole.

I think every hole is good. I don't think there's a bad hole out there. I think every hole is strong. Yeah, I think every hole is pretty good.

Q. And you sort of hole that you hold onto your hat, gets your attention, gets you standing up a bit straighter?

TOM McKIBBIN: I think nearly all those blind tee shots, probably, especially if the wind, I think a lot of them are off the left. It's weird. It feels like you're aiming very far offline but you're not. It's just because you can't see the fairway. I think those holes need a little bit more attention.

Q. 7 was carnage last time the Irish Open was here.

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, the par 3, it's a great wee hole. After the green goes down, into the wind and off the right,

it's a pretty tough hole.

Q. The Open experience, what was that like, and do you think it will help, given the way the weather has changed?

TOM McKIBBIN: Yeah, I think having that sort of experience and that sort of test, I think this week will play very similar difficulty-wise. It's a very hard course even when you just come to play it casually; it plays very hard.

I think playing the four rounds at Troon will definitely help me for this week sort of know how to control my emotions a wee bit and sort of try and just know par is pretty good out there.

Q. Did playing in a major feel different?

TOM McKIBBIN: A little bit. Obviously there was a lot more people there. Especially in practise rounds and stuff. But I think once you get out there, it's just another tournament.

I think it feels a little bit different because it's more difficult and a little bit more of a grind. But from a playing perspective, no, just sort of feels the same.

Q. You turned 21 last year. What did you do to celebrate?

TOM McKIBBIN: I played golf, actually. I played golf at Lake Nona in America. I was in Orlando for Christmas. So that was pretty relaxed.

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