

U.S. Open Championship 2021

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

San Diego, California, USA

Torrey Pines Golf Course

Rory McIlroy

Flash Interview



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. We are pleased to welcome 2011 U.S. Open champion Rory McIlroy to the interview area. Rory, just talk a little bit about your preparation this week and how the course is playing.

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, it's certainly different when we see it in January for the Farmers, but it's really good. I had my first look at the course yesterday, played 18 holes. The setup's great. It's fair. Obviously, with the dry southern California climate, the greens have the possibility to get very firm, so I think they've taken that in mind.

The rough is playable. You can hit it in the rough and at least have a chance to get it up around the green and sort of use your short game to scramble and save par. It's not as penal as some other U.S. Opens. But I think the setup's good. It's really fair. I've heard nothing but positive praise from a lot of the players.

It's nice to come to a venue where we all know it pretty well from sort of being on the PGA TOUR schedule. There's not really any secrets out there. We all know what to do and how to play it, and it's just a matter of who can execute over the four days.

Q. With your Player Advisory Committee chairman's hat on, can you comment on the reports that greens books are said to be banned on the PGA TOUR?

RORY MCILROY: Look, everything that's talked about in those meetings is somewhat confidential, but what I can say, I think -- I use a greens book, and I'd like to get rid of them. I think everyone is in the same boat, most guys on TOUR are in the same boat, that if it's going to be available to us and it helps us, people are going to use it, but I think for the greater good of the game, I'd like to see them be outlawed and for them not to be used anymore.

Q. Rory, what do you attribute your struggles in the first round at majors to, since you last won one?

RORY MCILROY: Probably just putting a little too much pressure on myself, playing too carelessly, being a little

tentative. I think that sort of sums it up.

Q. What was it like meeting Yuka yesterday, and what advice did you give her?

RORY MCILROY: It was great. I watched a lot of the Women's Open a couple of weeks ago, and it was cool. I first saw Yuka and her swing and sort of read about her story at the previous U.S. Women's Open in Texas in December of 2020, and it's pretty cool. I think she played okay there, and obviously she played great at Olympic, and it was cool to meet her. It was cool to let her follow for a few holes.

Obviously, the talk turned to the golf swing and all that sort of stuff, and all I really said to her -- she asked how can she be consistent for a long time and how can she keep this sort of form going into the future? And I just said, what I've always tried to do is write everything down. Just whatever feelings you have after a practice session, even if the swing looks the same on the video, the feelings that you have and the swing thoughts could be slightly different, and those feelings and those thoughts can come and go day to day. That's just the way golf is.

But I think if you write everything down and sort of keep of a journal of that sort of stuff, it's always a reference point to go back to. So that's all I was trying to tell her is to -- it's boring to be at the top of the game for a very long time. You just have to keep doing the same things. Whatever works -- and it is, it's mundane, and it's tedious, but everyone's got a blueprint of what their swing is, and if they keep on top of it and they do the same things, do the same drills, over time, you fast forward 20 years, you're probably going to have a really good career.

Q. What do you think Mike Davis' legacy is going to be with the USGA?

RORY MCILROY: Drivable par-4s. (Laughter.) He likes a drivable par-4. I think Mike will be remembered for someone that wasn't afraid to change it up. He brought the U.S. Open to a few different venues -- Erin Hills, Chambers Bay -- but he also wasn't afraid to mess around with the courses a little bit, making what wouldn't be traditionally a



drivable par-4, for example, into a drivable par-4, playing tees 100 yards up. Even going back to Olympic when we played it in '12, moving that tee up 100-whatever yards on 16 on Sunday, which probably cost a couple of people the U.S. Open title.

So just keeping players on their toes, I guess that's the big one. He's probably brought the USGA and the entire organization forward, being a little more progressive with it, and that's probably going to be what his legacy is.

Q. There's talk now of the USGA and maybe the other organizations moving away from municipal golf courses such as this one to the more kind of elite four or five. How do you feel about that given you've participated in these public Opens, so to speak? How do you feel about them just getting back to a core of courses?

RORY MCILROY: I would be in favor of that. I like that. I think, when you think of a U.S. Open, I think you think of the iconic venues that it has been played on. Obviously, Pebble being one, even like going back to '13 at Marion, I thought was a huge success. I thought that was a really great U.S. Open. Obviously, Shinnecock. There's courses that are just synonymous with U.S. Opens. I don't really think we need to go too far outside of those.

It sort of worked for The Open Championship. They have a rota of three or four courses. Yes, they went to Portrush for the first time in a long time a couple years ago, but I think the reason Augusta has become what it's become is because people are so familiar with it. Year after year, people tune in, they know the holes on TV, and I think that's one of the reasons the Masters has become the spectacle that it is.

Q. Pete was saying a couple of days ago that he thinks you're making real progress with your swing. What do you feel you're up to now?

RORY MCILROY: I feel good. Pete and I had a few really good days in Florida last week. Yeah, like the technical and mechanical parts of it are all there. It's just a matter of going out in a U.S. Open setting and just trusting what I've been doing in practice, and then that gets more into the mental side of things and just being really clear and really committed in what you're trying to do and being as free on the course as I am on the range.

That's the big challenge, but in terms of where everything's heading, it's definitely in the right direction. Yeah, we had some really good days last week.

Q. When you're driven and desperate to win majors

again, how do you take the pressure off yourself?

RORY MCILROY: I guess by being indifferent. Not by not caring, but by not putting myself under pressure that I have to care, I guess is the right way to do it. If I went out and played this golf course any other week, you play free, and it's just the same thing. As I said, you just have to be able to swing with that freedom, and that's sort of what I'm trying to get back to.

There's no surprise that if I do have, say, not a great first day that I'm able to play well the rest of the tournament because that does free you up. It's like, okay, well, the bad one's out of the way, and now I can just sort of freewheel. It's just a matter of freewheeling from the Thursday and not the Friday.

Q. To ask you a question first, the jacket -- which looks pretty cool, by the way.

RORY MCILROY: Thank you.

Q. Can you talk about something like that? Would you wear that out on the course? Can you wear that out on the course?

RORY MCILROY: No, I just came from the fitness trailer. I just did a little workout, and it was the first sort of thing I took out of my suitcase. I mean, it's comfortable, but no, I don't think I could swing in it.

Q. When you were answering the question about the greens book, you said that you thought maybe it would be better for golf if there wasn't a greens book. I think that's pretty much what you said. Can you talk about what other things you'd like to see changed that you think would better golf that currently are being implemented in the game right now? Like if it's anchoring putting, whatever it might be.

RORY MCILROY: I thought we got rid of anchoring putting three years ago.

Q. I don't know, did we?

RORY MCILROY: No, probably not (laughter). Yeah, that is certainly something that I would like to see addressed, as well, and I think there's a common consensus with the players on that one too. Look, the game of golf is in a great place. I think we always have these conversations of what we can do to make the game better or grow the game or expand the game.

I think it's in a pretty good place. Yeah, there's a couple of little things that us golf nerds want changed, whether it be



green reading books or arm-lock putting or whatever it is, but from a whole and looking at the game from an entirety of it, I think it's in a really good place.

Q. Can you expand on just why the green books are such an advantage?

RORY MCILROY: It's not that it's an advantage really, it's just taking away a skill that takes time and practice to be mastered. I think reading greens is a real skill that some people are better at than others, and it just nullifies that. It nullifies that advantage that people have.

Yeah, honestly, I think it's made everyone lazier. People don't put in the time to prepare the way they used to, and that's why you see so many more players at Augusta, for example, take their time around the greens, hit so many more putts, it's because they have to. It's because there is no greens book at Augusta.

Look, it might take practice rounds, it might make practice rounds a little longer, and you might have to do a little bit more work, but I think, once we get to the tournament rounds, it will speed up play, and I think it will help the guys who really have done their homework, it will help them stand out a little bit more.

Q. I always think back to '07 at Oakmont, when Phil injured his wrist practicing out of the rough at Oakmont. It just made me wonder what it's been like this week. I'm hearing spotty, juicy in spots. What do you think it's going to be?

RORY MCILROY: Yes, I think if you see your ball sailing into the rough, you hope you're just going to get lucky. It can settle into the kikuyu, that's sticky and juicy, or there's the patches of poa out there that are more of the yellowish, brownish color, and you hope your ball is going to land in one of those patches and you can get it out onto the green.

There's no substitute for hitting the ball off the fairway here. It's a pure -- it's fairways and greens. It's a proper U.S. Open test. The one way to keep you from injuring your wrist is by not going in it.

Q. Thinking about Bryson last year and his approach to how to play Winged Foot, someone brought up the idea -- we talk about graduated rough, going deeper the farther you get away from the fairway. Have you ever considered what it would be if they graduated it toward the green? In other words, they made it super thick and juicy at 290, 300, 310, deeper that way, to prevent bomb-and-gouge?

RORY MCILROY: I don't like that, Doug, because I hit it

330.

Q. I know that. What would you think about that? You wouldn't think much of it, would you?

RORY MCILROY: I wouldn't think much of it. I wouldn't like you setting up the golf course.

Q. Would it be a way to combat what Bryson did last year?

RORY MCILROY: I don't know because Winged Foot is such a different animal to here. You had so many more openings into the greens at Winged Foot, for example, and the way those fairways were running, you could land it 30, 40 yards short and have it trundle up onto the putting surface, where here with the kikuyu grass, it's so spongy, you can't do that. It just hits and stops. It depends on the course. It depends on the grass. There's so many different variables that go into it.

I don't know, there's a -- for example, Memorial, I felt like the changes that Jack made to Memorial a couple of weeks ago, it took driver out of my hand a lot. Yeah, selfishly, I didn't like that because, if I can get driver, I can have shorter clubs into the greens, but it sort of makes it hard because then I'm having to hit 3-wood that goes 290 --

Q. It's a shame.

RORY MCILROY: I know. And the guys that I'm probably 20 yards longer with off the tee are hitting drivers, and they're all of a sudden 15 yards ahead of me. It's like where's the balance? Where's the balance? I don't know, it's a very -- you're not going to be able to set the golf course up completely fairly for every single type of player. There's going to be golf courses that suit other players more than someone else, and I think that's just the way it is.

Q. Looking back on your 2011 U.S. Open win, how would you compare your mentality heading into the U.S. Open week then to now?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I think the '11 U.S. Open was only my third one, and I played okay at Bethpage in '09, I missed the cut at Pebble in '10. Yeah, probably just a little less going on in my head, I guess, is the best way to describe it. Probably a little less cynical too. Sometimes I think you can sort of get into that mindset coming into U.S. Opens.

Yeah, just trying to -- first time I laid my eyes on Congressional, I thought, you know, I could see myself

shooting scores out here. It's the same as here. You hit fairways, you hit greens, and you can shoot good scores. It's just a matter of getting into a little more of a positive mindset going into the tournament.

Q. I know you've left frustrated from the big tournaments so far this year, but how close do you think you are to changing the narrative a little bit maybe this week?

RORY MCILROY: At Augusta, I was still in the middle of a transition of stuck in between what I was trying to do in my swing, and it wasn't a great week.

Kiawah, I felt like I went into the week playing pretty well. I struggled on the left-to-right winds there. So even from the first tee shot on Thursday, hitting it into the water on 10.

Since then, I've changed my driver setup a little bit, and I feel a lot more comfortable with that.

If I'd have played the par-5s the same way that Phil played them at Kiawah, I'd have won the golf tournament. I just played the par-5s so badly. But every time you play a tournament, you learn something, and you try to put that into practice the next week. But it's not as if -- you know, I won a tournament four or five weeks ago, so it's there.

Probably walking off Muirfield Village a couple Sundays ago, I said to Harry, I felt like I played better at Memorial than I did at Quail Hollow. I finished 18th at Memorial and I won Quail Hollow. It's golf at the end of the day and sometimes it's just unpredictable.

I'm feeling good about where my game is. As I said at the very start, it's about going out there and playing as free as I can and having that mentality that I had as a 22-year-old and just trying to get into that mindset.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports