

# U.S. Open Championship 2022

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Brookline, Massachusetts, USA

The Country Club

## Rory McIlroy

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome back to the interview area at the U.S. Open Championship. We're thrilled to be joined by world No. 3 and 2011 U.S. Open champion Rory McIlroy. Did you have a chance to play the course yesterday?

RORY McILROY: I played the front nine yesterday.

THE MODERATOR: Any initial reaction?

RORY McILROY: I liked it. I liked what I saw. I played here a couple of years ago. I guess I played all the holes that are going to be played this week, but in a different setup or different routing, I guess.

Sort of had to jog my memory a little bit and try to remember, but yeah, great setup.

It seems pretty playable off the tee. There's some rough, but if you just miss a fairway, you can certainly get it to the green. You're going to lose control of your ball and not be able to spin it into the greens, but at least on the front nine there's a lot of greens that have very manicured run-ups, so the greens probably play a little longer than they actually are.

Maybe not quite as much as like a Winged Foot, where I think you're going to have to be a little bit more strategic than we were there, but overall, great setup.

That front nine has two short par-4s. It's got a very reachable par-5. The two par-3s are pretty tough. A couple of longer par-4s.

Looking forward to seeing the back nine today, but I liked what I saw yesterday.

**Q. I don't want to rub your nose in a bad prediction, but in February you said that this thing was dead in the water, and obviously, now --**

RORY McILROY: The U.S. Open? (Laughter.)

**Q. No, no, no.**

RORY McILROY: I thought we were at the U.S. Open.

**Q. We are at the U.S. Open. That LIV Golf was dead in the water, and obviously something has changed since then. I'm wondering what do you feel like you got wrong, whether it's about state of the game or about your peers to where this thing has more life than initially thought?**

RORY McILROY: I guess I took a lot of players' statements at face value. I guess that's what I got wrong.

You had people committed to the PGA TOUR, and that's what the statements that were put out. People went back on that, so I guess I took them for face value. I took them at their word, and I was wrong.

**Q. Is the caddie situation going to be the same as it was in Canada, or what's the plan for this week?**

RORY McILROY: Harry and his wife had their second child last Thursday, so he got in last night, and he'll be on the bag this week.

Niall and I's run has come to an end at this point. Pretty good record. Had a fourth in Dubai and a first in Canada. If I ever need someone to jump in for Harry, I've got a pretty good substitute there.

**Q. Given the historical significance of Francis Ouimet's victory here and his relationship with his caddie, can you talk more about your relationship with Harry?**

RORY McILROY: Funny that the best question comes from a kid.

This course and the history of Francis Ouimet, 1913. Again, that's what's so good about golf is the history and the tradition and these stories.

The fact that he grew up just off the 17th hole here, and we're still talking about it to this day over 100 years on. That's so cool. That's the great thing about this sport.



Yeah, great to be back to a venue where there is so much history.

**Q. After a victory like you had last week, I know you go to every event expecting to do well and wanting to win, but does it raise your expectations when you play like that?**

RORY McILROY: It certainly puts a pep in your step. It gives you a lot of confidence.

Going into last week, even coming off Memorial where I didn't have my best week, I still knew my game was there. I still knew that I was playing well, so regardless whether I got -- I think it was the fashion in which I won last week was what gave me the most pride.

Got a lead early in the back nine. Lost that lead. Was tied with two holes to go, and then I showed some really good resilience and birdied the last two holes to get the job done.

I think that the fashion in which I won was what made me the proudest of the victory. Yeah, anytime you follow -- I did the same thing in 2019 going into the U.S. Open at Pebble Beach and played pretty well there.

I didn't play well enough to live with Gary that week, but I feel everything is certainly trending in the right direction, and I'm happy with where the game is at.

**Q. When did it occur to you that you were going to pass Greg with a win?**

RORY McILROY: I won the CJ Cup in October and got to 20, so I was just waiting for that 21st.

**Q. You've really emerged as the leader of the pro-PGA TOUR faction. Why have you taken that mantle of leadership?**

RORY McILROY: Because in my opinion it's the right thing to do. The PGA TOUR was created by people and tour players that came before us, the likes of Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer.

They created something and worked hard for something, and I hate to see all the players that came before us and all the hard work that they've put in just come out to be nothing.

I think one of the other things as well is the PGA TOUR has certainly given me a lot of opportunities, and I've benefited a lot from that, but I think what they've done for

charity. They've raised -- if you put all the other major sporting organizations in this country -- so NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, if you put all their charitable dollars combined, the PGA TOUR has raised twice as much as that in their history.

That is a massive legacy and something that I don't think people talk enough about, so when you are talking about the TOUR and everything that's happening right now, you have to see the bigger picture than just the golf, and I think I've tried to take a wider view of everything, and I just think it's the right thing to do.

**Q. As you probably are aware, the 9/11 families have sent not one -- well, they've sent one scathing letter to Phil and four other U.S. players playing in the LIV Tour and then they replied to Phil's non-answer yesterday with another scathing statement. Obviously, it's related to the Saudis and the Saudis' involvement in 9/11. Do you understand the 9/11 families' point of view?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, of course I do. I think everything that's happening with this tour, it legitimizes their place in the world, and I'm not saying -- I'm sure not every Saudi Arabian is a bad person. We're talking about this in such a generalized way.

I've spent a lot of time in the Middle East, and the vast majority of people that I've met there are very, very nice people, but there's bad people everywhere. The bad people that came from that part of the world did some absolutely horrendous things.

Of course, I understand where these families are coming from, and in this day and age everything is just so intertwined, and it's hard to separate sport from politics from dirty money from clean money. It's a very convoluted world right now.

I certainly empathize with those families, and I can't imagine -- I have friends that have lost people in 9/11, and it's a really tragic thing. I empathize with those families, and I certainly understand their concerns and frustrations with it all.

**Q. If I may just follow up, do you consider what Phil and the others are doing to be sports-washing, to be actually in business with MBS versus just playing in one tournament?**

RORY McILROY: I'm not sure if they're totally -- I don't think they're complicit in it. In a way I think -- look, they all have the choice to play where they want to play, and they've made their decision.

My dad said to me a long time ago, once you make your bed, you lie in it, and they've made their bed. That's their decision, and they have to live with that.

**Q. I know you talked about it in the past, but could you talk about working with Brad Faxon and what he has meant to you?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, Fax has been a wonderful asset to me over the last few years. We started working March of 2018. We spent a couple of hours together at the Bear's Club on a Monday afternoon, and then that same week on a Sunday I had my best-ever performance on the greens in a tour event.

What we were talking about worked straight away, and I feel like I've become a much more consistent putter since working with Brad. If anything, it's become almost less practice in a way. Just sort of simplified the whole thing.

It doesn't have to be perfect. All you're trying to do is get the ball in the hole, and a lot of visualization, a lot of hitting putts at different speeds and getting the ball to enter on the high side, on the low side. Just be so visual with it and sort of try to put a lot more feel into it, the way I play the rest of the game.

Fax has been a great asset for me but also just a great friend as well, someone to lean on, someone that's played the tour for a long, long time. I can lean on him if I ever need to.

**Q. Then just a quick follow-up. Him and Billy Andrade recently announced the end of the CVS Charity Classic, which you came once and played.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah.

**Q. I want to know if you had any thoughts on it and that experience playing in Rhode Island and --**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, and going back to what I was talking about with the PGA TOUR and charity, that CVS Charity Classic raised a lot of money for the community there in Rhode Island. I think Fax and Billy did a great job with that.

I don't know the details behind why it's not going to be a thing anymore, but they had a great run, and they raised a lot of money, and they should be proud of what they did.

**Q. Can you talk about legacy and what your legacy means to you at this point in your career.**

RORY McILROY: I hope I'm still building on my legacy. In golfing terms, I'm still youngish. Even though I've been out here for a long time, I've basically spent half my life on tour at this point.

It's very important to me. It means a lot, going back to history and tradition and putting your name on trophies that have the legends of the game on them. That's really cool, and that's something that money can't buy.

Legacy, reputation, at the end of the day that's all you have. You strip everything away, and you're left with how you made people feel and what people thought of you. That is important to me.

**Q. Rory, as this LIV Golf thing develops, can you see two different factions emerging in the locker rooms? As the dust settles over this, how do you think it's going to strain or impact some of the relationships and friendships you've developed over the years?**

RORY McILROY: I don't think it will -- I don't think it will strain any relationships. I'm still going to be close with the guys that have made the decision to play those events. It's not as if you agree on absolutely everything that all your friends do. You're going to have a difference of opinion on a lot of things. That's fine. That's what makes this a great world. We can't all agree on everything.

I don't know. I don't think anyone can see where this thing will be in five years' time or ten years' time. If I had a crystal ball, I could obviously give you a better answer. Honestly, I don't know.

I just think for a lot of the guys that are going to play that are younger, sort of similar age to me or a little younger than me, it seems like quite short-term thinking, and they're not really looking at the big picture.

Again, I've just tried to sort of see this with a wider lens from the start.

**Q. Rory, I was wondering, considering the timing of last week and Canada going up against their debut, did that light a little motivational fire maybe under you to play well that week opposite that? Do you find yourself at all recruiting some of your peers to stay with the PGA TOUR right now in conversations and things like that?**

RORY McILROY: I don't think it gave me motivation. Look, I talked about going out there on Sunday and trying to get my 21st win and all that. A little bit petty, I guess, in a way, but yeah.

Did it help me win or help me keep a level of intensity up? Probably.

No, I don't think what was happening in London gave me any more motivation. I wanted to go there and play well, like I do every week. I got hot on the weekend, and it was nice to get a victory.

Recruitment-wise, everyone is their own person out here, and they have their own goals and their own beliefs. My goals, I've realized, are a lot different than some other people's goals out here. Again, that's fine. Everyone is different, and they make their own decisions based on what they feel is right for themselves.

So I don't feel I need to recruit anyone. I'm not -- I don't work for the PGA TOUR; they work for me. People make their own decisions, and for me, my schedule and where I play and having the ability to pick and choose the courses I want to go to and what's going to give me the best chance to be successful and build on my career, build on my legacy, it's nice to have all those options open to be able to choose from.

**Q. Rory, this is a little bit of a devil's advocate question regarding LIV.**

RORY McILROY: Of course, it is, from you.

**Q. I know the circumstances are much different, but years ago a lot of the European Tour players came over to the PGA TOUR because the money was bigger and whatnot. Are there any parallels there to some degree even though there's no history to LIV?**

RORY McILROY: You've got three of the four major championships that are in the United States. The travel gets increasingly more difficult going back and forth. To give yourself the best chance to further your career in terms of wins and legacy and trying to win major championships, America was the place to be.

I don't think it was all to do with prize money. It certainly wasn't guaranteed. You had to show up and play well to earn it. That's the other thing, right?

I didn't renew my PGA TOUR membership in 2011, and I was talking about it last night. It was a big regret of mine. I sat at home and watched THE PLAYERS Championship, honestly, on bad advice.

I think that's the thing. I have now surrounded myself with good, honest, hardworking people that are trying to do the right thing for the game of golf. If you want to be one of the best players in the world, this is the country where you

need to play the majority of your golf.

**Q. As it relates to your golf for a second, I was kind of thinking about this in context of Spieth who accomplished an awful lot early, once-in-a-career stuff historically. Your start was pretty good as well. I wonder how much you think you're measured in the majors based on what you did early compared with what you are doing now, which I think is probably more top 10s lately than it was at the start.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think the start of my career was probably more feast-or-famine in the majors. I would get hot and win or I would miss the cut by 10. (Laughing.) A little more consistency going on. But, again, that doesn't bring with it the glory that the wins do.

I'm getting back there, though. My last two showings in major championships have been pretty good. That run at Augusta and then the start at Southern Hills was a very welcome one considering the starts I've had previously in major championships.

So I'm getting back to a place where I'm feeling a lot more comfortable with my game and a lot more comfortable at the biggest -- it's not really the biggest championships in the world. It's more the biggest and toughest tests in the world. I think my game is now at place where I feel confident going to these golf courses that are set up more difficult than everyday tour events and knowing that I have the game and the mentality to succeed on them.

**Q. I just have one more related, if you don't mind, back on the main event, of course, which is LIV. Friendships aside, is there any part of you as a player that looks at those joining as not so much surrendering, but almost recognizing they're not going to be as competitive or can't be as competitive, and do you lose respect for that? Sorry.**

RORY McILROY: No, I understand. Yes, because a lot of these guys are in their late 40s. In Phil's case, early 50s. Yeah, I think everyone in this room and they would say to you themselves that their best days are behind them.

That's why I don't understand for the guys that are a similar age to me going because I would like to believe that my best days are still ahead of me, and I think theirs are too. So that's where it feels like you're taking the easy way out.

**Q. Notwithstanding, and this is actually repeating the -- notwithstanding that and what you just said, if we specify Phil Mickelson, have you lost some respect for him?**

RORY McILROY: As a golfer? No. I think his -- he won a major championship 13 months ago, probably one of the crowning achievements of his career and one of the most impressive achievements in the history of the game of golf. As a golfer, I have the utmost respect for Phil.

I've been disappointed with how he has went about what he has done, but I think he has come back and shown some remorse about how he has handled some things so I think he has learned from that.

Who am I to sit up here and give Phil a lesson on how to do things? He has had a wonderful career. He is his own man. He is a great addition to the field this week.

Am I disappointed he has taken the route that he has taken? I am, but I still respect him tremendously.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, thanks for your time and good luck this week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

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