

U.S. Open Championship 2024

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Village of Pinehurst, North Carolina, USA

Pinehurst Resort & C.C. (Course No. 2)

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the interview area. We are joined by Rory McIlroy.

How does it feel to be back at a U.S. Open?

RORY McILROY: It feels good. I've been on a pretty good run of U.S. Open performances over the last few years. Obviously had a close call at LACC last year, obviously Wyndham just pipping me to the post there.

But I feel like I really struggled at U.S. Open setups, 2016, '17, '18 in particular. I sort of had a bit of a I guess come-to-Jesus moment after that, tried to really figure out why that was.

Then my performances from 2019 and after that have been really, really good.

Yeah, excited to be back. I really enjoyed Pinehurst last time. We were here in 2014. Just got in, so I'm looking forward to seeing the golf course this afternoon.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Based on either gut feeling or analysis of strokes gained or talks with Harry or your previous experience here in 2014, between now and Thursday afternoon, what part of your game are you most focused on?

RORY McILROY: I think it's course-dependent. I would say for this golf course, it will be around the greens. From what I remember in 2014, it's obviously generous off the tee in terms of the playing corridors that you're asked to hit it into. If you hit it outside of those, you can get yourself into trouble, this sandy waste area.

Like most Donald Ross courses, it's on and around the greens where I'm going to have to sort of do the most work and sort of figure out what shots to hit around greens.

Obviously Martin here 10 years ago used the putter very, very well. Sort of figuring out what I'm comfortable with on and around the greens. I think that will be the big key over the next sort of 36 hours.

Q. You mentioned the last five years, all top 10s, all improvement. Is there one theme to that? Is there something in terms of game plan at different venues that you've applied that is reflected in these results, improving every year?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I would say embracing the difficult conditions, embracing the style of golf needed to contend at a U.S. Open, embracing patience. Honestly, embracing what I would have called "boring" back in the day.

Explosiveness isn't going to win a U.S. Open. It's more methodically building your score over the course of four days and being okay with that.

Honestly, it's just more of a reframing of a mindset than anything else.

Q. You've spoken about the importance of the short game here at Pinehurst. We always talk about you and talk about your prowess off the tee. That's the sort of thing that commands the headlines. Do you think your wedge play, which is actually sensational, gets a little overlooked? How much fun is that aspect of the game to you?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think when you excel, especially at one part of the game, there's other parts of the game that get overlooked a little bit. I feel like I've turned myself into a pretty proficient player around the greens. I've always been a pretty good chipper of the golf ball. Bunker play has been solid for most of my career. I feel like I've turned myself into a really good putter over the past sort of four or five years.

But yeah, the driving is what people are interested in when they watch me hit a golf ball. That's fine. But it takes more than driving a golf ball to win the amount of tournaments that I have.

Yeah, I feel like all aspects of my game are in pretty good shape at the minute.

Q. Can you talk about Pdraig Harrington getting



inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame.

RORY McILROY: Pdraig, he's the quintessential pro. He's also a wonderful ambassador for the game of golf around the world, anywhere he goes.

I think from someone that grew up in that part of the world, aspiring to be one of the best golfers in the world, Pdraig was the one, I've said this before, but he was the one that opened the floodgates for us and made us believe we could follow in his footsteps. Winning in Carnoustie in 2007, then winning those two majors back-to-back in 2008, I think myself Graeme McDowell, Darren Clarke, Shane Lowry, a lot of us, we looked at him and saw him achieving things that we wanted to achieve, and it sort of made us believe a little bit more that we could.

I think he really paved the way for us in some way. No one more deserving. As I said, he's a wonderful ambassador for the game. Probably loves the game of golf more than I do in some ways. He's a relentless practicer and tinkerer, always trying to figure out ways to get better.

Yeah, as I said, no one more deserving than Pdraig.

Q. Another win for Scottie at the Memorial. You've been on runs like this, seen it --

RORY McILROY: I haven't been on a run like this (smiling).

Q. What is the most impressive to you about what he's been able to accomplish so far this year?

RORY McILROY: The fact that the only thing that took him from winning a golf tournament was going into a jail cell for an hour (laughter).

I think just the relentlessness. Look, a lot of stuff went on in his life, as well. They've just had a new child. He's been through some struggles in his game, particularly the putter that he's been able to turn around, as well.

It's not as if he hasn't had his challenges along the way, or circumstances have been a little bit different for him. But yeah, I mean, the word that I describe it as is "relentless." It seems like every time he shows up, he is the guy to beat, and deservedly so.

This run that he's been on, I think he's played 14 times this year or 13 times this year, only once out of the top 10. Seems like he's always in contention.

The most exciting thing about last week at Memorial was when he made the triple on 9. Everyone was like, oh,

looks like he might let people in here, but he finds a way to steady the ship, make a few birdies when he needs to. Undoubtedly the best player in the world at the minute by a long way.

It's up to us to try to get to his level.

Q. I don't remember what tournament it was, but you were in the broadcast booth and said, Maybe he should try a mallet.

RORY McILROY: Oh, Riviera, I remember it well.

Q. Do you regret giving him that idea?

RORY McILROY: Well, he tried the Spider last summer for a couple of tournaments. But I think the work that he's put in with Phil Kenyon as well, I think that's a big part of it. I know they started to work sort of after the FedExCup Playoffs last year. Obviously the work they've done has really been paying off.

Q. You're drawn with Scottie and Xander again. Is there any advantage to being with those two guys or a disadvantage, get caught up in playing them rather than just concentrating on the golf course?

RORY McILROY: I mean, if they're playing well and I try to keep up with them, I guess it's a good thing.

No, I mean, it's always exciting to be a part of a marquee group like that, No. 1, 2 and 3 in the world. I remember back in the day, I think it was Torrey Pines, watching on TV, I failed to qualify for that tournament. But I remember I think watching Tiger, Phil and Adam Scott the first two days.

It's cool to be part of these pairings. I think at this point, Scottie, Xander and myself are all experienced enough not to get caught up in it, just to go about our business, try to shoot a couple good scores to put ourselves in position going into the weekend.

Q. Nick Saban used to give his teams 24 hours to celebrate a win or mourn a loss. When you have a close loss like last year at LACC, what is your process for dealing with it, putting it behind you?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I won my next start after LACC at the Scottish Open. Wasn't quite able to emulate that at the Open. I've played enough golf tournaments over my career that once it's done, it's done. You leave it in the past. You try to learn from whatever happened that given week.



The good thing about golf in particular is there's always the next week, always an opportunity to get back up on the horse and try again.

Q. You said earlier you kind of found U.S. Open golf a little boring at one point. Pinehurst asks some different questions than most other U.S. Open courses. Do you like that kind of examination where maybe it gives you some kind of a chance to recover better than out of really thick rough?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, because it gives you options and it gives you, like, even going back to last week at Memorial, people hit it offline or people hit a green, you're basically only seeing players hit one shot. There's only one option. That turns into it being somewhat one-dimensional and honestly not very exciting.

I think a course like this definitely demands a different skill set and also some creativity. I think that will be on display this week. I've already seen some videos online of people maybe trying fairway woods or having lob wedges or putters. Even if you get half lucky and get a decent lie in that wire grass, sandy area, being able to hit a recovery shot.

I think for the viewer at home, that's more exciting than seeing guys hack out of four-inch rough all the time. Hopefully that comes to fruition and it is an exciting golf tournament.

Q. I think so many golfers talk about the importance of like the current shot or the current tournament that you're playing. Do you still set career goals? Do you have an idea of numbers or accomplishments that you want to achieve before you hang it up?

RORY McILROY: Not particularly. I mean, I've always said I still feel like being the most successful European in the game is within my reach. I've got obviously Seve and Nick Faldo to pass there in terms of major wins.

I'm really proud of my body of work over the past 15 years and everything that I have achieved, whether it be season-long titles or individual tournaments or majors. Obviously getting my hands on a fifth major has taken quite a while, but I'm more confident than ever that I'm right there, that I'm as close as I've ever been.

I wouldn't say I've got, like, a particular number of wins. I mean, I want to win as many golf tournaments as I can. I want to try to compete and win as many majors as I can.

I think the only thing about trying to pick a number is that you're setting yourself up for failure or disappointment.

Tiger wanted to surpass Jack. It looks like he mightn't get there, but are we going to call Tiger's career a failure? Absolutely not. It's arguably the best. He's played the best golf anyone's ever seen.

There's always going to be that tinge of what could have been. I don't want to do that to myself. If someone would have told me at 20 years old I'd be sitting here at 35 and this is the career I've had, I would not have believed them and I would have been ecstatic.

Still have a good a little bit of time here, hopefully for the next 10 years. I still like to think I've got a good run ahead of me. Whatever those numbers are, whatever the totals add up to, I'll accept that and feel like I've done pretty well for a little boy from Northern Ireland that dreamed of playing golf for a living one day.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, thank you and good luck this week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

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