

# The 149th Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 13 July 2021

Rory McIlroy



MIKE WOODCOCK: Good afternoon, everyone. We're joined by the former Open Champion and four-time major champion Rory McIlroy this afternoon. Rory, great to see you. Thank you for coming in.

Leaving aside 2019, you've had a remarkably consistent record in the last few years in the Open. How much do you hope to be able to continue that this week and bring that Open form into the championship?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, I think over the last few years, The Open has been my -- you know, my best performances in major championships have been at this event. Had a really good chance to -- I guess had a good chance to at least put some pressure on Francesco at Carnoustie in 2018 and I didn't birdie the last there.

It's been good. Even though I've sort of grown up on links courses and played a lot of links golf, still, when you turn professional, 90 per cent, 95 per cent of the golf you play isn't this style of golf, so you always have to adjust a little bit.

Over the years I've just become more and more comfortable with this style of golf, and I think more than anything else, there's a lot more variables in the Open Championship and on links courses. Once you learn that you can't control those variables, then you just have to go out and accept whatever is given to you.

I think as I've gotten a little more experience and matured, I've been able to play this championship a little bit better, and hopefully I can continue that record this week.

**Q. Could you put into words just how much of a profound blow it was to have no Open Championship for this sport last year and just how much it means and how special it is now returning?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, profound blow sounds very serious. There was a lot of events that were cancelled last year because of the pandemic. I guess my thought, even you look at -- I always compare golf to tennis because two individual sports, four majors a year, and The Open Championship and Wimbledon were cancelled last year, which was -- both Wimbledon and here, arguably the biggest tournaments in

their respective sports, and for those to be cancelled -- even actually walking in our little like open clubhouse here this week, there's a board with the list of winners and the courses, and it says 2020 championship not played, and you're just so used to seeing at that like 1941 or 1945, like war years and stuff like that.

The fact that every time now you look at 2020 it's going to say "championship not played," it just sort of stuck with me. It was like, Wow, yeah, it was a really different and weird year.

As you said, I think everyone is just so glad to be back and playing again and inching our way back to some sort of normality. Obviously next Monday is going to be a big day here for England and the UK, and I think everyone is looking forward to that.

It's great to be back and great to have fans and just great to be playing an Open Championship again.

**Q. What were your takeaways from the practice round other than the lovely weather? Did anything strike you as unexpected about the course?**

RORY McILROY: I think the biggest thing here is the course, even before the rain yesterday, the course was quite lush, quite green. We maybe weren't getting the bounces that we're accustomed to getting here at St. George's with the bumpy fairways.

Honestly, I think the course plays a little better that way, so I was pleasantly surprised at -- I walked away from the golf course on Saturday and Sunday thinking, this is a much better golf course than I remember it being, and I think that's just because of the way it's playing right now.

I think it's perfect, and as the days go on with a little bit of wind and sunshine, by the weekend it should just be absolutely perfect. It should be playing the way it should play.

Yeah, I think more than anything else, I obviously didn't have great memories from 2011 the way I played, and playing the last few days, it's -- this is just my perception, and because of not playing my best that time, I came back here and it's much better than I remember.



**Q. Related to the first question, you've had two years to dwell on what happened in 2019. You weren't able to banish the memory last year. How much has the fact you missed the cut and it was your home Open, how much has that lived with you as a monkey on your back?**

RORY McILROY: I mean, not really. I ended up winning the FedExCup in 2019, so it gave me a few million reasons to feel better (smiling).

I didn't dwell on it that much. It was tough, but the great thing about golf is there's always next week. You can always get back on the horse. You can always -- and that's what I did. I moved forward, set my sights on other things like the FedExCup, like -- that was basically all there was left to play for that year.

I won a World Golf Championship in China. I got to world No. 1 at the start of 2020, and then the pandemic hit and the world sort of changed.

If anything, it was a catalyst for me to play some of my best golf. I left Portrush obviously very disappointed, but by February of 2020, a few months down the line, I got back to No. 1 in the world.

So I didn't dwell on it that much.

**Q. You never like to miss a cut, but the fact that you've been here for a few extra days and been able to taper your practice accordingly, could it turn out to be a blessing in disguise?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think so. You never want to miss a cut, as you say, but as missed cuts go, this wasn't necessarily a bad one. I wasn't planning on playing the Scottish Open a few weeks ago anyway, so just to get a couple of competitive rounds in and just learn a little bit more and figure out what I need to do -- look, it would have been great to stay and play an extra couple days in Scotland, but to be down here and get a few holes in on Saturday, play a full round on Sunday, felt like I got a bit of a head start on the rest of the field, which feels good.

It means now that I didn't even play any holes yesterday. I played 11 today. I'm probably going to go out early tomorrow and play 18.

But I just meant that I can take it a bit easier the next couple days, not feel like I'm trying to cram all the preparation in.

**Q. Given the swing changes obviously Charlotte was such a huge step, but it's been kind of uneven since. Where do you feel like you are in the process of where you want to be ball-striking wise?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I feel good. I've hit the ball really

good in practice the last few days. I feel like I figured something out on Sunday here, which has been really good.

I hit the ball great on the range yesterday, and I hit the ball well today on the course.

It's hard. You're going -- thinking a swing so much, and it's really about trying to get that blend of getting your mechanics right but then also letting your athletic ability and your instincts shine through, as well.

It's just been trying to get that balance. As I said, I feel like I figured something out on Sunday, and I feel good with it. I feel good about where I am going into the week.

**Q. An interesting stat that I uncovered: On three occasions in the last sequence of missed cuts, you have bounced back and won three times. Of the last nine times you've missed the cut, three occasions, coming out, straight out of the box, you've won. I wonder if there's anything going on there in terms of motivational or psychological that puts you in a better place or are you fighting harder, or is it just a chance statistic?**

RORY McILROY: No, I certainly don't think it's a chance statistic. Look, I think in golf you always learn more about your game when you've missed a cut or struggled or not played as well. I think anyone can play well, anyone can hit the ball great and give themselves chances to win -- not anyone, but a lot of people can.

But you just learn more. I've always learnt more from disappointments and from not doing as well.

But I've always tried to learn. I've always tried to figure out, okay, why did this week not go so well, and then you give yourself a couple of thoughts and they're fresh in your mind going into the next week. That's why I say in golf there's always next week, and that's a great thing, because you can right some wrongs pretty quickly.

I've been able to do that in the past. I missed the cut at Memorial a couple years ago, went down and won the Canadian Open the next week. Yeah, missed the cut at the Masters and then went and my next start was Quail Hollow and I won.

Golf always just gives you another opportunity to go out and play well and to see if you've learned from your mistakes, and I've always made it a priority in my career to really try to learn from my mistakes, all the way back to what happened at Augusta in '11 and going and winning the U.S. Open the next major.

I had a few things fresh in my mind for a couple of months

there, and I made sure if I ever got myself in a position like that again, I wasn't going to make the same mistakes.

**Q. You had a very good U.S. Open; I'm just wondering, would you be happy to play the same as you did in that event this week? Or was it something about that performance you feel you need to improve on to give yourself another chance at this week?**

RORY McILROY: I think if I played like I did at the U.S. Open I'd take my chances. But I feel like I can play better. Yeah, look, geez, if I'm -- of course sitting here today, if I'm tied for the lead with nine holes to go on Sunday, I'd obviously take it and take my chances, but I still feel like I can play better than that.

**Q. I was just listening to a podcast about the Ryder Cup, and Viktor Hovland said you were able to have a chat during The Memorial a couple of weeks ago. I was wondering if you recall what you talked about and also how you see him fitting into the European side.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, Viktor is going to be an instrumental player for the European team for a long time to come. I've been really impressed with him and how he's played. I played a practice round with him at Pebble Beach in 2019 and he was still an amateur then. What he's done already as a pro, it's really, really impressive.

Yeah, he's obviously a great young player. He's, whatever he is, 23, 24. He's got a really bright future, and that's -- yeah, having someone like him on the European team can only help.

He's used to playing in the States. Obviously a great college career, plays most of his golf on the PGA Tour. It's not as if he's going to get overwhelmed by anything over there during the Ryder Cup.

I can't remember the conversation that we had, but I probably told him if he was trying to choose a partner, I'd put my hand up and like to guide him around. But yeah, I'm looking forward to teaming up with him in September.

**Q. The notion that you can hit a perfect drive here and it not be rewarded, just curious, is there a place on every hole where you can hit it and know where to hit it so that doesn't happen, or are you better off taking your chances and hitting it down there and seeing what happens?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, it's not as if every hole is like that. There's a few holes where you might hit a good drive and -- but I think, as I was alluding to earlier with how the golf course is playing right now, you're not going to get these huge bounces where it goes into the long, thick rough. It might go into the first cut, but you can still control your ball from there.

It's certainly not as penal or unfair as it has been in previous years. 2011 it was a little bit like that, but looking back to '03, for example, it looked really burnt and crispy then, and it looked like a bit of a pinball machine out there.

But that's not going to be the case this week. It's a lot more lush. It's a lot more green. I think the biggest thing this week is if you do hit it off line, you've got some really thick, juicy rough on either side of the fairway, which you just have to avoid.

MIKE WOODCOCK: Rory, thanks for your time and best of luck this week.

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