

The 150th Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 12 July 2022

Rory McIlroy



MIKE WOODCOCK: Good morning, everyone. We'll make a start. Delighted to welcome the four-time major champion and 2014 Champion Golfer of the Year Rory McIlroy to the interview room.

Rory, if we could just start, obviously this is a very special week in golf and a great milestone, The 150th Open. You looked like you were having a great time yesterday at the Celebration of Champions. How does it mean to you to be part of this week and to be competing for the Claret Jug with all this history going on?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, it is. It's a very special week. To be included in a pretty special day yesterday, it was very cool. To play in something like that alongside my childhood hero, Tiger, one of the legends of the game, Lee Trevino, and then Georgia as well, who I was super impressed with. I'd never seen her hit it before.

But I think she's got such a great pedigree in the R&A championships. She won the Girls' Amateur then the Women's and then obviously going on to win the Women's British Open. Very, very cool to be a part of.

It's one of those moments that you take a step back and sort of think about your journey in golf and what's led you here. Yeah, it just, I guess, made me very proud to be a part of it. I think as well this is a special week for me because I missed the previous Open here in 2015.

So to be able to do all these cool things -- the Celebration of Champions, the Champions' Dinner tonight, all that -- I've really been looking forward to for a long time. Great to be here. Great to play another Open at St Andrews. Obviously, I'm really excited to get the week started.

MIKE WOODCOCK: That's great. And you stayed away from the football this week?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, very much so.

Q. Rory, I wanted to ask you, you played with Lee yesterday, Lee Trevino, and one thing that I've always noticed about him is how happy and always laughing and smiling he is, whether he's playing a round with you, four holes with you

guys, or going into tournaments. Do you think you can ever reach that state of mind or should I say attitude in tournaments, not thinking about the results and just being that happy and going to tournaments?

RORY MCILROY: No.

(Laughter).

I think Lee is a very unique character. I think the reason that he is so well liked is because of his uniqueness. He literally like -- like, I've watched him hit some balls before on the range, but I never knew, like, he literally walks into the shot, sets up for a cut, and then walks all the way around to setting up for a draw, and then he makes his swing, but he's talking at the same time.

He's one of a kind. It was great to be out there with him because you just listen, the stories that he tells, and he just -- most of the time, he's just talking to himself, but he just wants to talk. It was very cool.

Q. Rory, what are you seeing out on the golf course in terms of the way it's playing, compared to when you've been here in the past? And any adjustments you're making to your game or your clubs from what you've seen?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I think everyone's seen how firm and fast the fairways are. The weather looks pretty similar for the rest of the week. So I'd say the greens will get -- the greens are still quite receptive. There's a lot of grass on them, and they're quite lush.

Still have a very firm first bounce, but they're receptive if you hit a well-enough-struck iron shot.

I've played this course mostly in like September, October time for Dunhill, where it plays completely differently. Then it's sort of hit driver everywhere, get it as close to the greens as you can, and then take your chances from there. I think this week you're going to maybe see guys laying back a little bit.

The pin positions -- yeah, the hole locations that they'll use this week are very different than what they use at Dunhill, for example. So, laying back, giving yourself full shots into some of these greens, playing the angles a little bit more, I think that's going to be really important this week.



It's definitely a lot more of a strategic golf course when it plays like this. Yeah, even like the drive I hit on the 2nd hole yesterday -- and that pin's in the middle of the green. I felt like I couldn't hit a chip shot that close, so I putted it from whatever, it was 60 yards.

You'll see a lot of that this week. If you hit a lot of drivers, you may get close to some of these greens, and it would be advantageous to lay back and give yourself fuller, fuller wedge shots into some of these greens.

Q. Hi, Rory. Given your form so far and everything that surrounds The Open this year, do you feel that this could potentially be your year here at St Andrews?

RORY MCILROY: I hope so. I've only played one Open here before. I got off to a great start and got caught out in wind not too dissimilar to what's out there today.

Yeah, I'm playing well. I'm in good form. My confidence in my game is as high as it's been in quite a while.

I can't go in here thinking that this might be my time. I just have to go out and play a really good tournament. I've got to string four good rounds together, and hopefully at the end of the week, that's good enough to win.

I'm happy where everything's at, and I just can't get ahead of myself, and just have to make sure that I prepare well the next couple of days and get myself in the right frame of mind for Thursday.

Q. There's been a lot made about how The Old Course would hold out to modern players and modern equipment. How do you see it playing out this week? And if there is a really low winning score, does that really matter?

RORY MCILROY: I don't think it matters. I don't think you're going to see that, though. I think with the condition of the golf course, I think with a little bit of breeze, just like I was alluding to, yeah, you can bomb it around here and hit driver and get it close to the greens, but that doesn't necessarily mean you're going to make birdies from those positions.

I can't see it -- I mean, I can see it being low enough, like getting into the sort of teens, but I can't see something in the 20-under-par range. That will win, though, obviously. It will win by quite a few. I just think with the way the golf course is playing and how firm and fast it is, it's just going to get super tricky by the end of the week.

Q. What was your preparation like last week, being in Ireland at Adare? And then we saw you with Tiger at Ballybunion. What was that stretch like?

RORY MCILROY: Quite relaxed, quite nice. Played Adare in the Pro-Am, and then played Ballybunion on Thursday. Apart from that, didn't really do too much. Hung around Adare for a couple of days, did a little bit of practise, got in here Sunday.

Then, yeah, played whatever I played. Played the first five and the last five yesterday in a practise round.

There's not a whole lot of new information out there on the golf course. It's just a matter of -- I don't want to -- I'd rather, like, build up slowly towards the week. I don't want to really overdo it. I don't feel like I need to overdo it.

I wasn't maybe expecting the fairways to be as firm as they are, so I feel like my wedges don't quite go as far off this turf as they do, like, for example, the turf I was practicing on last week. So just need to get the numbers dialed in a little bit for them.

But apart from that, it's just about getting comfortable around the greens, putting from 20, 30, 40 yards. But preparation's been nice. I haven't felt like I've needed to do anything. I've just sort of been in a really decent state of mind and happy with where everything is. I think that sort of confidence and contentment in my game, it's a nice way to lead into a major.

Q. Rory, what are you thinking on the 17th tee? And from tee to green, how challenging and unique is that hole? Have you ever had any adventures in the bunker?

RORY MCILROY: Not really. I've sort of done pretty well to avoid that trap for the most part. 17 is -- I mean, not all about the tee shot, but the tee shot's a big part of it, and sort of challenging yourself to trust that there's a lot more room right than you think. Like I hit one way right yesterday in the champions challenge, and I was out of bounds by like a yard. Like I felt like I hit it right of the hotel, and it was just out.

So you can really challenge that right side, but you have to have a lot of trust in your golf swing to do that. But once you get your tee shot away, it then opens up every hole location on that green, even the ones over the bunker on the left-hand side.

If you hit it into that left rough, it sort of takes all your options away. You've just got to hit it to the front right and then try to make your two-putts from there. The tee shot is key, and like I said, just trusting you've got a little more room on that right side.

Look, it's a hole where you make four 4s for the week and you're really happy. You're not trying to -- yeah. I mean, a 3 is a massive bonus there. You take four 4s and run very happily to the 18th tee.

Q. Tiger famously missed every bunker in 2000, and I guess

knowing what you know about this course, the firmness and everything, is that an impressive feat to you? A lucky feat? Is it a mixture of both? What does it make you think?

RORY MCILROY: It's impressive. I think you're trying not to go in bunkers, so you've achieved one objective for the week, I guess.

Again, 2000 was quite firm and fiery and fast. I've watched a lot of highlights of that year, and I know he hit a lot of drivers and he drove quite a few greens, but I think he was still pretty strategic in some of the golf he played as well.

It is, it's an unbelievably impressive -- I don't know, there are 100-something, 200 bunkers on this golf course?

Q. I think 112.

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, it's pretty impressive, especially when there's so many tee shots here that are sort of half blind and little bunkers that -- I don't know, the golf course is so well designed that there's just so many really well-placed bunkers here that, yeah, it's a really impressive feat to stay out of all of them.

Then even you think about your greenside bunkers or you get a bad break or you get a firm bounce on the green and it runs through into the bunker or whatever it is. I think not going in a bunker for the whole week sort of just shows extreme control of your golf ball.

Q. After yesterday, have you noticed a more kind of open and light-hearted Tiger Woods than before? And has that helped you feel a bit more relaxed this week?

RORY MCILROY: I've gotten to know Tiger very well over the past decade or more, and he's like that in private moments, more so than anyone really thinks. But I think he's just maybe showing that side a little more, that side of himself a little more to the public over these last few years.

And as his career is sort of -- winding down, I guess you could say -- I think he now appreciates everything that he's got done in the game. I think Tiger's mindset has always been, okay, onto the next one, onto the next one, onto the next one.

I think, especially after the Masters in '19, for him to just sit back and reflect on what a career it's been. I think he maybe appreciates it all just a bit more now, and that's part of the reason that you're seeing that sort of lightness and more joyful person on the golf course, I guess.

Q. Rory, Jack has said -- and I think he was quoting Jones by saying that a golfer's career resume is not complete unless he's won an Open at St Andrews. Do you agree with that?

And if so, does that not kind of add to the weight of a player this week when you only get to play it probably three or four times in peak years?

RORY MCILROY: Okay, I would say it's -- I don't know if a golfer's career isn't complete if you don't, but I think it's the holy grail of our sport. So not a lot of people are going to get that opportunity to achieve that, but that's what winning an Open at St Andrews is. It's one of the highest achievements that you can have in golf.

There's a lot of great players that have won Opens and maybe not had won Opens at St Andrews, so I think it's unfair to say that a golfer's career isn't complete without that. But it's certainly up there with one of the greatest things you can do in our game.

Q. To follow up on that first, Rory, is the holy grail for you The Open here or the Masters?

RORY MCILROY: I guess it's both. Obviously I'd love to win both. And I'll be greedy and say that I'll take both.

Q. Then my question for you is, you've kind of become the de facto speaker for the PGA TOUR on matters with LIV. Tiger Woods has been very much in the PGA TOUR camp. Why do you think that is, and how has he influenced you in any way to feel that way?

RORY MCILROY: I think the legacy that Tiger has built over 25 years, the platform for him to do it has basically been the PGA TOUR. So I think he appreciates the platform that he was given at the very start and able obviously to play as good as he's played, but then to have that platform to build his brand, too, and do everything else even just outside of hitting a golf ball that's made him who he is.

And I think as well he's such a big guy on history and tradition. And he's chasing a record that Sam Snead has held for I don't know how many years, the amount of victories on the PGA TOUR. And I think those traditions and the history of the game are very important to him. And I think he doesn't want to see that all go away. I think that's a big part of the reason why his position is what it is.

Q. Rory, last month you created a bit of a viral moment when you said, "... my 21st PGA TOUR title, one more than somebody else" -- that somebody else clearly being Greg Norman. Greg Norman has quite dramatically been disinvited from this week's 150th celebrations. Are you quite relieved that he's not going to be here given the circus that he's been creating?

RORY MCILROY: It's The 150th Open Championship, and that's what we need to focus on. I think the focus would have

been taken away a little bit if he'd have been here.

I supported that decision, and I think right now, because of everything that's happening in the golf world, I think it was the right decision to be made. But if things change in the future, or whatever happens, who knows, but I could see a day where he's certainly welcome back.

But right now, just with everything going on, we want the focus to be on The 150th Open Championship and this being a celebration of a wonderful golf tournament and a wonderful game in general, and I think it was the right decision for that.

Q. As a bit of a follow-up on the Tiger question, playing with him yesterday, obviously at Ballybunion, what are you seeing in his game? How do you feel he's holding up physically? What do you think it will take for him to contend? As a fun follow-up, any funny interaction with J.D. and his colourful attire and his son yesterday?

RORY MCILROY: I actually was very -- yesterday, for those four holes, he was moving better than I'd seen him move in a while. That was really good to see. And his swing -- hitting the golf ball and swinging the club aren't the issue. It's the walking part of it that's the struggle.

But he seemed to be moving well. Everything looked pretty good yesterday, so that's encouraging.

I saw J.D. briefly, saw Little John briefly. He was sort of telling me what his schedule is coming up and what tournaments he's playing. I think he said he finished second or third in the Florida State Amateur at the Bear's Club a couple of weeks ago. He's turning into a good little player, and it will be exciting to sort of follow his progress as the years go on.

Q. Can you see Tiger contending on Sunday?

RORY MCILROY: I think the way the golf course is and the way the conditions are, I could certainly see it. It's not going to be -- it's going to be a game of chess this week, and no one's been better at playing that sort of chess game on a golf course than Tiger over the last 20 years.

Q. Rory, there seemed to be some contradictory statements made by you last week, one at McManus, talking about LIV, and also some comments that were given to Kyle Porter in regards to LIV as well. Just wondering if you could clarify exactly what your position is. Also, as a board member, you have the ability to probably vote at some point if you would permanently suspend the players that have left for LIV. How would you vote in permanently suspending players?

RORY MCILROY: So if you actually read the two, I wouldn't say they're contradictory. Basically I said the same thing. Like

I'll point everyone back to Kyle's article that we went through a few days ago that I sort of laid all my points out in that.

Then as a vote, I don't think that should be in the public domain about how I would vote in that. So I'll keep that one quiet also.

Q. Rory, you were talking earlier how maybe Tiger is relishing his achievements even more now as he looks back. I appreciate that you're at a different stage of your career, but as the wait goes on for another major, do you find yourself looking back more fondly on your achievements? And also does that weight make you more determined to get your hands on another major?

RORY MCILROY: I'm certainly not at the reminiscing point of my career yet. I'm very proud of my achievements, and I'm proud of what I've achieved in the game, but I know that there's still a lot more that I want to achieve and a lot more that I can achieve.

I look back fondly on what I've done so far, but I still feel like I've got another decade or more of really good golf left in me. So, yeah, I'm firmly looking ahead and trying to make the most of however long left I've got in this game.

Then what was the question about Tiger? Sorry.

Q. That was all part of the same question. Just one other thing, if I may. You talked a lot about how you clearly understand the significance of The 150th Open with all the history and stuff. Does that make it maybe better for the game if you get a player winning that isn't involved in LIV, do you think?

RORY MCILROY: Selfishly, for me, yes, I think it would be better for the game. But at the end of the day, everyone that's here has the same opportunity to go out there and try to win a Claret Jug, regardless of what Tour they play on or whatever that is. It doesn't -- whoever wins here at the end of the week should be commended for one of the greatest achievements this game has to offer.

I'm not going to begrudge anyone if they win the Claret Jug and they play on a different Tour than I play. That's still a wonderful achievement, and they're still playing the same sport. But I selfishly want that person to be me, and I'm going to try my best to make that happen.

Q. You talked about how special it would be to win this week, The 150th Open and at the home of golf. Of course you already know what that feels like. How special is it when you're called the Champion Golfer of the Year?

RORY MCILROY: That's a moment you dream about,

especially being from this part of the world. This was the major championship, it was the first one I ever attended as a kid. Yeah, it just means a little bit more.

Yeah, to hear your name and winner of the gold medal, Champion Golfer of the Year, it's what dreams are made of. I still remember that pretty vividly. I'd love to replicate that on Sunday evening.

Q. Rory, two wildly different topics. Are you a fan of Monty Python's Holy Grail? Have you seen it?

RORY MCILROY: No.

Q. Good. Next one. How much do you remember from your rounds, the two first rounds in 2010, the 63 obviously, which was brilliant, and then getting caught in the weather? How much do you remember of those two, the wild differences between the two?

RORY MCILROY: Not much. I honestly don't remember if I -- I'd have to watch highlights to remember what I did or how I played or where I made birdies.

The only thing I -- this is sort of a good lesson in human behaviour, but the only thing I remember about the 63 is hitting a 6-iron into 3 feet at 17 and missing the putt. Then I birdied the last, I remember that.

That's the one thing that sticks out in my mind because I remember coming off the golf course thinking that was a really good opportunity for the first person ever to shoot 62 in a major, and I didn't quite get it done. So you can always be better.

MIKE WOODCOCK: Rory, thank you for joining us. Best of luck this week.

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