

The 150th Open

Press Conference

Thursday, 14 July 2022

Rory McIlroy



MIKE WOODCOCK: We're joined in the interview room by Rory McIlroy.

An excellent 6-under par, 66 today. Seven birdies, just the one dropped shot. That leaves you two shots off the lead as it stands. Can you sum up how you feel about that and it's obviously been a good start for you?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, fantastic start. Just sort of what you hope will happen when you're starting off your week. Yeah, I mean I did everything that you're supposed to do around St Andrews. I birdied the holes that are birdieable. And I made pars at the holes where you're sort of looking to make a par and move to the next tee. And didn't really put myself out of position too much.

I had -- sort of maybe trying to be a little bit too cute with the second shot on 13, but apart from that, missed it in the right areas, areas where you can get it up-and-down from. And yeah, got off to a good start going out, which is sort of important here, make your score go right and sort of hang on a little bit coming in.

So, yeah, overall really pleased. It's another good start at a major. Three in a row for me now. And looking forward to the next few days.

Q. Well done. Lovely 66. What were your anticipations? What were you expecting today, given the conditions? And secondly, with the weather set to stay very similar between now and Sunday, what can that only do to make the course more difficult?

RORY MCILROY: I came in here playing well, and I've played this golf course well over the years. So I knew if I just went out there and played my game and stuck to my game plan, that something like this was possible. And in terms of making it more difficult, I think the thing that would have made it more difficult this week is if I would have had more rough because you can hit like driver -- I've never really hit driver on 16 before, but it's sort of the only play.

You're just getting the ball -- had a wedge into 14. It's so fast and firm. 615-yard hole. And it's just the way the conditions are. The golf course is playing so, so short. But it's still tricky.

It's not as if -- there's an 8-under, there's a 6-under, one 5-under. It's not as if everyone is shooting the lights out. I think 3-under is in the top 10.

So it's not like it's very, very easy out there. It's tricky. Some of the pin positions -- I think that's what they're going to do over the next few days. They're just going to hide the pins away and make it very hard to get close to some of them. And even today they did that.

Think of even like the 1st hole just over the burn there. Just over the slope on 2. That sort of right ridge on 3. Way back 4. I mean, they used a lot of really good hole locations today, and I would expect them to keep doing that over the next few days.

Q. This week you looked like you're in total control on and off the course. Do you feel like that? And you just said thinking well is so important out there. Give us a best example of that from out there today.

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, everything feels very settled. No real issues with my game. Everything feels like it's in good shape. Everything feels just sort of nice and quiet, which is a nice way to be. And yeah, thinking well.

17, for example, today I hit it way down there. And my ball's on the fairway, but it's in a lie where I don't feel like I can get the leading edge of a lob wedge underneath the ball to get a good enough strike on it. So I chipped a little gap wedge down there, and I pulled it.

But I played the right shot so that if I did miss it, it wasn't in too bad of a spot but I could then get it up-and-down from. And that's what I'm talking about, the trickiness. I only had 85 yards to the front of the green on 17, and I knew 4 was going to be a good score.

So I think it's accepting that sometimes and not being overly aggressive, even when you put yourself in some of these positions. I think that's important.

Q. You mentioned three really good opening rounds in a row in majors, and that comes after kind of struggling in opening rounds in majors in 2020 and 2021. Is that just golf being golf, or is there some sort of attitude shift?



RORY MCILROY: I think it's golf being golf. And I think I've played with a little more freedom because I can, because I'm in more control of my swing and my game. And I think it sort of goes hand in hand. I have confidence and I can go out and play free and not be maybe as timid and tight starting off.

And as I said, three majors in a row now where I feel like that, which is a really nice feeling considering how I have felt previously at times.

So it's golf being golf in a way, but at the same time I'm in a better place with my game to go out there and give a better account of myself.

Q. Did you by any chance see your drive on 5 hit the stone?

RORY MCILROY: So I was saying to Harry, I knew it was right at the stone and it finished pretty close to it. I said to Harry, some poor guy is going to have his ball end up right behind that today because it's right in sort of the firing range, and I don't think you get a drop. It's sort of play it like it lies. You'll have to check with a rules official.

But I was saying to Harry when we were hitting the second shot, that it's so unfair if that does happen, but I didn't know my ball hit it. It's funny you said that because we were talking about that stone.

Q. Can you talk about your drive and how short it was because it hit that stone, how much it took from your drive?

RORY MCILROY: I didn't even notice. I think I still hit it past the other two. (Laughter).

Q. You mentioned the fast start at PGA and U.S. Open and then kind of faded -- not faded, but didn't win those obviously. Did you take away anything from like just how those last three rounds at both of those tournaments went that will change your mindset going into the last three rounds here?

RORY MCILROY: I need to go out tomorrow and back up what I just did today. I think that's important to do. But again, this golf course isn't going to change that much, I don't think, between today and tomorrow in terms of conditions.

I've seen the golf course now in tournament play and tournament conditions and know what to expect. Tomorrow's an important run, just to go out and back up what I've done today.

Q. Pretty slow going out there today, under six hours for your round. How difficult is it to stay focused when you're out there that long? You had a 20-minute wait, I think, on 5.

RORY MCILROY: It's quite stop-start, but I think St Andrews is that way. There's a lot of crisscrossing and waiting on other greens and waiting on greens to clear because the drivable par-4s.

So I think, especially the first two days when it's the full field, it's to be expected. It is what it is. Thankfully it speeds up over the weekend and two balls, and it gets moving a little bit more.

But I think playing this tournament, you expect it to be that way the first couple of days.

Q. Did you feel that you had to make any changes to your normal clubs that you carry in the bag today, wedges or anything, because of the firmness?

RORY MCILROY: Yes. I'm using a lob wedge with less bounce than I usually do. Even still, I don't know if -- I think I could do with using even less bounce again. The fairways are so firm.

And some of the lies are so bare that, again, going back to that second shot on 17, I felt like if I had a full lob wedge there and I didn't get it quite right, then I could have thinned the thing into the middle of the (indiscernible).

Again, you're up there leading The Open Championship and you're worried about hitting a lob wedge out of bounds because of a bare lie off the fairway.

It's tricky. And then I put a 2-iron in the bag instead of a 5-wood, and I hit that quite a bit today. That's been a good club this week.

Q. You looked very relaxed as well as in control. But when does the sort of realisation that this looks like being a great chance to finally get over the sort of (indiscernible) wait for a major win. Does that start to tighten things up? Are you prepared for that?

RORY MCILROY: Look, I just have to go out and play the same golf that I've played today, the same golf that I've played over the last few weeks. I've been playing well. I've been swinging the club well. And I think it's better if I don't think about it that much and I just go out and play golf and try to shoot some good scores on one of my favourite golf courses in the world.

Q. The freedom that you were talking to Dan about, is that simply a result of going back to Michael and maybe some earlier stuff, or is there something else behind that?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I think it's me -- I don't know -- I wouldn't say technically my swing -- it might be a little better than it was previously, but I think it's more me taking ownership of everything again. And knowing my tendencies

and knowing sort of the more you own what you have, the more it's easier to manage. Whether you have certain tendencies or shot chips or whatever it is, I feel sometimes when you get into the weeds with what you're trying to do with golf swing or with coaches and they're sort of trying to tell you how to play the game.

I'm pretty good at this game. I think I know what I'm doing. I think I just need to take -- I needed to take ownership of it again. And I think that's where the freedom comes from.

Q. Do you expect the golf course to change at all between now and the end of the week? And is there anything new that you learned about the course today?

RORY MCILROY: If there's no rain in the forecast, it might get a touch firmer, especially the greens. I definitely noticed today some of the high points in the greens were getting a little burnt out and bare.

And I think because of that, there are certain areas of certain greens that were a little faster than others. So that's something just to keep an eye on over the next few days.

I've played this course a lot. I haven't played it a lot in these conditions. But I've played it a lot over the years. And I think I know it pretty well. I maybe saw a couple of pin positions I've never seen out there today, but apart from that, I thought I handled everything pretty good.

Q. You said in the buildup about the defence you never had and waiting 12 years to come back here after '15. Were there any nerves, because you seemed serene on the 1st tee?

RORY MCILROY: As 1st tee shots go, it's pretty easy. Hitting a 4-iron into 120-yard fairway. But there's always nerves. There's always anticipation, I guess, and wanting to get off to a good start. And I always have 1st tee nerves.

But once that 1st tee shot's gone and out of the way, you sort of get into your routine and you're just playing golf. And that's where I feel most comfortable.

Q. Similar to that, but you made it look easy, but did it feel easy out there?

RORY MCILROY: It never feels easy. There's pivotal moments in the round that I think -- they could be little things that -- like I wasn't really -- I hit a good putt for birdie on the 8th hole, hit it three feet by. I wasn't really that comfortable with the second putt, but I stepped up there, committed to it. Held a nice putt. It's just like these little part of the rounds that just test you.

And I feel like every time the round did that to me today, I was

able to come through it. The 2-putt from 60 feet for bogey on 13, and the up-and-down for birdie on 14 and the 2-putt on 17.

There's just little parts of the round that it sort of shows you where you're at with everything and mentally, physically, and I came through all those little tests today unscathed, and I'm really proud of that. So it might have looked easy, but there's certain parts of the round that are challenging.

Q. You've played in this event a number of times now. Where does the test this week rate in terms of fast-running golf courses that we've had for this event?

RORY MCILROY: It's the fiddliest Open that I've played. It's the only way I can really describe it. It's just really fiddly out there. Carnoustie was firm in 2018, but it wasn't like this.

It wasn't, you know, okay, the 18th at Carnoustie was like a runway, that fairway, but around the greens here and just all the slopes and undulations and everything, it's -- I think as the tournament progresses, you're going to get some funny bounces and it's going to test your patience at times.

And fiddly hasn't really been my forte over the years, but I'm hopefully going to make it my forte this week.

MIKE WOODCOCK: Thank you for joining us. Best of luck.

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