

The 152nd Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 16 July 2024

Rory McIlroy



STUART MOFFATT: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to this afternoon's press conference with four-time major champion Rory McIlroy.

Rory, how are preparations going this week, and how much are you looking forward to the challenge ahead?

RORY MCILROY: I feel like preparations have been going well. I feel like preparations probably started last week at the Renaissance.

Just getting myself familiar again with links conditions, links turf, green speeds. Obviously we play a majority of our golf in the States and green surfaces that are quite different to here. So just trying to get, I guess, reacclimated to that. Not that -- obviously grew up playing a lot of links golf, but when you only come back to play once or twice a year, it just takes you a little time to adapt.

Yeah, it's been going well. Got my first look at the golf course this morning early. It's basically a tale of two nines on this course. You feel like you have to make your score on the way out and then sort of hang on coming in.

Looking forward to the week. The course is in great shape. Obviously we've got an amazing field, as these major championships produce now. It's the only time four times a year that we get everyone back together. So looking forward to the week.

Q. We had Tiger in a little while ago, and he was mentioning after the dust settled for you after the U.S. Open, he shot you a text. Just kind of wondered what that meant to you to hear that from him.

RORY MCILROY: Full disclosure, I changed my number two days after the U.S. Open, so I didn't get it until he told me about it today. I was like, oh, thanks very much. So I blanked Tiger Woods, which is probably not a good thing.

Tiger has been nothing but incredible to me over the course of my career in the good moments and the bad. He sent me an incredible message after St Andrews in 2022.

I met Tiger when I was 15 years old, and I've built up a great

relationship with him, his whole family. He really enjoys spending time with my mom and dad as well.

So, yeah, it means a lot. It means a lot that he reached out. Actually it means a lot that he waited a few days to reach out, which if he hadn't have waited that long, I probably would have got it.

But I caught up with him earlier. It's always nice when your hero and the guy that you had on your bedroom wall is reaching out and offering words of encouragement.

Q. On a quick follow, obviously you had last week under your belt to play, but where is your head space at a month or so removed from Pinehurst to where you sit now?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, it's good. Game's in really good shape. Had a nice reset after Pinehurst that was needed and felt like I shook off a little bit of the rust last week and played okay. Felt like I probably could have given myself more of a chance to win the tournament.

I thought it was a solid week. Again, it's like one eye on preparing for this week, but another eye on trying to get into contention as well.

Overall I've been in the UK now for a couple of weeks, and it's felt nice to get back over here and get back into the swing of things.

Q. Do you have to change your phone number a lot? Is that something you do a lot?

RORY MCILROY: I actually haven't done it in a while. So I thought it was time, yeah.

Q. That was a totally separate thought. Tiger also was saying that you said you felt uncomfortable on 16 and 18. He said you feel that basically every time you're trying to win a tournament. Were you surprised at that feeling, and how will you deal with it, I guess differently, moving forward than you did a couple weeks ago?

RORY MCILROY: No, not surprised. I think the last few holes of a major championship with a great chance to win, if you're not feeling it, then it probably doesn't mean as much to you as



it should.

No, it wasn't a surprise. It was just more a disappointment that I didn't handle those uneasy feelings as good as I could have. I alluded to this. I was probably more aware than I should have been of what was happening behind me and sort of got out of my own little head space a little too much. That was a big part of the reason why I didn't close it out coming down the stretch.

Q. Just a quick one. Might I ask why you change your number from time to time? Would it be safe to assume you weren't cut off from not paying your bill?

RORY MCILROY: No, no, I can pay the bills. There's a lot of money floating around in golf at the minute.

Honestly, from the time I left Pinehurst to the time I walked through my front door on Sunday night, I probably got about 10 or 15 text messages from media members, and I was like, it's probably time to get a new number. Create a bit of space.

Q. That's fair enough. Do you ever get overwhelmed by when you have lots of goodwill messages but sometimes it gets a bit too much, particularly if you're feeling particularly down after a tournament? Everyone is expressing their sympathy, sometimes it can almost make you feel a bit worse?

RORY MCILROY: No, I'd much rather people reach out, in fairness. It's a lovely thing and hopefully a nice reflection on how people feel about me or what they think about me. No, I'll never shun messages of support or encouragement. It's a lovely thing.

Q. You mentioned a couple things in your introductory comments. Slow greens, is there anything you do mechanically that you change or with your club? Then also, the forecast is for the wind actually to be the complete opposite the first couple days, from the south. Do you have memories of how this golf course, have you played it that way, or have you thought about that yet about Royal Troon?

RORY MCILROY: Definitely was cognizant of that today in the practice round. It was very, very calm starting off, but I would say, once we reached probably like the 7th hole, it started to blow like north-northwest, like straight down on the front side, and then it was really straight back in coming in. Maybe a little tiny bit off the left, if anything.

The forecast looks like it's going to be basically straight off the right going out and straight off the left coming in, so quite a few more crosswinds, which presents its own challenges in a way.

Yeah, I think we're all -- you know, you would like to play the

golf course in the conditions you're going to play in the tournament, but sometimes Mother Nature just doesn't let that happen. But it won't be too dissimilar to what it was in 2016, sort of down off the right usually on the way out and off the left coming in. Maybe just a few more crosswinds than there usually is.

Then the slower greens, I don't like to tinker too much with the putter. Fax was out there walking with me this morning, and so was Luke Donald. I asked Luke -- I really try to focus on the strike more than anything else here and put a good roll on it because any putt here that's misstruck just doesn't get to the hole.

So I sort of picked Luke's brain a little bit, and he always said he liked to focus on the tempo of his stroke and really, if anything, make it a little shorter and a little brisker on greens like this. So that's something that -- you know, the strike and maybe just think a little bit more about the tempo of the stroke, two good things this week.

Q. Rory, if and hopefully when you win another major, how much of a relief will it be to you to stop the endless kind of psychoanalysis of what's going on inside your brain and people asking you questions like this one: When are you going to win another major?

RORY MCILROY: It doesn't bother me. I know that I'm in a good spot. If I think about 2015 through 2020, that five-year stretch I seldom had a realistic chance to win a major championship in that five-year period. So I'd much rather have these close calls. It means that I'm getting closer.

But yeah, absolutely, I'd love to be able to play the golf and get one over the line, but as soon as I do that, people are going to say, well, when are you going to win your sixth? So it's never ending.

Q. Bob last week, quite phenomenal end to the week. You told us 12 months ago he was going to have many opportunities. What did you make of how he ended up on Sunday? Secondly, you spoke last week about you can't remember the last time you took a holiday. How much do you crave for the day you can get up with the family, go down to the coffee shop and have breakfast without being Rory McIlroy, the global superstar?

RORY MCILROY: On Bob, yeah, absolutely phenomenal what he did last week, especially after the -- what happened last year and coming so close. Love to know who put a sprinkler head there on 16, but it worked out in his favor.

Bob is so proud to be Scottish, and he's so -- he wanted to win that national open more than anything else. To have that chance even last year and to produce the golf and to hole that

putt at the last, it was a perfect ending to the tournament. Yeah, really happy for Bob.

I think after the Ryder Cup he's really come into his own. Obviously the Canadian Open was a huge win for him, and then winning the Scottish Open is obviously even bigger. Really happy for him. Puts him in a good spot heading into this week.

Then it's not as if -- I regularly go out with my family and have coffee and have breakfast. Yeah, I get stopped sometimes and whatever, but I'd much rather have it that way because if I wasn't getting stopped and wasn't on TV all the time, I wouldn't be very good at my job. So it's nice to get recognized and nice to -- again, going back to having people wish you well.

But, yeah, there's times where you crave a little bit of anonymity and want to get out of the public eye, but I understand that in the position that I'm in, if I'm going to reap the rewards of the position I'm in, then there's other things you have to deal with as well, and I completely understand that.

Q. Rory, you mentioned earlier that you grew up playing links golf. Was it harder to adjust to the style that's played more around the world, or is it harder to go back the other way?

RORY MCILROY: For me personally, it's probably a little harder to go back the other way because my natural game is to hit it in the air and to play more of a game that's suited to big American sort of parkland golf courses.

But I've gotten much better over the years to adapting and hitting the shots that are required on links courses in blustery conditions, and I've sort of prided myself on that. My record in the Open Championship over the last few years has been very, very good.

Yeah, it still takes a little while when you play 11 months of your golf every year in very different conditions. That's why I thought it was so important for me to get back and play the Scottish Open last week, just to refamiliarize myself with the turf, the types of shots needed around the greens, and even the wind. You feel like in warmer conditions in America, like a wind that's a similar strength doesn't affect the ball as much as it just feels like a real heavy wind here, especially when you play at seaside links.

So just getting refamiliarized with all that I think is important.

Q. How old do you think you were when you had the realization that the style of golf in North America was going to be really good for you?

RORY MCILROY: Probably early on. I always liked trying to hit it far and hit it high. I didn't necessarily grow up on a links

course. Holywood is a parkland sort of golf course. I had to learn how to hit it high.

I think, once I was a teenager and I started to travel around Europe and to South Africa and Australia and some of these other amateur events, I soon realized that hitting it long and hitting it high was a big advantage in the game.

Q. They say there are five stages of grief, and going back to Pinehurst, when did you think -- you added another one, the sixth stage, which is changing your phone number.

RORY MCILROY: It wasn't out of grief, but okay. (Laughter).

Q. When do you think that you finally came to the acceptance stage, and how was that process?

RORY MCILROY: I would say maybe like three or four days after, went from being very disappointed and dejected to trying to focus on the positives to then wanting to learn from the negatives and then getting to the point where you become enthusiastic and motivated to go again.

So it probably took three, four, five days. It's funny how your mindset can go from I don't want to see a golf course for a month to like four days later being can't wait to get another shot at it. When that disappointment turns to motivation, that's when it's time to go again. But, yeah, three, four days.

Q. You mentioned earlier that you met Tiger for the first time when you were 15. Do you ever sort of sit home and think like how surreal it is that that 15-year-old lad has now become fairly close mates with Tiger Woods? And like it was said earlier, like a global superstar?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I get reminded of it or I remind myself of it every day. I always say this, and it sounds cliché, but I don't take it for granted that I can wake up every day and try to live out my childhood dream. And one of my childhood dreams was to meet Tiger Woods, but not only that, to compete against him and to befriend him and become close to him.

Yeah, not in my wildest dreams did I think that I'd end up in the position that I'm in, but I'm very grateful for it. I still have to remind myself a lot that this is my life.

Q. They said at the Scottish that you went to Manhattan for a few days, and you were talking about walking the high line a little bit with your AirPods in. What's a day of meditative thinking like, and what does it do for you?

RORY MCILROY: It's liberating in some way. The thing is just to get out, to not be on a screen, to look around, to -- I think trying to find the joy from the small things in life I think is

really important.

Going there especially is a good reset, just in terms of seeing everyone living their lives and the hustle and the bustle. Honestly, no one gave a shit if I missed the putt at Pinehurst. It's a nice perspective to keep.

Yeah, just to go and get lost in a big city like that and just be one of the herd sort of going about your day, it's -- for me anyway, it's a nice feeling.

Q. You've hit this shot off the tee a few times this season, this ultra low drive, like apex is at 30 feet, 35 feet. Just wonder if that's a skill you've always had, if you've had to develop it over the years, how you practice it. Where does that shot come from?

RORY MCILROY: It's definitely something I've developed over the years, and honestly it's only a shot I've been able to hit since I've become a little stronger.

Really it's about trying to keep my right side high on the way into the golf ball. I've talked about my sort of low tee and high tee. I tee it down low, which helps me keep on top of it and keep that right side high. If I tee it up a little higher, I can get some right side bend going.

When you time it well, it can be awesome. When you don't time it so well, it can create some issues. It's a really nice go-to shot for me if I don't feel 100 percent comfortable on a tee shot or if a tee shot doesn't fit my eye, to be able to tee it low and hit that shot.

12 at Pinehurst was an example. It's a wide fairway, but I got up there, and I just didn't see anything. So to just get the ball on the deck and get it running, especially on fairways like that, conditions like this, it's something that -- it's a shot that I've went to more and more over the last couple of years since I've been able to practice it and develop it. It's been a nice go-to when I'm struggling to see a certain shot. Just tee it low and sort of squeeze one out there, and it still gets out there quite a long way, which is nice.

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