

The 153rd Open

Press Conference

Monday, 14 July 2025

Rory McIlroy



MIKE WOODCOCK: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the opening press conference of the 153rd Open. I'm delighted to welcome former Open Champion and current Masters champion Rory McIlroy to the interview room. Thank you for joining us today. I'd like to start by asking you what it means to be back here competing in the Open on home soil.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it means an awful lot. It's weird, it doesn't feel like six years has passed since 2019. I think it's amazing that Portrush has this opportunity so soon after the last Open to host again.

Just great to be back. I don't spend a lot of time in these parts anymore just with travel schedule, living abroad, all that stuff. To be here, to see a lot of familiar faces, even some of the -- every hole on the course has a different team of marshals from different golf clubs, and just to see people that I've met throughout the years out there this morning was really nice.

It's really nice to be back, and obviously very excited for the week.

Q. You spoke after the Masters about needing to find your next Mount Everest. Your last two starts have been really solid. How would you describe how you're feeling coming into this week compared to how you came into the PGA or the U.S. Open?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I'm certainly encouraged by how I've played the last two starts, especially last week in Scotland. I think the two weeks off after the Travelers just to reset, to get over here, a bit of a change of scenery has been really nice.

When I was looking at the calendar for 2025, this was the tournament that was probably, I don't know, circled, even more so than the Masters for different reasons. It's lovely to be coming in here already with a major and everything else that's happened this year.

I'm excited with where my game is. I felt like I showed some really good signs last week. I feel like I'm in a good spot and had -- not that last week was a pure preparation week, but I definitely feel like it put me in a good spot heading into here.

Q. The pressure is off, the Slam is there, the Masters --

RORY McILROY: Is it? Is the pressure off?

Q. I don't know, there's always a pressure, now playing at home. You also spoke about your schedule. Now you're kind of adding new parts of the world, like my part of the world, India. Any comments on that? And does it mean that you will be seen more often in different parts of the world?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I hope so. I've certainly voiced my views and opinions about the top level of men's professional golf maybe needs to get a little more international in some ways. I'm excited to go to India. I've never been before. So I'm excited just to take in a new place and a new culture and play in different parts of the world.

I'm going to Australia at the end of this year as well. I always have. I've always been quite an international player, and I've enjoyed going to different places.

I just think at this stage of my career, basically 18 years into my professional year, to still be able to experience new things and play in new tournaments, that's something that means a lot to me.

Q. What are your most vivid recollections of the emotional week here in '19, and what do you take away from that that maybe helps you this week?

RORY McILROY: I think I remember not -- the ovation I got on the first tee on Thursday and not being prepared for it or not being ready for how I was going to feel or what I was going to feel.

Then the golf on Thursday feels like a bit of a blur. I try to forget that part of it.

But I remember the run on Friday. I remember I was making a charge and making a run to try to make the cut, and I hit a 6-iron into the 14th, second shot, and I remember the roar from the crowd. It was sort of getting a little dark and it was overcast, and for whatever reason, that's the one thing I remember is that shot and that roar of the crowd, and walking up to that green and getting a standing ovation. It was really special.



I wish I had have been here for two more days to get a bit more of that and experience it. But hopefully I can change that this week.

Q. I think it was in full swing you were talking about you and Shane's relationship and you mentioned he can be kind of a good role model for you in some ways. I wonder if there's any traits of his or characteristics that you envy and wish to embody in yourself?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, Shane and I have become -- we've always been close, but I think we've become very close over the last sort of five or six years. I think once we both had kids, or at least once I had kids or had a daughter and I see how Shane is with his daughters, and I just think -- when I say like a role model, I just think about how he is off the course, how he is able to separate his family life and his normal life from his golfing life.

Look, I know it may be a little bit more -- I'm in a bit of a different position, so it may be a little bit more difficult for me, but it's definitely a place that I strive to be in, to be as comfortable getting away from it as he is in a way and enjoying the fruits of your success and sharing that with your loved ones.

More so that. That's one of my New Year's resolutions was to have more fun. I think Shane is very good at having fun, and I need more of that in my life.

Q. Just following on from trying to think positively about Portrush, what are your memories of breaking the course record as a 16 year old? And speaking about that same topic of being an artist instead of a scientist, how do you reflect on the golfer you are now compared to the golfer that you were who broke the course record?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, honestly, I remember a little bit of it. I don't remember a lot of it.

I know I was -- I think I was 9-under for the last 10 holes. I had it going with the putter a little bit. It was certainly the first time I'd ever felt, like, in the zone or that flow state or whatever you want to call it.

I think as well, this golf course has changed. It's weird the way the original 17th and 18th have been taken out of this golf course and the new 7th and 8th have been put in, but Harry and I were talking about the course last week, and he's like, on the 12th hole -- I'm like, that's the 10th hole. He's like, no, that's the 12th. Even now I still remember this course the way it was and not the way it is for The Open.

I've only played -- I played the Irish Open in 2012 but it was still the original golf course, so I've really only played two competitive rounds on this new golf course. It's a little bit

different.

I think when I shot that 61 when I was 16, I had a little bit of a clue of what I was doing, but I certainly didn't have as much of an understanding of the game or of my game as I do now.

I think in that 20 years, technology has evolved. I don't even think TrackMans were a thing at that point. There's a lot of different things that have happened to the game of golf that probably push you in the direction of a scientist more than an artist. But as we all know, The Open Championship and links golf, you need to show quite a lot of artistry to do well here.

Q. Last group out yesterday in Scotland; out here at the crack of dawn this morning. Just wondering how much sleep you had and whether it was always the intention to get the prep started really early?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I got about four hours of sleep, so I'm looking forward to taking a nap after this.

The last couple of majors, at the PGA and the U.S. Open, the practice rounds take so long. I feel like there's 50 people inside the ropes all the time. I feel like I just can't get good work done, good preparation.

I didn't come up here ahead of time to try to get a couple of practice rounds in, so I just wanted to get out early, sort of beat the rush, beat the crowd, and do my work with not a lot of people around. So that was the reason that I did that today.

It worked out well. Obviously we had that weather delay there, and it was nice to get 18 holes in early and feel like I got a productive day of work in.

Q. In 2006 at the Dubai Desert Classic you were a 16-year-old amateur playing with Peter O'Malley and Robert Coles. I was also a 16 year old and I was also your scorer that day --

RORY McILROY: No way.

Q. You told me that day that your two goals were to be the World No. 1 golfer and to complete the Grand Slam. When you're an elite golfer as you are, one of the best of the generation and achieve your lifelong dream like that, what is the process of resetting your goals look like?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think everyone could see over the last couple of months how I struggled with that, I've done something that I've told everyone that I wanted to do, but then it's like I still feel like I have a lot more to give. Talk about the pressure being off, yes, but anyone that sits up here at this table, we're all competitors. We all want to do better. We all think we can just get a little bit extra out of what we have.



But yeah, it's taken me -- it hasn't taken me that long. Jesus, being 10 weeks or whatever it is, it hasn't been that long. But I think just -- I've alluded to this, but I probably just didn't give myself enough time to let it all sink in. But that's the nature of professional golf. They do a very good job of keeping you on the hamster wheel, and you feel like it's hard to get off at times.

But it's been an amazing year. The fact that I'm here at Portrush with the green jacket, having completed that lifelong dream, as you said, I want to do my best this week to enjoy everything that comes my way and enjoy the reaction of the fans and enjoy being in front of them and playing in front of them.

But at the same time, I want to win this golf tournament, and I feel like I'm very capable of doing that.

Q. You said the other day you hadn't played here since the last Open. Just wondering how you found it this morning. Also, do you get much opportunity to play your home course, where you grew up, these days?

RORY McILROY: So yeah, I think the two things I noticed about this golf course today when I played is I have a real appreciation for how well bunkered it is off the tee. It's like, okay, well, I can hit a 2-iron off the tee, but that brings this bunker into play. But then if I hit driver, it'll bring this bunker -- so you have to take on the shot. You have to say, okay, I'm going to commit to hitting this shot and I just know I'm going to have to avoid -- like some courses that we go to in the Open rota you can just take the bunkers out of play. You can lay up short of them or go beyond them. Here there's always one bunker or another bunker in play, so I think off the tee it provides a very, very good test.

Then I'm always surprised when I come here how much movement there is on the greens. The greens are quite slopey here for a links golf course. You compare that to even Renaissance last week where I had a lot of putts that were like right edge, left edge, not a lot of putts that were really outside the hole that much. You get here, you're having to play two feet of break, or it's a little bit different than maybe what you face on some other links golf courses.

So they're the two things that I sort of noticed today.

As for Holywood, I haven't played Holywood in I'm going to say 15 years maybe.

Q. I wanted to go back to the first tee in 2019. You'd been a pro for 12 years, done some great things in the game. What exactly were you feeling, and in what way were you not prepared for that feeling, and what have you learned about that going forward?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think just the -- I played a couple of Irish Opens, won here, won at Portstewart, won at County Down. I think I played maybe three times in Northern Ireland as a pro.

But then you get to an Open, it's a major championship, everything that comes along with it, and I just think that that feeling, the walk to the first tee and then that ovation, I was still a little surprised and a little taken aback, like geez, these people really want me to win.

I think that brought its own sort of pressure and more internally from myself and not really wanting to let people down. I guess it's just something I didn't mentally prepare for that day or that week. But I learned pretty quickly that one of my challenges, especially in a week like this, is controlling myself and controlling that battle.

I talked about it at the Masters on that last day. The battle on that last day wasn't with Augusta National. It wasn't with Bryson. It wasn't with Justin Rose. The battle that day was with myself.

I think whenever you get put in environments like that, that's basically what it is. It's you trying to overcome your mind and trying to give yourself that clarity to give yourself the best chance to put together a really good performance.

Q. This has been billed as your homecoming since completing the golf swing. What have you made of the reception so far? It's early in the week but you had big crowds out there. How does it make you feel when you hear people, particularly from here, saying you're the greatest sportsman from here?

RORY McILROY: We got to the hotel at 1:00 a.m. last night, so it's barely been 12 hours, 13 hours I guess now, but it's been great. By the time I got to the back nine today, there was a nice crowd out there. After the 18th and seeing all the kids and signing autographs, it's really, really nice, and I'm sure that'll just build as the week goes on.

Then for the other thing, I'll let other people make that determination. I try to go about my business. I try to give the best of myself every time I'm out there. It's amounted to some pretty nice things so far.

As I said at the start of this, I still feel like there's a lot left in there. The story certainly isn't over.

Q. Earlier in your career one of our questions would be that at the beginning of the year you said that you would write the goals that you set for yourself. Apart from winning the DP World India Championship, how have your goals changed after the Masters? How have you reset your goals?

RORY McILROY: I think it's pretty obvious, the two big things left this year are this tournament and the Ryder Cup. Those are the two massive things that are left on the golfing calendar.

I think what I've found as well is after two weeks after and getting that excitement and that enthusiasm back, I sort of approached last week and this week as a 14-day chunk of getting some really good work in, especially last week. But then doing your prep away from tournament golf but then, okay, this is your time to lock in for two weeks and do everything that you need to do, and then reset again and then try and build myself back up for the Ryder Cup.

I know I've got some events between here and the Ryder Cup, but obviously wanting to have my very best stuff when we go to New York.

I think after the Masters, obviously I had the PGA and the U.S. Open up there in terms of goals. I felt like the PGA was just maybe a bit -- it was a bit soon, and I didn't know how I felt, and then U.S. Open was okay. It was just -- I started slow and then sort of it took me a while to get into the tournament a bit but then finished with a decent last day.

As I said, it's been nice to get back over this side of the pond, change of scenery, reset a little bit.

I'm really excited for obviously this week, but I'm excited for the rest of the year with the Ryder Cup, India, Australia and everything else that's to follow.

Q. You mentioned all the familiar faces and you get asked questions about coming home and whatnot. All the people who kind of feel like they have a piece of you here, how did you handle that in '19, and what's your plan to handle it now? Do you isolate or do you let yourself be --

RORY McILROY: I think in '19 I probably tried to isolate, and I think it's better for everyone if I embrace it. I think it's better for me because I can -- it's nice to be able to accept adulation, even though I struggle with it at times. But it's also nice for the person that is seeing you for the first time in a few years. It just makes for a better interaction and not trying to hide away from it.

I think it's more of an embrace everything that's going to come my way this week and not try to shy away from it or hide away from it, and I think that'll make for a better experience for everyone involved.

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

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