

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us today to discuss the new five-part docuseries "unCommon: Building a Boston Sports Team," which has been following Rory and his Boston Common golf teammates behind the scenes for about the past year as they get ready for their first match in the new TGL league.

As you know, we've had cameras following you for, like, over a year. With the delay of the start of the league, we had a lot of time to follow you and your teammates, Adam Scott, Keegan Bradley and Hideki Matsuyama.

What's it been like having the cameras follow you as you prepare for the start of the TGL season? And what do you think about the unCommon series we're producing overall?

RORY MCILROY: It's been a really cool process to be a part of. I think from the sort of idea of TGL to then the creation of the six teams and obviously, more specifically, the Boston Common team with Fenway Sports Group, this idea came together about us trying to go behind the scenes on what it's like to try to put together a new team for a new sports league. And I thought it would be something that would be quite, as you said, a peek behind the curtain and something that people would enjoy to see and to see everything come to fruition.

And obviously there's been a few ups and downs with the TGL journey to get to this point. So we were supposed to launch January 2024. Obviously that's been delayed to January 2025.

But I'm on the record saying that it has been a blessing in disguise, not only for the league, but for the Boston Common team itself because everyone knows Tyrrell Hatton was on Boston Common and he decided to go over to LIV. So we had to try to recruit someone else in. And we've got an amazing replacement in Hideki Matsuyama. I think we were all really happy when Hideki joined us in the middle of this year.

It's been a really cool process to be a part of. These sort of behind-the-scenes documentaries are becoming more

common in golf and in sports, obviously with "Full Swing" on Netflix and having the cameras follow us sort of day-to-day and PGA TOUR events and majors.

So, having the cameras follow for this docuseries on common didn't really feel that much different but hopefully the viewers will enjoy it and enjoy a behind-the-scenes look of what's went into the creation of this team with myself alongside Fenway Sports Group as well.

Q. At the end of episode 2, you see your team start to test the different surfaces. I know you probably have had a chance in the last couple of weeks to test them as well. How realistic are the surfaces? And I saw something that the sand is the same as Augusta National. Having played there a lot and did the sand remind you of Augusta?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, so the playing surfaces are very realistic because they are real. We're playing off real Bermuda grass for the fairways, real Bermuda rough, if you do hit into the rough. And, yeah, I guess the sand, that is the same sand that Augusta uses in their bunkers.

And once you get within 40 yards of the green, then you transition to the green zone where all of that is artificial turf. But I still feel like the ball reacts very realistically on the green.

We toyed around with the idea of using real grass and real turf on the green, but with the rotating green and then obviously with the jacks underneath and the ability to change slopes, we were afraid if we used real turf that that turf could crack and break. So we made the decision to go with artificial for the green because we want to make it interesting. We want to make, every time that we go on the green and we play the 15 holes, the back green is slightly different each time, with it being able to rotate them with the slopes being able to change. That's the reason we went to the artificial turf on the green.

The playing surfaces are very realistic. Whenever you hit it out of the rough, you have to think about whether you're going to get a flyer; whether it's going to come out soft, a lot of things that you would have to think about on a real golf course.

Q. I want to hear more about how you're preparing for

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this event, maybe compared to the way in which you go about learning a new course for a new event, maybe that you haven't played before. How much have you spent in the arena? How many days have you visited so far? And how are you communicating, either with other team members or other TGF competitors, exchanging tips or ideas or advice about getting ready so that you guys do start well in January?

RORY MCILROY: I went to the test facility once before we could get into the arena. And then I've been in the arena twice. I went through basically like a couple of full practice matches already. And I'm going to try to get in there a couple more times, especially before Boston Commons' first match on the 27th of January.

There's a few of us that have quite the advantage that we live in the area so we're able to maybe spend a little more time in there than some of the other guys.

But I think it is important. I think, look, we're all competitors at the end of the day. We want to win. And even going back to the Showdown on Tuesday night, we're trying to provide entertainment for people. But whenever I got to the venue at Shadow Creek, you'd switch into a different mode. The competitor in you comes out. You don't want to lose. You really want to win. Scottie felt the same and so did the other guys as well.

So I think everyone's taking it real seriously. And I've talked to a lot of guys that are playing in TGL, and, firstly, I think they're blown away by the facility and the venue. It's nothing like we've ever seen before, especially in golf. So they were sort of -- they were blown away by the size and the scale of everything. But then I think also just the realistic nature of playing off the certain grasses and being able to shape shots and hit shots.

It's been quite the process, and I think the game play is going to be very realistic. And the only thing that I think the players need to get dialed in is just the flow of the show. Obviously the two hours -- the shot clock, I've been caught up by the shot clock a couple times already in practice. So that's something that we're going to have to be cognizant of. But from everyone that I've talked to, everyone seems really excited to get going in January.

Q. This concept of team golf is relatively new. And it starts with LIV in '22. My question is can you see TGL as a threat or rival or whatever to that, just based on getting fans to rally behind a team, since it's still kind of new? And do you think it would be easier to do with being affiliated with a big city, if that makes any sense?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, absolutely. Team golf has been around since 1927 in the professional game. You go back to the Ryder Cup.

Q. They didn't get paid back then.

RORY MCILROY: Some of us still don't get paid. But I think the one thing that -- what TGL has done a good job of is trying to locate the different teams in cities or geographies where you can really plug into the wider sports fans of that city.

So obviously with Boston Common and everyone knowing, I guess, the intensity in which Boston fans support their teams, trying to plug into that. Obviously Fenway owns the team. So plugging into the sort of Red Sox fans and obviously everyone else, whether it be the Celtics or the Bruins or the Patriots, I think that to me at least gives you a connection to something, which is great.

Now that we've got Keegan as well, which is amazing, Keegan's from that area. So he's so proud to be playing for a Boston sports team. So we have that in our favor as well.

But I think that's what TGL has done maybe a little bit better to connect with certain fan bases than, say, LIV, for example.

But I see this as all being complementary. Obviously there's only so many weeks in the year. There's only so much golf we can all play. But I say this as being complementary to everything else that is going on in the world of golf.

And I also see it as -- look, there's no -- I'm still a traditionalist in a lot of ways. There's no replicating championship golf. I think that's always going to be around. It always will be around.

But I think there are certain things that we can do to innovate and try to maybe try to appeal to a different and younger demographic, especially trying to condense it into a time frame that is a little bit more digestible and putting it on at a time where we're maybe going to get a few more eyeballs as well.

So we sort of tried to think of everything. And the proof will be in pudding January 7th when it kicks off, but we're excited about the possibilities of it.

Q. As a viewer, I was just watching the show, one of the most interesting parts is engaging with this question of, okay, what if this thing doesn't work? And



that seems like kind of a new challenge at this point in your career with this new project. I'm curious what it's been like to get buy-in from other players and from fans.

RORY MCILROY: So I think -- absolutely, it's a great question and I've wrestled with that question quite a lot over the last year. We've had the year delay, and it's also -- look, you've seen, a lot of the players now have gotten into the arena and they've seen it. It's been, like, a pretty easy sale for most of the players.

I think they see the benefits of the concept and where it could go from here. And I think once the fans see it, there's been a little bit of rollout here over the last few weeks on social media. They obviously had the TGL had their media day yesterday.

So you're still trying to convince fans and viewers that this is worth their while and worth watching. But really the only way to do that is to make a great first impression on January 7th. And hopefully people can see what we're trying to do. We're trying to innovate and trying to bring a certain part of golf into the 21st century in some way and try to have it, I guess, more -- I go back to appealing to a different demographic. But it's going to be very different.

Maybe it's something that the traditional golf fan finds interesting finds interesting and sort of complementary to the golf that they usually watch. And then maybe some people that have never watched the game before in any serious way think actually this is a pretty cool version of golf, and we can sort of get into it and we can root for a certain team that we haven't really been able to do before.

But, look, it's a question I've been asking myself for a long time. And the big thing is hopefully it resonates with people and people really get interested in it and it can take off from there.

But, as I said, the only way to do that is to make a really good first impression on January 7th. And that's what we're intending to do.

Q. On a basic level, are you excited for your first match? What are your emotions kind of going into your first time out there?

RORY MCILROY: I'm excited. Probably a little nervous as well because we've played a couple of practice matches. It's not quite as easy as I thought it was going to be. It's like there's a couple of holes that were halved with bogeys.

It's going to be interesting. We're playing in a completely different environment. It's pretty hard to read the green

with all the lighting and everything that's going on inside.

Again, going back to what I said at the start, I'm a competitor at the end of the day, and I want to make sure that when I step in that arena that I'm as prepared as possible. And I'm obviously playing for a team and I want that team to win. That's a big part of it, too.

Q. Being a Boston sports fan myself, I want to know how do you plan on resonating with us Boston sports fans when you're not really even competing in the city?

RORY MCILROY: That's a good question. I think by trying to -- we're mostly owned by Fenway Sports Group. So it's going to be up to us and them to try to insert us into that sort of Boston sports culture as much as possible.

So whether making appearances at Red Sox games or trying to go to different Boston sports or try to collaborate with some of the biggest and best athletes that Boston has, either past or present, I think that's -- trying to tell the people of Boston that we're proud to represent them and we're going to try to make them proud of this new team.

Q. Getting a chance to watch the five-part series, were there any moments that either caught you by surprise or maybe gave you a little more appreciation for this TGL process that you didn't really have in the moment living this out?

RORY MCILROY: I think just everything that goes into trying to create something from scratch. It's not very often in this day and age that that happens anymore. So I think just the amount of people, the amount of work, the amount of coordination needed to, not just pull off creating this new league, but also creating these six teams and trying to get owners for these six teams, trying to recruit players for these six teams.

It's been a huge undertaking by a lot of people, and even with some of the setbacks that we've had, it takes a huge effort from, as I said, from a lot of people. And I think just whenever Mike McCarley and Tiger and I sat down and talked about this idea back before COVID, I was, like, yeah, this seems like a really good idea and it would be fun to be part of.

Then once you actually try to get your arms around what you're going to do, it turned into a massive undertaking. And it's been really cool to see it go from just that idea when we talked in Tiger's office until it's real now and it's about to launch here in a couple weeks' time. And we're really excited for that.



Q. You said a little bit nervous, how often do you get nervous?

RORY MCILROY: I mean, I get nervous all the time, especially when it's something that you really care about. I was nervous on Tuesday night before starting. I get nervous quite a bit.

Q. You mentioned the first meeting and going through what you did about a year ago actually with the collapse and with all that in mind, when you walked into that SoFi Center for the first time and looked around and saw what was certainly nothing like what it would have looked like in the bubble, you can look back, was it a wow feeling?

RORY MCILROY: It was certainly a wow feeling, walking in there, and just even I think how big the arena is. And I think one of my first thoughts walking in was, like, wow, the delay was like a blessing in disguise because it wouldn't have looked the way it had if it hadn't been for that. So I think it was a bit of a silver lining that that happened. It gave everyone more time to dial things in, make the arena a little bit better. So I think everything that went into the SoFi Center has been overwhelmed by just how cool the place is.

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