



Rory McIlroy

Press Conference

Tuesday, April 7, 2026

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to welcome back our 2025 Masters champion Rory McIlroy to the interview room.

Rory, the last time you were here, you were wearing a green jacket for the first time, and now you're back as Masters champion. Tell us how it feels.

RORY McILROY: Look, it feels absolutely incredible. Can't believe it was 12 months ago that I was sitting here and sort of trying to take it all in. Yeah, to be able to come back and do this press conference in a green jacket, that feels pretty good.

Look, it's been an amazing 12 months, bringing this thing all around the world, the excitement on people's faces when they see it, the excitement that I still get putting it on.

It's also -- the 12 months has been amazing, but just this week, got here on Saturday, spent a little bit of time at the ANWA, at the Drive, Chip and Putt on Sunday. Got to play with my dad, which was special for both of us, on Sunday afternoon.

Look, I keep saying this, it's a dream come true. It's incredible. I really tried to embrace and enjoy every part of it. I've got one more thing to try to embrace and enjoy tonight at the Champions Dinner, then I'll be able to turn my full attention to getting ready for the golf tournament.

Yeah, it's been amazing.

Q. I'm just curious, as you go into this week, what you think the most difficult element of defending will be for you. Obviously there's a lot of distractions and stuff, but you just spoke about the good distractions.

RORY McILROY: Probably the 90 other players that are in the field. It's arguably maybe not the largest field in golf, but it's the strongest.

There's so many great players and so many players with so much experience on this golf course, it's not quite like some of the other major championships. It seems like you get the -- a lot of the same guys contending year in and year out.

That's the challenge. I feel comfortable on the golf course, feel comfortable with my game. It's been a good three weeks at home getting ready physically and mentally and just trying to prepare for everything that this week is going to sort of throw at me. I know that I can do it now, so that should make it a little easier for me to go out and play the golf I want to play.

Q. Just wondering if you can put into words how different you feel arriving here with that huge weight lifted from your shoulders? Perhaps you won't know how that feels until 10:30 on Thursday morning.

RORY McILROY: I think the best way that I can describe it is -- well, firstly, I would have never gotten up here this early. I would have never arrived on a Saturday. I usually arrive earliest Sunday night but probably Monday, Monday evening.

I think for the past 17 years I just could not wait for the tournament to start, and this year I wouldn't care if the tournament never started (laughter). That's sort of the difference.

Yeah, it's completely different. I feel so much more relaxed. I know that I'm going to be coming back here for a lot of years, going to enjoy the perks that the champions get here. It doesn't make me any less motivated to go out there and play well and try to win the tournament, but yeah, just more relaxed about it all.

Q. A couple times when you've talked about Harry, the few times it's been really emotional. I wonder, if you could kind of put into words, what Harry's friendship has meant to you over the years and why it was so rewarding for you guys to do this together.

RORY McILROY: I think, as an only child, he was like the big brother I never had, and I think that's what makes it so special. Harry's got a little brother and a big sister, so he had that, but I always felt like Harry was my big brother. I think that's why, when I talk about it or -- it's why it makes me emotional.

Q. Mr. Carr just mentioned a year ago you're wearing the green coat for the first time. Wonder if we could get a brief history of the green coat just for starters. The one you're wearing now, is that the one you were wearing Sunday night a year ago?

RORY McILROY: It is, same one. Haven't lost it.

Q. Have you brought it to a dry cleaner or a tailor?

RORY McILROY: I'm afraid to. I've tried to be very careful, but yeah.

Q. As somebody who is such a big fan of history and traditions like you are, I'm curious how you felt every Tuesday each year as so many of your peers went off to the dinner and you didn't get to be part of it?

RORY McILROY: Not great. I wish I was a part of it. I tell this pretty funny story about last year myself and Justin Rose actually went for dinner at the club last year on the Tuesday night with a few of the Augusta National members, and the way -- it was weird, I was pulling up Magnolia Lane, and you get to the circle, and I'm like, well, do I go and park way over at the parking lot? Because I'm not going to park in the champions parking lot.

Then at that specific moment, the champions were having their cocktails out on the balcony. I'm like I don't want to valet, get out, they're going to see me and it's going to be weird. So I had this really awkward moment with it all last year. Yeah, thankfully that was the last time that I needed to do that.

Yeah, I think it's one of the best traditions in sport. And I'm very grateful to be a part of it. I'm obviously going to get my first experience of it tonight and looking forward to many, many more years.

Q. Rory, you've been quite innovative in terms of how you've handled being the Masters champion with the YouTubes, particularly with the documentary. Your parents turned out as pretty much stars of the show.

RORY McILROY: They were stars of the show, yeah.

Q. Can you just tell us the life values and belief that they have instilled and how it has manifested?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think you all know, especially the Irish guys, my mom and dad have always been very reluctant to say anything or go on camera, but I thought that the documentary wouldn't be the same if -- you know, because we did go back a little bit into the childhood and into the upbringing, it wouldn't have felt complete if we didn't hear from them.

Again, knowing how they feel about it all, I would have been absolutely fine if they didn't want to do it, but they were willing to participate. I thought they did an amazing job.

I think in terms of what they instilled in me, I think work ethic is something that -- my mom worked night shifts. My dad worked multiple jobs. I think most people in this room know that. That was normal for me. That was normal as an upbringing. I never spent a lot of time with my parents together. It was either with my dad or with my mom because always the other one was working.

Because they knew their son had a dream to play golf, and golf is a less expensive sport to play in Ireland, but it's still a pretty expensive game to have to drive your son to different golf clubs and play in tournaments and golf equipment and everything else. So they sacrificed a lot.

I think that that work ethic, that's the thing I feel like they instilled in me the most and the belief. I talk about my dad being an eternal optimist and being able to see a silver lining in the worst of days, and I feel like that's what he's given me as well.

Obviously incredibly blessed to have amazing parents. Lucky that they're here this week to see everything unfold like this, and hopefully they have a lot of Masters left in them. We're excited for that as well.

Q. You're playing with Mason Howell this week, and he shared a story after the walk-up about following you when he was nine years old at a TOUR Championship, where you threw him a golf ball that he still keeps in his room. I thought that was interesting in watching the Amazon doc, you talking about watching Tiger win in '97 and saying "I want to do that." I wonder how often you reflect on the sort of full-circle nature of making your first start here against guys you looked up to and now and your 18th start against guys who look up to you?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think that's the incredible thing about our game is, because our careers are long, so many generations overlap. I remember playing the first two rounds of the 2010 U.S. Open with Tom Watson. That's incredible to think about now.

Yeah, I'm going to play with Mason the first two days, and I'm not sure when Tom was born, but Mason was born, what, 2005 -- no. 2008?

Q. He was nine in 2016. That's correct.

RORY McILROY: I just think about the time span. That's why our game is so incredible. I've been lucky that the people that I looked up to took me under their wing when I was starting off. And I was able to play a few holes with Tom McKibbin earlier today, and it's great to see him make his first start as well.

That's the incredible thing about golf that not a lot of other sports have.

Q. You were saying a week or so ago that the stumbles you suffered last year were from being too defensive and you were going to go and look for more places to attack. Did you do that, and have you found any?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think -- look, you're always going to have to pick and choose your spots around here, where to be aggressive and where not to, but I definitely think there's places where I could be more aggressive off the tee.

Like I've talked about my -- I guess how uncomfortable I felt on some tee shots last year, so like the 7th through the 14th and the 17th. For me, if I'm going to hit 5-wood or 3-wood into the trees anyway, I may as well hit driver and get it close to the green.

Yeah, there's a few tee shots out here where I'll just try to be a bit more aggressive, and then if you do hit a good tee shot, you turn a potentially tough hole into a birdie hole.

Q. Over the last year, I'm curious what has brought you the most joy away from the game?

RORY McILROY: I'd say watching my daughter grow up. I think Poppy, like she's a mini Erica. It's like living with two of them, which is great a lot of the time. She is the most unbelievably polite and respectful and well-behaved little girl, and I really love that she started to get into the game a lot more, and it all stemmed from the putt last year at the Par 3.

So she made sure that I brought her putter up this year so she could hit the putt with her putter and not mine. Yeah, that's been amazing to -- and as well, just to see her grow up to have her travel the world to see different places, to give her a life that I could only dream about when I was that age, that's been the coolest thing.

Q. Now that you're in possession of all four, I'm curious if you think one of the four majors lends itself in your prime window, and maybe beyond, to the most opportunity to win or to be the most productive? Is there one that stands out?

RORY McILROY: I think this one. I think when you've had the experiences that I've had around here, good and bad, I think that can stand to you. You come back -- the other major venues, we don't go back to the same place every year. So I think that is something I feel like I'm still young, but I'm very experienced. I've been doing this for a long time. This is my 18th start.

So I think this is -- I do have -- I do feel like I've got another hopefully 10 good shots at this. Not that I don't at the other majors, but I just think that everything here is a little more predictable. You know the golf course pretty much. There's subtle changes year after year, but the hole locations are always in similar spots.

I just think the more experience you have around this golf course, the better it is. That's why I think here.

Q. Rory, when we spoke a few weeks ago, you went into great detail about the dinner, and it was clear that you put a huge amount of thought into it. What were you trying to achieve with that, and how long roughly do you think you spent thinking and preparing for the dinner?

RORY McILROY: I would say I'm quite a procrastinator, so I probably put it off for as long as possible until I actually really had to think about it, which was probably at the back end of last year, starting to think about how to put it together.

But it was a fun process to go through. I was trying to achieve something that I would enjoy but also something -- and it ties back to experiences that I've had, but also wanted it to be something that all the other people in that room would enjoy as well.

People keep asking me why didn't you go more Irish? And I said, because I want to enjoy the dinner as well.

(Laughter.)

So I tried to do a few things that I thought everyone would eat. The club encouraged me to do one vegetarian dish in the appetizers, so that's where the peach and ricotta flatbread came from. I think that one was probably for Gary Player.

Yeah, it's been fun to work through. The club have been amazing to work with. As I said, the fun part was getting access to that wonderful wine cellar that they have. I'm excited to share those wines with everyone tonight as well.

Q. We always talk about what changes you see on the golf course. Have you seen anything off the golf course, clubhouse, other buildings, that you haven't seen before that gave you just a great appreciation of the heritage and history? Second to that, given your vast appreciation of tradition, how many flowers can you name on each hole?

RORY McILROY: Wow. Yeah, I don't know if you've noticed, there's a big new player services building. Yeah, I would say that I probably haven't spent a ton of time in the clubhouse since I've been playing here. I just always felt -- obviously the champions locker room is for the champions. I've always felt like I knew the week of the tournament that the clubhouse is for participants and their families, but I still felt like I had to earn the right to be there a little more often.

But no, I don't think there's anything that -- I've learned why the Trophy Room is called the Trophy Room even though there's not a trophy in it. Why the Founders Room is the Founders Room. So there's nice little bits of history that I've, I guess, figured out along the way over the course of the past 12 months.

Then flowers. Like what the holes are called? Okay. I couldn't get all 18.

Q. If you can do three, I'll be impressed with you.

RORY McILROY: Azalea, has anyone heard of that one?

Q. Dustin got that one right too.

RORY McILROY: White Dogwood, Pink Dogwood.

Q. Which holes?

RORY McILROY: Pink Dogwood, the 2nd. White Dogwood, 10?

Q. Off by one. Thank you.

RORY McILROY: Holly is the 18th. Firethorn is the 15th. 12 is Golden Bell. I can keep going here.

Q. We can stop. We have other questions. Have you ever seen a golden bell?

RORY McILROY: I probably have, I think. I've played the 12th enough, I'm sure I've seen one somewhere.

Q. The last time you were in this room, you asked what are we going to talk about next year? Now it's 12 months on, what do you think the story is now?

RORY McILROY: Flowers.

(Laughter.)

I think the story as it relates to me is what do I do from now onwards? What motivates me? What gets me going? What do I still want to achieve in the game? I think that's the story.

And there's still a lot that I want to do. You think every time you achieve something or have success that you'll be happy, but then the goalposts move, and they just keep nudging a little bit further and further out of reach.

I think what I've realized is, if you can just really find enjoyment in the journey, that's the big thing because honestly I felt like the career grand slam was my destination, and I got there, and then I realized it wasn't the destination.

Q. Kind of similar to that question, but in the documentary there was a sequence where we basically ask you a version of the same exact question every year you came back here. I'm curious now what has the shift been like of kind of what are people asking you now? What's the difference in what people want to know or hear from you actually?

RORY McILROY: I think the nice thing now is instead of it being come on, Rory, you know you can do this, it's back to back. There's a real positive connotation to it instead of, geez, Rory, we've been waiting a while. When are you going to get this done? It's just very different, and maybe that's just my perception of it.

But it is so nice to walk around property or be out on the golf course and, yeah, just not have that hanging over me, like it feels that it's a big weight off my shoulders.

Q. A lot of players have talked about, ones that have won on TOUR for the first time, just you coming up and congratulating them. I've heard people say he didn't have to do that, but he did. You referenced Carla Bernat Escuder winning the

Women's Amateur last year and the putt that she had. Why is it important for you to go up to these players when they achieve their first milestones?

RORY McILROY: I know how much it means to me, so I can imagine what it means to them. I know how I felt when I won my first TOUR event or my first major, and I'd get a note from Jack or Arnold or one of these guys -- and I'm not saying I'm in their league, but I just always want to make a point of congratulating people on achieving things they really want to achieve.

I think it's important. I think it makes you a decent human being, and I genuinely am happy for other people's success. I think that's a really good way to be in life.

Going back to my parents and the values they instilled in me, I think that's one where they always talked about being happy for other people's success.

Q. Rory, I'm curious from a mindset standpoint, can you identify something that you feel like you didn't do particularly well early in your career that you felt like you did well last year?

RORY McILROY: Specifically to this tournament?

Q. Yes.

RORY McILROY: I never -- again, I think panic is the wrong word, but I didn't overreact on Thursday when I made those two double bogeys. I didn't overreact when I was only 1-under through nine on Friday. I think not overreacting and not pressing too hard, I stayed patient or as patient as I could be, and I feel like that patience was rewarded.

I played a 14-hole stretch at 10-under par after that, and that was literally the stretch of golf that won me the golf tournament. So I think in years past I would have went for a pin I shouldn't have went at, missed in the wrong spot, made another bogey, and then all of a sudden the round starts to get away from you, especially around here.

I think last year I didn't let that happen to me, and that was a big difference.

Q. We are told that the reigning champion is supposed to offer some thoughts at the dinner. I wonder how much thought you've given to what you're going to say and how you've prepared for that, and are you nervous at all about talking in front of that crowd?

RORY McILROY: I've thought about it a lot. Honestly, I've probably thought about that more than the food. So many legends of the game there. Obviously there's two that won't be with us this year, which is a shame, but hopefully they will be with us in the future, and I'm sure they will be with us in the future.

But talking in front of that group, I want to say the right things and make sure I get my feelings across of how grateful I am to be a part of that group.

I'll follow Ben Crenshaw's lead. I know he'll direct the run of show a little bit. But yeah, I have a few remarks that I want to make. I'm not going to say it all here, I'll wait for tonight, but I have thought about it a lot.

Q. Rory, you spoke earlier about not overreacting on everything that went on last year. Bob Rotella has been a big part of your journey the last few years. How have the conversations changed now after what happened last year? Is there a different message?

RORY McILROY: No, not really. I think that's the thing about psychology is it's maybe the same messages packaged a little differently, depending on where your mind is at the time.

But no, it's -- especially if you're trying to get the best out of yourself on the golf course, it's the same thing. I would say it should make my job a little easier out there to stay patient or to not react to a bad stretch of golf because of what happened last year, but we're all competitive and we're all golfers and I'm sure I'll get frustrated at some point.

Bob has been a massive help, but I wouldn't say the message really changes that much.

Q. Many years ago you were talking in Dubai, and you said that every time you play a round with Gerry, that you learn something. Mostly it's life lessons. When you did go out with him on Sunday and played this golf course again, did you learn something again which might help you this week?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. I learned he needs to play a spinnier ball.

(Laughter.)

No, every time I get to play golf with my dad, it's a blessing. We were able to win the Seminole Pro-Member this year, which is something we've wanted to do for a long time. So it was nice to get over. Hopefully that's the most pressure I feel this year. He was riding me pretty hard the last few holes.

Look, it was just an amazing experience to be out there the Sunday before the Masters together and enjoy it all and soak it all in. I guess just reminisce on the journey that we've been on. It's a long way from Holywood, Northern Ireland, so we're just trying to soak it all in.