



# Rory McIlroy

## Press Conference

### Friday, April 10, 2026

THE MODERATOR: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to welcome our defending champion, Rory McIlroy, back to the Media Center.

Rory, you've had a fabulous round today, a 65 to follow your 67 yesterday, and 9 birdies, 24 putts. It was sublime. Want to tell us how you feel about it?

RORY McILROY: Look, I've always felt like this golf course can let you get on runs if you allow it. I talked last year about how I really won the tournament in a 14-hole stretch, the second nine on Friday and the first five holes on Saturday.

Yeah, I knew I had some chances coming in when I was standing on the 12th tee, but I didn't think I'd birdie 6 of the last 7. It just shows what you can do around here. Even if you might hit it in the trees on 13, on 15, and on 17 -- 17 was obviously a bonus with the chip-in. But my wedge play today was really good. My short game the first two days has been amazing.

I've spent a lot of time up here over the past three weeks. Even though I haven't played tournament golf, I feel like being up here a lot and playing, I've prepared as well for this Masters as any other that I've played.

I think all that work around the greens over the last three weeks has certainly paid off over the last two days.

**Q. Rory, even deep down, is there a part of you that feels intimidating?**

RORY McILROY: To others?

**Q. Yes.**

RORY McILROY: No. No. That's not me. That's not what I want to do. Honestly, I don't care -- I don't -- golf is the most amazing game because it's you and your golf ball and the golf course and that's it. You shouldn't be affected by anyone else.

**Q. Could you just talk us through the chip on 17? You seemed to make your mind up pretty soon after you saw the ball, putt was on, and what you were going to do?**

RORY McILROY: It was tricky. It was up and over. I was landing the ball on a little bit of a slope into the green. So I knew that, as long as I connected or struck it well enough, that the ball was going to check.

I had a good landing spot. I was like, okay. So when I hit it, I hit my landing spot perfectly. It came out with the right trajectory and the spin that I thought it was going to have. I couldn't see the bottom of the flag, so all I saw were the patrons standing up on the grandstand like it had a chance, and it went in.

Again, that was -- I wanted to get it at least pin -- you know, level with the bunker, if not beyond the bunker, because I knew that was going to be a better angle for the chip shot. Harry and I talked about that.

Yeah, that's just the benefit of having a lot of experience around here is knowing, even if you're right at that green, whether you're front right, pin high right, back right, what the different shots are going to be like.

Laid it up in a good spot and hit a good chip. Bonus that it went in, but yeah.

**Q. You played these first two days with Mason Howell, and you've spent years talking about how you wanted to play like a kid again. What do you think he saw and learned from you these two days?**

RORY McILROY: Hopefully he saw that you don't have to be perfect to shoot good scores. I think when I was 18 and I started to play TOUR events, I thought that pros just didn't make mistakes, and he saw plenty of mistakes out of me over the first two days.

Again, I fell back on my short game and my wedge play. So hopefully he saw someone that wasn't perfect but was very efficient with how he scored, and I think that's -- to be successful at the professional level, that's a big part of it.

**Q. Despite all these years of it being about you getting over that hump last year, you had been acquiring experience here for 17 years. I'm curious when do you feel like there was a moment that you kind of realize like you do know how to play this course really well?**

RORY McILROY: I think I've known that for a while. Even going back to my first year here in 2009, I shot 30 on the back nine on Sunday. So I've always had the ability to go on these runs.

But I think it was getting to the point where I would allow myself to play the course the way that I knew that I could. So it was getting past myself. It was staying aggressive. Like my little mantra to myself today was keep swinging, keep swinging hard at it even if you're not hitting fairways, just keep swinging.

Over the years this golf course is sometimes -- you know, my mindset hasn't been keep swinging. It's been guided, tentative. I think the experience I've accrued over the years and obviously with what happened last year, it makes it a bit easier out there to keep swinging.

**Q. You've played so many times on this course and you have so many specific successes on specific holes. Do you ever allow yourself to think when you're on a hole, okay, I've done pretty well on 15 before, I'll be okay now?**

RORY McILROY: No, you just have to play with what's in front of you. No. I've done that before where I've went into -- like I went into the 2015 Masters wanting to play the par-5s better because I didn't play the par-5s well in 2014. But then I didn't play the 4th hole and the 11th hole well.

So the next year I went and tried to play the 4th and the 11th hole well, but then I didn't play certain -- I mean, you can pinpoint holes all you want, but at the end of the day, you just have to play the hole that's in front of you and stand up and execute and make good swings.

**Q. It felt like a key moment in the round was after the bogey on 10, the way you managed to respond, and then the way you hit that spot on 12. How did you manage to recompose yourself in those situations? Is it the experience you've got?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I guess I got through 11 with a par, which is all you really want to do. It's a tough hole. I only had a 9-iron in, but I hit a good tee shot there.

Honestly, today you're not going to get the 12th hole to play any easier than it was today. The three guys in our group all made 2s there. There wasn't really any wind. So there wasn't much decision around what club or what type of shot. It was basically a stock pitching wedge for all three of us.

**Q. What for you would be more fun, eking out a victory by the skin of your teeth or potentially running away with it and**

## **lapping the field?**

RORY McILROY: What do you think?

(Laughter.)

Look, I've built up a nice cushion at this point. I guess my mindset is just trying to keep playing well and keeping my foot on the gas.

**Q. 7-under par on the par-5s of the first two days. If you told me in 2009 that you'd do that without hitting a fairway on any of the par-5s and only hitting one of them in two, what does that say about the evolution of your game over the past 18 years?**

RORY McILROY: Becoming a wily old veteran. Yeah, again, I remember, even go back to the final round in 2011, hitting it in that bunker off the tee at the 2nd hole and, like, not panicking, but thinking, oh, this isn't good. I can't go for this in two. How am I -- and I walk up there today, and it's like, no, I lay it up to a good number, and I'll have a good chance to make a birdie.

There's so many different ways to skin a cat. I've shot 12-under par for the first two rounds here. I've played well, I've hit good shots, but it hasn't all been amazing. I've relied on my short game when I've needed it, and I've certainly hit enough good wedges into those par-5s to build the score that I have.

**Q. With a lead like this and the late tee time tomorrow, are you going to allow yourself to think about what you want to do tomorrow, or are you going to try and keep your mind off of it and how you spend that time?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I'll probably try to keep my mind off of it. That distraction is usually a good thing for me, especially with a late tee time and the lead.

Yeah, there's actually two really good semifinals at Monte Carlo in the tennis. So I'll watch that. I think it's Sinner and Zverev and Vacherot and Alcaraz. So I'll watch those. We've been watching the tennis early in the mornings. So I'll do that.

And then hopefully spend some time with Poppy. I think we're about halfway through "Zootopia 2." So maybe do a little bit of that.

For me, I get to the golf course 2 1/2 to 3 hours before, and then I'll start to think about things. Before that time, I really try to stay off my phone and distract myself and try not to think about it too much.

**Q. Is the mindset with a six-shot lead here any different than it would be if you had it anywhere else? If it is, does last year play a part in that?**

RORY McILROY: I don't think so. I just want to go out and play two good rounds again. Obviously this golf course has certain characteristics that guys can get on runs, guys can make eagles, you hear roars all over the golf course.

I think the next two days for me is really about focusing on myself. It's hard to avoid those big leaderboards out there, but like I know that I've got a lead. So I don't need to keep checking it all the time. So for me, just really focusing on myself and staying in my own little world out there is the best thing.

**Q. Obviously no lack of attention on you coming into this event, but with the documentary and the dinner and everything, do you feel like people were sleeping on your golf game at all?**

RORY McILROY: I don't know. I don't follow the coverage as closely as I maybe used to. Not really. I guess it's understandable. I haven't played in three weeks. The last time everyone saw me, I was struggling with a bit of a back injury. It's understandable if I wasn't in the forefront of everyone's minds coming in here from a playing perspective.

**Q. Rory, what would Congressional Rory advise this Rory about protecting the lead on the weekend?**

RORY McILROY: Don't protect it. Go out and play freely, keep swinging. That was a big part of the lesson from the 2011 Masters to the 2011 U.S. Open was don't get protective. Go out there and keep playing, keep trying to make birdies, stay as trusting and as committed as possible.

**Q. On Wednesday you said that a double-digit score would be an amazing score. You didn't specify that would be Friday. I'm just wondering how much things have exceeded your expectations so far?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, when I got to 8-under par for the tournament early today after the 4th hole, I thought, if I could finish 10-under, that would be amazing -- that would be a great two days. So to drop to 6-under and finish at 12, that's -- I must say, though, I felt -- when you're in the fairway and you strike the ball properly, you can still get the ball to stop. The greens were firm but not ridiculous. So there was still chances.

I would envision that the greens are continue to just get a little bit firmer as the week goes on. I was having lunch and watching a little bit of the coverage out there, and I was quite surprised at some of the early groups, how easily they were stopping the ball on some of the greens. So I felt like that still allowed you to be quite aggressive when you did get the ball in play and were attacking from the fairway.

**Q. Your putting has been fantastic this week. What have you felt on these greens that has kind of allowed you to match line and speed in a way? We haven't seen everybody else be able to do it. It's been a lot of guys I think today struggled, feeling it was going to be faster. Yesterday it seemed like guys were kind of running things by. What's worked for you on the greens?**

RORY McILROY: I think just spending time here. I played -- between THE PLAYERS and this tournament, like between THE PLAYERS and starting on Thursday, I've been on this golf course, geez, like Monday, Tuesday last week, then Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. I was up here for a day the week before as well.

I've been on this golf course so much the last three weeks, and that's been a combination of practice and chipping and putting around greens, and then just playing one ball and shooting scores and ending up in weird places that you maybe never find yourself and just trying to figure it out.

I think just spending so much time up here has been a big part of it.

**Q. There's obviously a real electricity in watching you when you're in this mood. I just wonder what do these sequences feel like for you, reeling off six birdies in seven holes like that? We've obviously seen you in majors by eight before. But are you just kind of zoning at that point? Are you that conscious of the outside world at all?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've certainly had times where I felt like in the zone or in that flow state or whatever you want to call it. Maybe this afternoon was one of those times. I would say maybe not in the zone, but I definitely found a sense of flow those last few holes.

The only way I can describe it is everything that you see or any situation that you come across, you can find a positive in it. And then you see birdies and you can see ways to make birdies. So hit it in the trees at 13, fine, I can make a birdie doing it this way. Hit it in the trees at 15, same thing.

Then you get your spots where you can attack, like the 16th, and feed it in there. Yeah, I think that's the best way I can describe it. You reel off some birdies, and even when you find yourself out of position, you can still somehow see yourself make a birdie some way.

**Q. How important were those couple of weeks off from an energy perspective knowing that you're coming here last Saturday, and by Sunday you had been here for nine days now and people are so demanding of your time and there's so much that goes on being a defending champion? Just wondering if energy was a factor in your decision to not play.**

RORY McILROY: No, not really. I honestly just don't like the three tournaments leading up to this event. I'd rather come up here. I did a couple of days where I dropped Poppy to school, flew up here, played, landed back home and had

dinner with her -- or had dinner with Erica probably. Like I did a couple of day trips like that where I felt it was a better use of my time than going to Houston or San Antonio.

It wasn't really about conserving energy, but just I felt the more time I could spend up here, the better.

**Q. Before you had gone on that six birdies in seven holes, Fred Couples for the second day running said, "I don't see Rory losing this tournament ever." That was his comment. Then in the morning you spoke about Jack talking about giving you the advice, don't make double bogeys. When legends talk like that about you and have that kind of belief in you and they give that kind of advice to you even after so many years, which makes you feel happier? What do you look forward to more?**

RORY McILROY: I think the advice, like the advice from Jack or -- like even last year, I talked about Jack and Gary and Tom were up here after their ceremonial tee shots, and they all picked me to win. I mean, that's nice, but that is not helpful. Freddie saying that is not helpful. But Jack telling me not to make double bogeys, that's helpful.

It's really nice either way. It's nice that Jack feels a close relationship with me that he wants to help in some way, and it's nice that Freddie believes in me so much.

I guess it's still all noise. They're lovely words, and it's nice to hear these things, but it means nothing when you step on the 1st tee because you just have to stand up and hit the shots and make the putts.