

Genesis Scottish Open

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North Berwick, Scotland

The Renaissance Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



BRIONY CARLYON: Delighted to welcome back our reigning Masters Champion, Rory McIlroy, to the Genesis Scottish Open.

Rory, back on U.K. soil for the first time here in Scotland. Obviously won this event as well in the past but how nice is it to be back on this side of the pond

RORY McILROY: Yeah, really nice. We've been basing ourselves here from the middle of May. Straight after the PGA Championship, we came here, got ourselves settled at Wentworth.

So I've probably made a couple of trips back and forth. It's been lovely. Nice to play a little bit of links golf the last couple weeks and enjoy the run up to obviously this event and The Open.

But yeah, always good to be back. It's not home but feels like home in a way and excited to get a little bit of links golf under my belt these next few days.

Q. The course this week, rough is thicker and the routing change, is that a significant thing?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I don't think the routing of the golf course, I mean, it's still the same 18 holes. Might create some more excitement on Sunday depending what happens down the stretch.

But it's certainly a little bit of a different setup than it usually is. This course has definitely rewarded longer hitters and hitting driver a lot and getting it down there. The rough is noticeably more penal this year. Just having to be more thoughtful about tee shots and some of your play off the tee. But everything else is pretty much the same.

Definitely this course has grown on me as the years have went by. When I first came here, I think just because you come to Scotland and you play so many great golf courses, there are so many great golf courses in this area, I think we sometimes jump to maybe not liking a course because of how new it is or maybe some greens are a bit too sloped or

whatever.

But I must say, over the years, it has grown on me a lot, and I think it's sort of become a really good venue for this tournament.

Q. Talk about Wimbledon last week and how enjoyable it was going there with the green jacket.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it was nice. It was nice to be with everyone, to be with Luke and some of the guys from The Ryder Cup. Yeah, the Royal Box is always a lovely day out.

Yeah, that was the first time I had the green jacket on since Augusta, so you know, if you can't wear it there, where can you wear it?

Q. How do you see the future of this event, given its unique place in the calendar but with what is coming with the Championship and Challenger Series on the PGA TOUR? And as a follow-up to that, where would the DP World Tour sit into the equation, as well?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I think since this event has been co-sanctioned, it really has went from strength-to-strength. You look at the quality of the field this week, you get a great sponsor like Genesis on board. They have kept making improvements to the golf course and the facilities each and every year.

So I think for like these strong National Opens, this, to me, is the blueprint of what it can be and what can happen. Yeah, I think this is a perfect -- it's a perfect lead-in to The Open Championship. You know, I've thought could the Canadian Open become co-sanctioned, as well, leading into the U.S. Open as well. That could be interesting, as well, trying to build out this series of National Opens that have a bit more meaning behind them.

Yeah, I don't know how that fits into the Track 1 and Track 2 and all that stuff. But I see this event and I see how well it's done over these past few years, and I definitely I feel like it's the blueprint for a lot of the other National Opens.



Q. If you look at the blueprint that's come out, in a sense, it's talking about closed tournaments, i.e., tournaments for championship players.

RORY McILROY: We've got to be careful with that because then these National Opens lose the fabric of what they are, right. So that's -- you can't call yourself a National Open anymore if it's a closed off tournament and there's a certain number much guys.

I think these events need to be treated differently than, you know, the Travelers Championship or RBC Heritage or whatever else that are going to be in the Champions Series. These tournaments need to have -- there's a little bit more nuance with these tournaments for sure.

Q. You've joked about becoming a bit of a part-timer these days. When you turn up to a tournament, just recently, do you find that you have to work a bit harder to get up to speed or to shake off some rust? Because we've also seen a couple of extra sessions from you on the range, haven't we?

RORY McILROY: Have you?

Q. Augusta. One of the other majors didn't you have a storming session?

RORY McILROY: What do you think I do in my off-weeks.

Q. Not work that hard. Seems to come easy to you.

RORY McILROY: No, I work hard.

Q. So nothing more these days? Feeling rusty?

RORY McILROY: No.

Q. The Tour schedule has a bit of a repetitive feel in terms of same weeks, same courses annually. Do you ever find yourself returning to a place like this and thinking about where you were last year, just 12 months ago, how similar things can be or maybe how different?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think it could be 12 months or it could be more than that. It could be three years ago. It could be -- yeah, you certainly do -- you remember if you've played an event for 15 years and you're like, oh, I remember 15 years ago when I came here for the first time and how different it is or how the fields have changed.

Yeah, I think, of course, you start to reminisce a little bit when you start to come back to places a lot for sure.

Q. Is there something that this place makes you reminisce on in particular this week?

RORY McILROY: This week? Again, like I said at the start, like I've had to, when I first came here, I wasn't enamoured with the course or the place. But as time has went on and I've played it more, I've started to like it more and appreciate the golf course a little bit more. Yeah, it's definitely become a great venue for this tournament.

But yeah, and I've got some good memories, and we've stayed in the same house here for the last few years and we're next door to the Fleetwoods, and I was playing football with Frankie last night. Yeah, all that stuff is cool.

Q. You mentioned earlier, you got to play some links golf here lately. Any place of note besides Birkdale, and when you're doing that, is it with these tournaments in mind? Is it more for fun? Are you just sort of enjoying the experience or a little bit of both?

RORY McILROY: Birkdale was definitely just a scouting trip for The Open for sure. I would have liked to have not have it known that I was there but Faldo couldn't put his phone away, so -- (laughing.)

I love Nick. In fairness, he's great. I had a good time with him. He walked a few holes with me.

Then I played St Enodoc, whenever that was, last Friday. And yeah, we spent four days down in Cornwall with the Donalds and the Lawries. I had never, like I had never heard of it before, and it's I guess a top hundred course in the world. It's really cool. But that was more just for enjoyment. You're going out to play, but yeah, it's nice, you start hitting the ball off links turf again and start to play in a little bit more wind. Your links instincts come back, even if it is for fun. The stuff that you've grown up with starts to come back to you.

Q. So was it just the one day at Birkdale?

RORY McILROY: Just the one day at Birkdale, yeah.

Q. Did you feel like you got a lot out of that visit?

RORY McILROY: I did. Harry came over with me. Harry actually played Birkdale the week before as well.

I think refamiliarising myself with some of the holes but obviously Birkdale is a little bit different from what it was back in 2017, too. Just getting an early look at new holes. It just means it takes pressure off the start of the week and not feel like you have to play 18 holes any day, and if you want to just play nine, you I feel like you can and not feel

like you're under prepared.

Q. Want to ask you about Scott, not the one you might be thinking about. Stephen Gallacher yesterday sat in your chair and announced a collaboration for his own foundation and First Tee to try to help youngsters get into golf and with their life skills, as well. How important is that, and did you benefit from anything like that as a kid coming through? Because youngsters are going to be coming here this week and we want these youngsters to pick up a golf club in the future?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, absolutely. I benefited from a lot of those initiatives growing up. Talking of Nick Faldo, I was part of the Faldo Series that putt on junior golf tournaments around the U.K. I was part of a thing called Team Faldo which is like an elite team of the best juniors in the U.K. that we got to travel a couple of times a year to California or to Hong Kong once, as well.

So there were things that I was exposed to that definitely helped my progression as a golfer. Maybe not to the level of, like, The First Tee, for example, but the one thing that I love about golf in this part of the world, U.K. and Ireland; that it's so accessible. It's much more accessible in this part of the world than it is in other places.

And that's a great thing in that obviously if the -- like if the entry price is low, which it is for the post part in the U.K., it means that more kids will get into the game and play.

I guess growing up, I didn't know any different but you start to travel around the world and you start to appreciate how accessible the game is in this part of the world, which is wonderful.

Q. A couple things about Birkdale. What did you think about 15, the new one?

RORY McILROY: Undecided. I'll have to play it a bit more. I only played it once. It may be -- there may be a couple of holes locations on the green where the hole is a little bit too long for those hole locations. Like it's maybe a little bit silly to be hitting a 3-iron into some of them.

But if they moved up the tee box where you're hitting like a 6- or 7-iron in, it's good. But it's going to be an interesting hole. I think it's going to be a big talking point during the week.

Q. The rest of Birkdale, how would you -- what does it ask of you differently than some of the other links on the rota?

RORY McILROY: Links golf is all dependent on the conditions and all dependent on the wind direction. Links golf courses can play so differently from day-to-day just depending on the direction of the wind.

So there were some holes that I played that day that it didn't look like driver was the right play, but maybe when I get there and the wind is in a different spot, I might think, oh, yeah, I can be a little bit more aggressive off this tee.

But the one thing that I like about Birkdale is there's usually sets of bunkers on both sides of the fairway. So you're always having to challenge one set of bunkers to get to where you want your ball to finish.

So like Tommy and I were talking about it last night. The 10th hole at Birkdale, it's a dog-leg left and Tommy is like, "Did you play it back at all of them?"

And I said well, no. Because if you lay back at all of them, you don't really have a view to the green and you are hitting a 6- or 7-iron in. But if you challenge that left one to stop it short of the ones on the right, you have a full view to the green and you're hitting a wedge in, and then all of a sudden it becomes a gettable hole.

But to be able to put your ball in that position and hit a wedge in and get a full view of the green, you have to challenge the bunker on the left.

So there's a lot of holes like that where it's a lot of strategy, but like okay, I know I'm hitting a club that could get me into trouble but to be in the best possible position for my second shot, that's the shot that I need to play.

Q. Excuse the slightly left field nature of the question. But we're a month shy of Nike's announcement ten years ago that they were going to stop making golf equipment, caught some us by surprise --

RORY McILROY: Not me.

Q. Not you. But can you reflect on that time, how much of a surprise and a challenge that was for you?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it was definitely -- as you said, it took all of us by surprise. I remember getting the call, whenever that was, and I felt like it was very funny timing. Because I felt like the equipment was like getting really, really good. And I had even tested the equipment for 2017. I thought the golf ball was getting better. The equipment was getting better.

But like with all these massive companies, when you have a change of leadership, it changes the direction of the

company. You know, someone comes in, looks at how much R&D is costing, Nike Golf in comparison to the revenue that they are making, and they are like, yeah, we probably need to cut that.

But if a CEO comes in in four years' time and says no, we actually want to start doing that again, they could start doing it again. All these massive companies, they are influenced so much by what happens at the top.

Yeah, it was a shame because as I said, they started making some really, really good stuff. But it gave me an opportunity to, I guess, go to market and try different stuff and sort of see where I came out. Landed with TaylorMade, and it's been a pretty good run with them since.

Q. Just with Jon Rahm here and everybody else, does this feel how it should be? Probably got some bumps in the road before it gets back but does this feel how it should be, how it was five years ago?

RORY McILROY: I mean, yeah. I've talked about wanting to have just all of the best players in the world play together. Yeah, I guess this is a good -- and it's not as if this hasn't been open to them before. It's just because Valderrama was always this week.

Yeah, having Jon in this event is better for the event than him not being here, and obviously everyone else that's here, as well. That's a good thing.

BRIONY CARLYON: Thank you for your time. Best of luck.

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