

BMW PGA Championship

Wednesday, 13 September, 2023

Virginia Water, Surrey, England

Wentworth Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference

MATTHEW JOULE: Delighted to be joined by World No. 2 Rory McIlroy here in the media centre. Thanks for joining us. You just played the Pro-Am. What's your thoughts on the West Course this year and how much are you looking forward to the BMW PGA Championship.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it always -- I don't know why it surprises me every year but every time I get out here in the Pro-Am on a Wednesday I'm always amazed at how many people are out there and putting themselves in harm's way on a Wednesday. But it was a fantastic atmosphere. Yeah, look, Wentworth has got some really great memories for me over the years from coming here and watching The World Match Play with my Mum and dad as a kid and playing in a lot of these tournaments, also.

The course is in fantastic shape. The greens are pretty firm, I guess, after the good weather that we've had over the last couple weeks. Rough is pretty thick which is a good precursor to a couple weeks' time. So yeah, overall, it's in fantastic shape. Golf course is set up well and we've got a great field assembled as well. So looks like it will be a great week.

Q. As you alluded to, rough is pretty tasty. Give us your thoughts on course setup?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I thought it's penal off the tee. You miss fairways and you're going to struggle to get to the greens. I think there's some holes, there's a couple short par 4s where if you're hitting driver off the tee, and you miss fairways, yeah, you should be punished. But there's a couple longer holes that maybe the rough is not quite as severe and you can at least get like a 7- or an 8-iron on it and advance it quite a bit down the fairway.

But in terms of just the condition of the course, I don't know if I've ever seen better fairways. I think fairways are so pure to hit off and the greens are in great shape and everything. It's been a hot summer over there. The course is in fantastic shape. Just got to keep your ball in the fairway off the tee.



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Q. How was the trip itself in terms of bonding with players you might not know as well as others, Ludvig, etc.?

RORY McILROY: It was amazing. I'm sort of surprised it's the first time we'd ever really done it.

Yeah, there's a few new faces on the team and I thought it was a great exercise in terms of getting to know one another a little bit better. I had an opportunity to play with Ludvig for the first time on Monday, which I was excited about. I told him, "I said I've been looking forward to this for a while."

But yeah, so it's just been -- not that I need to get anymore excited about an upcoming Ryder Cup, but that trip definitely got the juices flowing on Monday.

Q. Did he live up to your expectations?

RORY McILROY: Probably exceeded them. Everyone talks about what a great driver of the golf ball he is and -- which he is. The ball-striking is incredible. But I was really impressed with his wedge play and how he can sort of control his trajectory with shorter clubs. I was on the bandwagon before. Certainly at the front of it now.

Q. You talked about the future of the Ryder Cup, how pleased that players like Bob have made it to Rome, and what he did at The Scottish Open from your perspective?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's a transitional time for the European Ryder Cup Team. There's guys that have been amazing Ryder Cuppers for two decades, basically, and you know, unfortunately things move on and you need to try to bring in some fresh talent. We certainly have that this year in terms of someone like Sepp who came on the scene the last couple years and has played some great golf.

Yeah, it's exciting. It's exciting. I think the thing, as well, which has been a nice -- refreshing, it felt like there's, you know, start with Rosey and Shane and myself, the three oldest on the team, which is amazing to say. I felt like the 12 of us are on the same level, there's no type of hierarchy on the team. I remember the 2012 Ryder Cup, I went in

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there, No. 1 player in the world, I had won two majors in the last two years, and I still didn't feel like I could speak up in the team room. It this doesn't feel like that, which I think is really good. Just making the new guys as comfortable as possible. To me, that's a really cool thing about the last couple days.

Q. I was going to ask you about Shane --

RORY McILROY: Older brother.

Q. Making a conscious effort --

RORY McILROY: Not at all. I don't think any of these guys need their hand held in any way. I'd rather them look across to me than look up at me, if that makes sense. That's the way I'd hope they see me in that way. We are all part of a 12-man team and we are all trying to do our bit, and certainly no one is more important than anyone else.

Q. How do you create that culture? How do you go about that? I see you're playing with Viktor again this week --

RORY McILROY: Absolutely. Yeah, I think with the younger guys and -- you know, when I came on to The Ryder Cup team in 2010, I felt like the veterans on the team were really good with me in terms of feeling somewhat -- but still, it's hard to not look at -- say in 2010, whether it be Westy or Poultis or Luke or whoever it was that was really at the top of the world rankings at that time, it's hard not to have that sense of looking up at someone and feeling like, stay quiet, do what you're told.

But I think just trying to make a really conscious effort amongst the vice captains, captains, the veteran guys on the team of just being inclusive and really just making sure that the younger guys and the rookies are really involved in everything that we do.

Q. Your own game, coming into this week, how big is it -- to sharpen their game this week?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, again, even though, you know, we are trying to create this really good team environment, at the end of the day, we are individual sports people. We all need to do what's best for us to get ourselves ready to play in Rome.

Yeah, I feel like that we have this week. It's nice to be able to stay short putt. Some of the guys from the States, the last competitive guys they will have played is the TOUR Championship a couple weeks ago, but there's also some guys on the team that will I think play Napa, is it this week, and then I know Brooks is obviously playing the week

before in a LIV event.

There's some guys that are going to have I guess a bit more sharpness coming in. The build up to Ryder Cup week is so long, anyway. Get there on a Monday and you've got that extra day. You're not playing until Friday. I'm pretty sure everyone on both teams will feel ready to go on Friday morning.

Q. You've played under a few captains now. I just wonder how your relationship with Luke compares to others, and given you're a senior figure, is your relationship with the captain different? Has that evolved? Do you feel he is leaning on you?

RORY McILROY: Actually, not really. I think he's sort of let me be a little bit. We've played a lot of golf and trying to play well. Look, we have chats. We live on the same street in Florida. We live ten houses down from each other, so it's not as if we don't see each other all the time but it's just been on a more casual sort of basis. It has not been sit-down talks and strategies and pairings. That's not my -- that's not my job. I don't want to have that role. I'm one of his players and I just want to do my best for the team.

But like if there's anything asked of me by being a leading player, a veteran player, a player that's played in quite a few of them, I'm certainly happy to take direction and do what's needed of me.

But I don't feel like it's my place to give the captain my opinion unless it's asked for, and Luke I think has got a lot of great vice captains around him and has leant on a couple of past captains, as well, which has been great.

Q. The last Ryder Cup, you had an emotional response. How much of that energy can you capture and is it possible to capture and take that forward?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I told a story on Monday night to the team about watching Brookline in '99 on TV and crying after America came back and Europe lost, and obviously I cried in Whistling Straits in 2021, so not much has changed.

But yeah, I fell as, you know, someone that should go out there and win points for the team, I didn't do that. Whether I had of played well that week and whether it would have made a difference whether we won or lost, who knows.

But you know, I just didn't -- I felt like I had, you know -- we're not used to playing for other people in this game, and you go out there and you're playing for your teammates, you want to do well for them. I felt like I didn't do that and I

felt like I didn't give a good account of myself and that stung and the score line stung. First time I had been dropped in a session in The Ryder Cup. There's just a lot of things that -- it was a difficult week for me.

But that emotion was real and what I said at the end of that tournament was all true. It is by far the best experience in sport, and standing shoulder-to-shoulder with your teammates in an environment like that is I think the epitome of what competition and what sport it.

Q. You're very good at giving us insight into other players. If I said to you, what is Edoardo like, and the second question is, what is it that aside from character, what is it that he does so well as the numbers man and statistical genius?

RORY McILROY: The guru? He's delved really deep into the stats in terms of pairings for fourballs, for foursomes, course setup, what our team as a whole does well and what their team does well; how can we set ourselves up for success in whatever way possible. He also has formed a very close relationship with some of the players over the last few years because he does some of the stats for certain players.

So I think the players trust him. Sometimes you have to take numbers with a grain of salt, and they don't tell a whole story or the whole picture. I think Edoardo comes in there not just as a statistician but as someone that's played The Ryder Cup and still plays the game at a competitive level.

I think all of those things combined, there's a big left of trust that he obviously know what is he's talking about, and what he's giving us is good information.

Q. And as a person?

RORY McILROY: Fantastic. Maybe a little more animated than his brother, but yeah, he's a great person. I think he's the sort of person that would fit easily into any sort of group whether it be young or old. And again, he's got a close relationship with a lot of the players on the team, anyway, which is a big plus.

Q. How will it be to get away for a couple days next week and feel more refreshed, and how is the back?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, back feels good, thankfully, touch wood. I came out of last week pretty good. Yeah, back was good and even all this travel back and forth to Rome, sitting on cars, planes, whatever, it was good. That was a huge a positive from the last week.

I've played a lot of golf this summer: The Scottish Open, The Open and the FedExCup Playoffs, last week, this week. Yeah, to go away for a couple of days.

Will be nice, and don't know how much recharging will be done. And certainly recharge for a few days when we get back here before going to Rome and get some practise in.

Yeah, you don't want to be sitting around the whole week just waiting to go to Rome on that Monday morning. Stay busy, whether that be practise or a trip away with friends of whatever it is. It's nice to get your mind off of it for a few days.

Q. Just on Ludvig, when did you first come across the name?

RORY McILROY: I think when he won -- so he got to No. 1 world in the amateur ranking, and I think he won the Haskins Award and the Nicklaus Award for being the best college player.

So I think that probably maybe the end of last year. Then there were some people in the golf community that were touting him to be on this The Ryder Cup Team as he was still playing college golf. He obviously had a phenomenal start to his pro career and played well. Played well in the States, was asked to play a couple events in Europe and finished fourth in Czech and won in Switzerland.

Yeah, he's having an incredible start to his career. Yeah, anyone who watches him play golf can see the potential and kind of talent that he has.

Q. I wonder how much you're hoping that the positivity and the energy that comes from The Ryder Cup unites fans around the world again?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, absolutely, I alluded to it a couple weeks ago. I feel like this Ryder Cup is a bit like the 150th Open at St Andrews last year where all of that noise went away for the four days that we were playing, at least. Yeah, there's just some tournaments that in our game that are bigger and more important than all of that stuff, and obviously The Ryder Cup is right at the top of the list.

So yeah, at the end of the day, it's about competition and about sport and competing at the highest level, and that's what the Ryder Cup is.

Q. Very quickly, how much did you enjoy playing with Gareth Bale today, and do you think he potentially has a future on the Tour now?

RORY McILROY: I enjoyed playing with him. He hits it



well. Like he does hit it very well. He's got a really good swing. A couple little bits that he would need to tidy up around the green. We're members at the same club down the road, so I'm going to play a bit of golf with him next week. He's a good player. He's a proper probably low digits to scratch golfer. Definitely some room for improvement as well.

It was good to play with him today. He's still got a bit of time until he turns 50 if he wants to make a go at the Senior Tour, but yeah, he's a good golfer, and we had a good time out there.

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