

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Sunday, 21 January, 2024

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



A Rolex Series Event



CLARE BODEL: An incredible and historic fourth title here at the Emirates Golf Club. How does it feel to be a four-time Hero Dubai Desert Classic Champion?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I was saying in an interview earlier that my -- the arc of my career and Dubai in general have sort of like tracked each other pretty consistently along the way. I remember my first Desert Classic in '06 as an amateur, staying what seemed like out in the desert at this point, and it's probably like only ten minutes away now, it's so built up.

But just to think like 18 years ago, and what it meant to come here and play in this event, to be sitting here, you know, having won it four times, and all the great experiences that I've had in Dubai and the friends that I've met and everything sort of along the way, it's always been a place where I come back to and reminisce about my career because I really feel like it's where everything started.

So it's amazing to sit here. The first Desert Classic, I took a media credential and I walked inside the ropes to follow Tiger and Ernie and Thomas Björn, I think, and then just to think about even the arc of that: Thomas Björn is my Ryder Cup Captain; I ended up buying Ernie Els's house; I've become really good friends with Tiger Woods. It's just amazing to think back on the last 18 years and sort of where I find myself.

I certainly don't take anything for granted, and I always appreciate the opportunity to be able to do what I do. Yeah, it feels amazing to sit here and have won that big coffee pot four times.

CLARE BODEL: Well, certainly seems like it comes full circle.

Q. Two different ones, if I may. Firstly, you haven't played competitively much at all since the Ryder Cup, but you've come back out this year seemingly sharp, playing very well. You haven't been sitting at home watching TV and eating takeaways all winter. What

has that process involved to keep you in that place you're in?

RORY McILROY: I think I have enough people around me to keep me accountable. I think that's really, really important. Whether that's Michael Bannon coming out and us working on some stuff; whether that's like the odd text from Harry during the course of an off-week; doing some work with Brad Faxon at home in Florida, doing work with my trainer, Roe; having conversations with Bob Rotella.

I think I have enough of a great team around me and enough people around me to keep me accountable. I feel like if I'm not trying my best, I'm letting them down, as well. If they are putting a hundred per cent of their effort into it, then I feel like I should at least do them -- give them the respect to put a hundred per cent of my effort in as well.

Q. And apologies, but the first Masters question of the year. You've gone to Augusta having won early and not won early. Does that make a difference even to your mindset or your confidence at this point?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think so. I think, look, Augusta is still a long way away in golfing terms. A lot can change in 2 1/2 months.

But it's always nice to get a win. It's always nice to feel like you're playing well going into it. I've always said that I'll take execution over preparation every single time because you just you have to execute the golf shots, especially there.

But I think last year at Augusta, I learnt a lot about myself and I learnt a lot about -- I've told this story numerous times now about the first green on Friday, and Brooks was on the eighth green and I saw the big leaderboard, and I was already ten behind at that point. I was ten behind after two days this week and ended up winning the golf tournament. That's a massive -- I feel like I've taken that learning already and put it into practise a little bit already. Yeah, that's a huge thing for me.

But you know, everything now is, yeah, I've still got some big events to come but you know, I think from now until that



first or second week in April, you know, at least a part of my mind is going to be towards getting myself absolutely ready for there.

Q. You've had some incredible wins in your career. But this one will probably stand out, especially for us. But where does it stack for you and coming from ten behind, especially not playing that well the first two days?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think it would feel -- if the scores on the weekend had been flipped and I shot 70, 63, I'd probably be like, yeah, that was amazing.

But the 70 today, I did what I needed to do. I felt like I played a very controlled round of golf. The two birdies on 8 and 9 were huge to sort of give me that cushion going into the back nine.

But yeah, the golf course definitely played a little trickier at the weekend. It was hard to get the ball very close because of how firm the greens were. And you know, I thought even after I finished on Friday, I thought if I shot two 67s over the weekend, I would have a decent chance to win, and if that had of been the case, I would have tied or 13-under. I wasn't too far away with the prediction, and I went one better than that and ended up winning the tournament.

Q. You spoke about Brad Faxon, getting those two videos from him. Did you sought that out or is it what you just said, that the team around you is so good that he himself sent it across?

RORY McILROY: He sent it across without a prompt from me. He just said, look, I hate bothering you when you're at a tournament, but I just saw a couple of things. Sent me a couple videos. Explained what he saw, and it's not anything new. It's actually the exact same thought with my putting that I had at the 2022 TOUR Championship. I ended up going on to win that, as well.

It was a familiar thought and a familiar feel. I definitely felt like I putted a bit better on the weekend.

Q. A lot of people think players like yourself could finish the job off when they get on that back nine, and you had a four-shot lead at one point. Can you talk us through how difficult that was over the closing few holes, and as you said you didn't birdie a hole on the back nine, which is unusual here.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it is. I think it speaks to how tricky the course was getting. The conditions were -- it was windy. The greens were firm. And then if your ball sort of

ran through into that like second cut, you get like real iffy lies. It was quite hard to judge how it was going to come out. Just it got tricky.

But yeah, after the bogey on 13, I just wanted to steady the ship a little bit. I knew 14, 15, 16 were tough holes, so I thought if I could just get through them and par them, I played those, well, at least 14 and 15, quite conservatively. I hit a tee shot left on 16.

I guess like, you know, I knew that I would have a couple of chances on the last two holes. If I needed to make a birdie, then those were the chances, but thankfully I didn't need to in the end.

But yeah, it was one of those days where I gave myself the cushion, and then even when I dropped a shot, it was just so hard to make ground up because of the way the course was playing.

So you know, luckily for me, the 8th and 9th holes today were the two pivot the holes in the round.

Q. Normally your dad rarely misses a shot you hit, but to have your mum here this week, how special was that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, this is her first time in Dubai in nine years, I think. So yeah, I think they have had a great time. They also love coming to Dubai and love spending time here. You know, we've got three of those pictures on the 18th green. They weren't here for the win last year, but it's pretty cool.

I mean, 2009 to now, and the 15 years that have passed and everything that's happened, it's still incredibly cool to be able to do those things with them.

Q. You've been coming here for 18 years, and I don't think there's any soul here in Dubai who doesn't know you. So how difficult is it for you to control your emotions when you are coming through? How difficult is it to control your emotions and how do you manage it?

RORY McILROY: I think I just have to keep telling myself, all you're trying to do is either you're trying to win a golf tournament or you're trying to shoot a good score or you're trying to do something you've done thousands of times in your life. I think it sort of puts it in perspective a little bit.

So it's really just trying to simply things and trying to, you know, trying to not let the moment take over. You know, you have to be in control of the moment and I think I have enough experience and I've played enough rounds of golf

like this now that I don't think I'm perfect at it. But I'm getting better at being able to control the moment and control my emotions and really try to simplify it into what I need to do that day to be successful.

Q. Just to follow up on that, the kind of stories that you share with us, historical, etc., about the first time you came to Dubai when Tiger was playing, how much does the history and legacy of golf in general mean to you?

RORY McILROY: Everything. I think it's the only way to be able to compare yourself to the people that you grew up idolizing. So I grew up -- my hero it was Tiger Woods. I wanted to do what Tiger did. I'll probably not have the career that he's had, but I still look at the trophies that I've won and my name is on those same trophies that his are on, as well, which is -- I mean, that's -- I don't know a better way of quantifying success in the game as putting your name on the trophies that the people before you have put their names on.

So whether it be this trophy or major championship trophies or whatever it is, like I sat up here on Wednesday and talked about global golf and something like the Australian Open. I'm looking at the Stonehaven Cup, and my name is on there with Peter Thomson and all the legends of the game.

I think it's a very cool thing. Michael Thorbjornsen has just won the second time as an amateur here. Hopefully in 15, 20 years' time, he's looking back and looking at the trophies that my name is on.

I think just being able to go from one generation to the next, I don't think there's a -- I don't know if there's any other sport that you can do it as much as -- maybe in tennis a little bit. But I just think that the generation span is so long in golf that, you know, I've played in the U.S. Open with Tom Watson but I've also played in a U.S. Open with Rasmus Højgaard, who is 60 years younger than Tom Watson.

I think just the generations and length of time that you can be a pro and you can have success in golf, I think it's amazing to think about the journey and to think about the players that you've played with. You know, at the start of my career, and then the players that I'm playing with now, and just the length of time that all of those careers have spanned.

Q. Bring you back to the present, Rory. We've seen you put the afterburners on here so often on the back nine, but when you win the way you did and manage to control things from the front, is there almost more

satisfaction doing it that way?

RORY McILROY: I mean, I like looking back and having a highlight reel on the last day (laughing). As I said, if you flip the scores and I had the 70 yesterday and the 63 today, I'd probably be sitting here maybe a little more, not upbeat, obviously I gone the golf tournament, I'm extremely happy.

Yeah, I guess it is. There's a lot of different ways to win. I think I've -- looking back at the wins that I've had, I've done it a few different ways and some have been dramatic, some have been not so much and today is one of those days where I think I started so well and I played that front nine so well that I didn't really have to do anything that special on the back nine just to get it home and get the thing won.

Q. And you said yesterday that the first time you had really looked at leaderboards was probably on the back nine; you probably saw that Adrian had closed to within a shot of you with his two birdies.

RORY McILROY: Yeah.

Q. How difficult was it for you to then not think, I've got to go into overdrive?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I thought -- I got away with a couple of things today. You know, there was a couple of times where I didn't make -- I didn't make birdie on 10, and then I made the bogey on 13, and I thought, you know, those were two that you're hopefully going to make birdie, and I didn't.

You know, luckily for me, the guys around me didn't quite -- you know, they made some birdies, but I think it was just really difficult to get the ball close and make a ton of birdies on the way in.

As I said, it was just the cushion that that gave me. I knew I always had one or two shots to play with coming down the last few holes, so I think that gave me a certain level of comfort.

Q. Just going back to Friday, obviously ten shots back, what's the mindset there? Are you still thinking, I can win this golf tournament?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I think because of the way the course was playing and the conditions of the course, and seeing how the greens were firming up, I thought, as I said earlier, I thought if I shot 10-under on the weekend, I would have a really good chance.



And I knew that Cam was on 13 or 14-under after two days, anyway. But I just thought that having played a ton of golf tournaments and knowing sort of how these things play out, unless Cam just sort of took off and left everyone else behind, I always thought around 13 or 14-under was going to be the winning score.

And then shooting 9-under yesterday, I knew I was right back in it, and then it meant that today, I just had to go out and play a solid round of golf, and I was hoping that that would be good enough.

So it's not that you're thinking -- I'm not thinking from ten behind that I'm going to win this tournament. It's more, if I can play two really good round of golf and shoot a couple of 67s, that may give me a chance on Sunday.

So it's not really thinking about the win, but it's more thinking about, okay, what's the winning score going to be, is it attainable to shoot those two scores, and I thought that it was.

CLARE BODEL: Thank you, Rory, thank you everyone, congrats again.

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