

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Wednesday, 21 January, 2026

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



BRIONY CARLYON: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm delighted to welcome Rory McIlroy here to the Hero Dubai Desert Classic.

Rory, it's the 20th anniversary of your first appearance here, and I hate to make you feel old, but you have won this tournament on four occasions.

RORY McILROY: Briony, come on.

BRIONY CARLYON: We know you like to start your year in Dubai. Talk to us about how much you enjoy coming back here this week.

RORY McILROY: I love Dubai. It holds so many great memories for me, first of which was coming here as a 16-year-old, and playing in the Dubai Desert Classic for the first time as an amateur, and I played twice as an amateur. In 2007, I made the cut, and that got me to world No. 1 in the amateur rankings, and two years later, I won my first professional event here.

So it's a lot of great memories. I've met a lot of great people along the way. Honestly, I've always felt like it was a perfect place to start the year.

Q. If you just go back those 20 years ago, the grapevine was that Jumeirah paid you \$1 million at that time.

RORY McILROY: I wish that was -- I wish. 20 years ago. First time I was here, I stayed in a Courtyard Marriott at the Green Community.

Q. What's wrong with that?

RORY McILROY: But I'm sitting up here (laughter).

Q. That's what we heard.

RORY McILROY: Okay.

Q. But just...

RORY McILROY: You heard wrong (laughing).

Q. From those days to now, when you know a lot more can be earned in just one tournament, what is the biggest change that you have seen in golf that you love, and something that you really do not appreciate?

RORY McILROY: I mean, golf has become such a big thing in this region, even playing with His Highness today, Sheikh Nazar, and talking about the development of golf in Bahrain.

But certainly in the UAE and in Dubai, you just see the amount of kids that are out here watching the tournament year-in and year-out, and obviously at mounted of amazing tournaments that come to Dubai.

Obviously we played at the Creek last week. We are here this week. We're in Abu Dhabi at the end of the year. We're at Jumeirah Golf Estates.

So very, very high-level golf comes to this region very often and it's amazing to see the growth of the game here. I would say that's one of the biggest things, right. I think junior golf probably wasn't as big in this part of the world 20 years ago as it is now, and that's amazing. I got a chance to meet the two junior Desert Classic Champions yesterday, and you know, I think coming back to a place for so long and seeing the development of golf in this region has been amazing.

Q. One of them, the Jumeirah Desert Classic winners, one of them is from Sri Lanka, which probably you've never heard of somebody from Sri Lanka doing something, as exceptional as this at this stage. What did you think of her, and how pleasing it was for you to see somebody from a new region coming up?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's amazing. You know, golf is such a global sport. It's played in all four corners of the world, and you know, I didn't even know they had golf courses in Sri Lanka. So it was amazing that she's come as far as she has, and she's won a prestigious junior event.



But you know, that's the wonderful thing about our sport. It is so global, and it has that reach. That's amazing.

Q. You spoke last week about not wanting to be complacent this year. I wonder what are your plans to go about that. Is it reducing your schedule?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think I need to show up at tournaments with enthusiasm every single time. So playing in the places that I want to play, playing the tournaments I want to play. Not feeling like I'm at a tournament because I'm obligated or have to be there but because I want to be there.

And I said this last week, but finding joy in the process. You know, like I'm talking about -- I've been coming here for 20 years. You just think about the amount of balls that I've hit and the amount of time I've spent on the range on my own. That starts to get tedious 20 years into a career. So it's like trying to find the joy in that.

What I really found joy in I feel like at home is playing golf. I definitely spend more time on the golf course than on the practice range nowadays, and that's something I've started to really, really enjoy.

So for me, it's always -- it's basically not make it feel like a job, you know.

Q. Related to that, what would constitute a good year for you? Can you quantify that result-wise, or is it more what you get out of it?

RORY McILROY: I think it's more the attitude that I bring every single week, and I think if I bring the right attitude and do the right things away from tournament golf. So at home, and obviously you still need to put the time in to be as good as you need to be and be sharp.

But yeah, I think it's bringing that attitude, and knowing my limitations and knowing, okay, this is somewhere I want to play. I've always said the results will take care of themselves if you do the other things right, and I think this year my focus is just doing the other things right. Then I feel like I'm a good enough golfer that then the results will take care of themselves.

You always know more about yourself when you're in contention, right. Even last week, I made those few birdies on the back nine to get back into contention and then I probably stalled a little bit the last few holes.

So I learnt a lot from that, and then it's just trying to put some of those learnings from the last three or four holes on Sunday into this week and just trying to build on what

you've done.

Q. If I might ask you a bigger question, golf question. Brooks Koepka returned to the PGA TOUR. Do you think that move is more likely to bring a reunification to golf rather than Jon Rahm going the other way a few years ago, or does that matter anymore? Does reunification still matter?

RORY McILROY: No. Well, it matters -- I think it matters. That's what I -- I would say that's Solution A. It matters.

But I just don't see a world where it can happen at this point.

Q. Would you just say why? Why can't it happen?

RORY McILROY: Just I don't see a world where the two or three sides or whoever it is will give up enough. Like for reunification to happen, every side is going to feel like they will have lost, where you really want every side to feel like they have won. And I just don't think -- I think they are just too far apart for that to happen.

Q. Just following off on that, really, obviously on the DP World Tour, there's a system of fines for the players coming back and expecting to pay up. Is that the right thing to have in place, do you think?

RORY McILROY: Look, I think any organization or any members' organisation like this has a right to uphold its rules and regulations. And what the DP World Tour are doing is upholding their rules and regulations and we, as members, sign a document at the start of every year, which has you agree to these rules and regulations, and the people that made the option to go to LIV knew what they were.

So I don't see what's wrong with that, I guess, is my opinion.

Q. If you go back a few years prior to LIV in the game, do you feel we're beyond that now; that is there a chance to move forward, that relationships are a bit better in a wider sense?

RORY McILROY: Yes, I think relationships are better, but at the same time, that doesn't necessarily mean that every organisation will give up in its own best interest.

Q. I'm going to go away from that.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

Q. For many, many years, I keep asking you, when is

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

the Grand Slam coming and when are you coming to India, and you did both of them in a single year. What are two or three things you still want to achieve in your career?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, Olympic medal. Open at St Andrews. Yeah, maybe like a U.S. Open at one of those like old, traditional golf courses whether it's Shinnecock this year or Winged Foot or Pebble Beach, Merion.

Yeah, I would say those. Again, like I keep saying, I would have told you two years ago, if I won the Masters, it would have been great and I could be retired or whatever.

But when you keep doing things, the goal posts keep moving, and you just keep finding new things that you want to do.

So yeah, I'm sure if I were to achieve those things, which geez, I hope that I do, I'd probably give you more stuff in four years' time. I think when you're a competitive person, that's just the way you're wired and sort of the way we operate.

Q. Sorry, I'm going to go back to that.

RORY McILROY: Thank you, David.

Q. Just one more question. I wonder if it actually matters if we don't get unification, given the fact that the doomsday predictions when it started could mean the end of the PGA TOUR and everything, none of those have come to fruition. So does it matter?

RORY McILROY: No, I don't think it matters. I definitely think the additional tours, if you want to call them, have weathered the worst of the storm.

Again, my opinion is that golf would be better served if all the best players in the world played together a little more often than they do. You know, we're really only seeing that four times a year at the major championships. But you're talking about a handful of guys that are missing, say, a Players Championship or some of the other bigger tournaments in the world.

So, yeah, I'd like to see the best players play together maybe ten times a year instead of four times a year. But I would say that's the only negative I see to something coming together.

Q. Just on that, do you feel like this tournament's been a big winner out of the last four years in professional golf?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. I do. I think any tournament -- I think a lot of tournaments, especially if the PGA TOUR are going to go to a schedule from February to August, I think any tournament in the September to January time frame has the possibility to be a winner, especially that the LIV schedule sort of ends at the same point, too.

I think there's a massive opportunity in that five-month window to put on some great events.

Q. Just in terms of the Ryder Cup, would it just be easier for Rahm and Hatton to pay their fines? They could probably afford it.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, absolutely. Main thing is -- look, this is my opinion. We went really hard on the Americans about being paid to play the Ryder Cup, and we also said that we would pay to play in Ryder Cups. There's two guys that can prove it. Great. I think that's -- yeah.

Q. The players advancing from the DP World Tour to the PGA TOUR, they haven't had the best of successes. How do you see the group moving over there this season, and are there a couple of players that you are more excited about than others?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think that the set of golf courses that we play on the DP World Tour, the guys that play a full schedule on the DP World Tour, are quite different than the tests that you face in America. It's just an adjustment. There is an adjustment period.

And also, the guys that are going over there, the majority of them aren't getting into the Signature events straightaway. So that puts them at a little bit of a disadvantage, as well. But I do think if you're good enough to finish in the Top 10 in the DP World Tour, you should be good enough to keep your card over in the States, as well.

BRIONY CARLYON: As always, Rory, thank you for your time and all the best this week.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports