

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome three-time FedExCup champion Rory McIlroy to the media center here at the 2025 TOUR Championship. Making your 12th TOUR Championship appearance, eight consecutive, which is the longest active streak among players. Open up a little bit about being back here at East Lake, the familiarity element of it, and obviously with the stakes being a little bit different this year with the format, how that changes the mindset.

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, look, anytime you make it back to East Lake you've had a good year, so it's always nice to come back. I'm on a nice little streak of playing some consistent golf over the last few years and getting myself back here.

We've played this event and this golf course in a bunch of different formats, whether it be -- there's been a lot of different ways that we've played it. The nines have changed, have flipped. There's been a golf course renovation over the years, which I think is actually very, very good. I'm refamiliarizing myself with that today.

Look, it has a different feel. Any one of the 30 has a chance to win the FedExCup this year, which is obviously a lot different than it's been in previous years. I think with that, it's a clean slate for everyone, and it's a great opportunity for one of the guys that maybe wasn't a huge part of the season to put their hand up and have a chance to win the big prize at the end of the year.

It's also a great opportunity for some of the guys that have had great years to sort of rubber stamp the season a little bit and end on a really, really positive note.

I think there's still a lot to play for this week.

Q. You mentioned the different formats here. Are we now at the, quote-unquote, best format? And if we're not, how would you change it maybe?

RORY MCILROY: I'm maybe part of the minority. I didn't hate the starting strokes. I thought that the player that



played the best during the course of the season should have had an advantage coming in here. But the majority of people just didn't like the starting strokes. Whether it were players or fans -- I was on the PAC when we were trying to go through that, and really it was just a way to try to simplify the advantage that the top players were going to get over the course of the week instead of Steve Sands doing calculations on a white board.

But you could also argue if it was starting strokes this week, Scottie with a two-shot lead, it probably isn't enough considering what he's done this year and the lead that he has in the FedExCup going into this week.

Look, there was a lot of other stuff on the table. Match play was on the table, and that got canned for this year. That might be brought back up in the conversation for next year or the year after.

I think it's just hard for the players to reconcile that we play stroke play for every week of the year but then the season-ending tournament is going to be decided by match play. I think it was just hard for the players to get their heads around that.

I don't know, maybe that will be on the table again, who knows. Yeah, look, it's a 72-hole stroke-play event, and that's what we play week in and week out. That's what's going to determine the winner.

I don't know if it's the best format, but it's the one that we have for this week.

Q. Obviously the schedule came out today for next year, and now there's nine Signature Events. There will be five Signature Events, four majors in four months and five in a six-week stretch from the Masters to the PGA. Is it possibly too much? Are there negatives to having that much, or is it all positive do you think?

RORY MCILROY: I mean, geez, I think it's all positive when you have -- golf builds through the January, February, March months, and obviously golf gets a huge popularity spike or whatever through Augusta; and then to try to keep that momentum going, keep that momentum going through the next few weeks, through the PGA, U.S. Open, I think it's a good thing.

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It's quite a bit of a workload for the players to play that much golf in that stretch, but I think it's not as if we're having to travel halfway around the world to do it. These are all pretty easy stops on the East Coast for the most part.

But I think it'll be good. It'll be a good schedule, and I think if the TOUR and the top players get off to a good start, I think that builds momentum for the TOUR, and I think the TOUR can just sort of ride that momentum through that stretch.

Q. You weren't afraid to skip some Signature Events this year. Do you see yourself skipping some in the future just because the schedule is going to turn out that way?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, look, I'll always look at the schedule at the start of the year and see what best fits me and my life and everything else that I sort of do, whether it's with family or other opportunities that I'm pursuing outside of golf. I'll always look at that.

I'll always choose the schedule that best fits me, and this year that meant skipping a few Signature Events. I might skip less next year. I might skip the same amount, I don't know. It's all just -- the luxury of being a PGA TOUR player is we are free to pick and choose our schedule for the most part, and I took advantage of that this year and I'll continue to take advantage of that for as long as I can.

Q. I feel like the narrative for a while has been just how good guys are at a young age, and the best players in the world seem to be getting younger. That seems to have stalled out. If you look at the list of the best players in the world, it's largely guys in their late 20s through late 30s, and you might be the worst guy to ask because you were good at such a young age, but I'm curious if you have a take on why that is.

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I think experience is a big part of it. I think being in different situations and golf tournaments and different scenarios as you go through your career, you're going to experience those, and I think by going through those experiences only makes you better.

I've had to go through some tough experiences to get to the other side and be better because of it, and yeah, look, I was good at a young age, but I don't think I -- I still hopefully haven't hit my golfing potential, but I think I'm a way better player in my 30s than I was in my 20s, and I think that's just to do with the experiences that I've had along the way.

I think you could say the same thing for a lot of the guys that -- Scottie is certainly -- he's 29, he's not 21, 22 like some of the younger guys, but I think just the experience of what he's been through over the past five or six year has gotten him to this point where he's arguably the best player in the world, and I think he would say that's because of all the experiences that he's had up until this point.

Q. Since you've played multiple formats here, do you feel the starting strokes better? Is starting strokes something you like better, and do you feel you're at a disadvantage for this year? And will you play any less hard because you don't have starting strokes or because the money has changed?

RORY MCILROY: No, I certainly won't. I don't think I ever started this tournament in the starting strokes era at 10-under, like in the No. 1 spot. If anything, I'm in a better position than I have been the last few years, so that's a nice thing.

But no, I think with the format change or with whatever the money is, we're still playing for the TOUR Championship and the FedExCup, and that's enough to play as hard as possible for.

Q. What places in Northern Ireland did you take your green jacket, and how many people were trying it on and were they mystified and amazed and what was the experience like for them?

RORY MCILROY: I've only been back to Northern Ireland twice since. I was there for three or four days to visit my parents the week after Augusta, and then I was there for the week of The Open Championship at Portrush, and that's it.

I've still got it for another seven months, eight months, so I'll have a few more opportunities for people to see it and to -- maybe not try it on, but at least they can see it.

Q. Along those lines, how many Masters flags do you think you've signed already?

RORY MCILROY: A lot. (Smiling).

Actually, I have no idea. It's been a lot. But I do know that they had 1,100 extra -- like 1,100 left in the merchandise facility at the end of the week, and we took all 1,100.

But it's been a lot. But I'll never get sick of signing them. I've waited 17 years to sign that flag in the middle, and I will never complain about doing it.

Q. You wouldn't do it in the middle, right?

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RORY MCILROY: No. No.

Q. If you were a Korn Ferry graduate to be or someone in the 61 to 100, how would you look at the schedule for next season?

RORY MCILROY: I would look at someone like Jacob Bridgeman or Andrew Novak or some of these guys that were in a similar position to them this year and being able to play their way into Signature Events with good play and feel like I've got an opportunity to do some great things.

Q. What's one thing that you've learned about Brian Rolapp from your early interactions with him?

RORY MCILROY: So I hadn't met him up until last week, and I was able to spend a good 90 minutes with him just talking through everything to do with the TOUR and what's -- the whole thing over the past three or four years and what the future looks like.

I like him. I like him a lot. I like that he doesn't come from golf. I like that he doesn't have any preconceived ideas of what golf should look like or what the TOUR should look like. I think he's going to bring a fresh perspective to everything, and I think he wants to move pretty quick, so I'm excited.

Q. Rory, obviously you have quite the hectic schedule through the rest of the year, but could you see yourself going to Augusta not as Masters prep but just to enjoy it as a Masters champion, and how do you think that might hit you having won it going back there, not Masters week but --

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I've already planned a couple of trips with some friends or some members beforehand. Yeah, it'll be -- it'll probably be a little emotional. I definitely have planned one trip that my dad is going to come on as well, and my dad wasn't there when I won, so I think that'll be a cool moment to be with him.

Yeah, it'll be emotional. Like I still get a little emotional thinking about it. But it'll be really cool. To go there, I have a lot of members there that have become good friends over the years, and to be able to enjoy that with them and play the golf course again and sort of reminisce over the good and the bad that happened over the course of the week, yeah, that'll be really cool.

Q. Is there one thing that stands out to you or that you always focus on when you've been non-Masters time that's just completely different that you really enjoy? Obviously not worrying about sight lines or preparing

for the tournament --

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, yeah. It's a beautiful place to play golf. If you stop to actually look around and look at the plants and look at the trees and hear the birds, it's a beautiful place to spend your day and to spend your night and go down to the wine cellar and pick a bottle of wine. It's one of the coolest experiences you can have in golf.

I've always said some of my favorite times at Augusta were when it wasn't the Masters Tournament, but it'll be lovely to next time go there and go up to the champions locker room and put on my green jacket and feel like I belong.

Q. I didn't think they had birds, I thought they just piped that music in. Do they really?

RORY MCILROY: You'll have to ask Chairman Ridley. (Smiling).

Q. When you had the green jacket on for the first time and you did press and TV and the Champions Dinner, do you remember what you did with it when you took it off at the end of the night, and when is the next time you put it on?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I had it on until -- I don't think I took it off until I went to bed, so I had it on maybe until 3:30 in the morning or something.

It's one of those things that -- I woke up at 7:00 a.m., slept for three hours, I woke up and it's one of those moments where it's like, did that actually happen, and you wake up and you see the green jacket lying over a chair in the bedroom and you think, yeah, that did happen yesterday.

I didn't put it on -- I don't know, I'm sort of reluctant -- I'm reluctant to wear it. It's not as if I wear it a lot. I have it hanging in my wardrobe in a place where I can see it every day, but I don't know, I always thought if I had one -- if I did win the Masters one day, I'd never have the thing off, and it hasn't been that way. I haven't worn it as much as I thought I would.

Q. What was the favorite occasion of wearing it? Where did you go? What did you do? AGW dinner probably doesn't count.

RORY MCILROY: No. Honestly, there hasn't been anywhere -- I went to the golf writers awards in Portrush, and I wore it that night, which was pretty cool. But I really haven't -- you also have to get permission every time you wear it, so there's a lot of dos and don'ts around it as well.

Q. You don't seem like a guy who asks permission a

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lot.

RORY MCILROY: I'm a rule follower at heart.

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