

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 interview room. Rory, what's it like to be back this week at the TOUR Championship?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think anytime you make it to East Lake, you've had a pretty good year. It's a tournament that I've had quite a lot of success on over the years. Maybe not quite as much since the course underwent its renovation a couple years ago, but hopefully I'll try to change that this week.

Always good to be back, and it's been a happy hunting ground for me. Obviously there were some positive signs in my game last week, so trying to continue that trend.

Q. Rory, what do you make of the new TOUR Championship format that was announced this morning, and do you think it'll provide any extra motivation to win that as opposed to the current formula?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think the PGA TOUR and the Future Competition Committee and Brian and everyone involved have really taken on board what the fans have been calling for and have wanted, which is match play. Brian took me through the plan last week for the first time. I didn't really know anything about it.

It's certainly different. Two weeks, two different venues. But it's cool. I think they've taken a big swing, and conceptually, I think I really like it.

The first week will be great trying to get into that top 16, and then the second week, I think for me, one thing I said to Brian is you really want to win a few matches in that second week. It's going to be hard for some guys to be playing match play and playing for 14th position or whatever it is.

I think all the incentives are there, and the regular season champion is going to be adequately rewarded after that final stroke-play event, and then the TOUR Championship



match play is going to be completely different. But I think it's sort of a departure from what we've had the last few years, but I do think it'll be a great thing.

Q. You mentioned Brian a couple times. What's your relationship like with Brian? How often do you guys talk? What are those conversations like? Is it every day? Is it once a week?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I would say it's been like weekly. Really, as much as I haven't wanted to get involved that much with TOUR structure or plans going forward, he's always wanted to keep me in the loop, which I really appreciated. We're working together on some stuff with the DP World Tour, which is exciting.

As I said last week, I've built a good relationship with Brian and also with the wider team that he's brought in as well, Dhruv and Paul and some of the other people.

I like his style of leadership. I like that he's sort of no-nonsense. He's very straight with everyone, with us, with you guys, and I think that's obviously what you want in someone leading your organization.

Q. Do you want to go into what you're working on with the DP World Tour with him? Do you want to expand?

RORY McILROY: Not really. There was a report yesterday where they were just talking about -- which some of it is close to the mark but not quite there, but yeah, just try and expand on -- I think if the PGA TOUR are going to play from February through to August, DP World Tour have five months where, with the help of the PGA TOUR and maybe some others, can really shine and really shine a spotlight on international golf and put on some of the biggest sort of international events in golf.

Q. Bearing in mind that it's new and it's still two years off, what do you think two straight weeks, four days each of match play is going to demand of players once that comes around?

RORY McILROY: I don't think it'll demand any more than what we already do. We play three weeks in a row here with Memphis and BMW and this week. I don't think it'll -- I think as well, it seems like the ambition is to go to golf courses that maybe have a smaller footprint anyway so

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maybe they're not as big and could be a little shorter. I don't think it'll be much more of a demand on anyone.

Q. You called it a big swing. We're in year 20 of the FedExCup playoffs. Do you think they've been successful? Do you think players have been motivated enough this time of year? Do you think fans have been properly engaged over two decades of the post-season?

RORY McILROY: I've certainly enjoyed them (smiling). I think they've been great for players. Obviously we play for a ton of money, and it's sort of like the culmination of the entire season.

The players have been rewarded. I think what the TOUR are really trying to do is listen to the fans and what they want, and I think this idea of match play over two weeks is something that came mostly from what the people that watch golf wanted, so I think that's a really good thing.

The FedExCup playoffs, I think some years maybe more than others they've worked, depending on how close it's been. It's obviously went through so many different iterations of structures. It was four playoff tournaments; it's now three. The points were quadrupled at one point for the playoffs; they're now the same as what they are for the regular season. There's been a lot of changes to it, but all with the ambition to try to get it right.

But I think what they've tried to do here is get away from -- coming from Europe, I've always argued does golf need playoffs. Yes, I get that other sports have playoffs, but arguably golf has its playoffs, they're just not at the end of the season, they're sort of interspersed in the middle of the season with the major championships. I think this is a more exciting way to end the PGA TOUR season.

Q. Entirely different, you've mentioned a couple times how venues matter. It matters where you win your golf tournaments. When the TOUR is looking at where they should be staging this TOUR championship for the two weeks, what should they be looking at? What's important to a player in terms of venue and prestige when we go to these sort of places?

RORY McILROY: I think history. History is a big part of it. Even you take the U.S. Amateur last week at Merion, watching that on TV was really cool. I'm not saying that that's what the TOUR Championship is going to be like, but if you think of places like Merion, you think of some of the courses that the USGA have sort of had a monopoly on over the past 50 to 100 years, places that the PGA TOUR either haven't went to or maybe sometimes can't go to, those are the sort of courses -- especially if we're going to

go to a smaller footprint and a limited size of crowd, you can all of a sudden go to some of these historic venues, and especially playing match play. It doesn't matter, you can go to a 6600-yard golf course and par is irrelevant. I like that idea as well.

Yeah, I'd say some of the historic courses and courses that typically the PGA TOUR hasn't went to.

Q. What would be your dream venue for the match play?

RORY McILROY: It's hard. There's dream venues, but those dream venues I just don't think are a possibility. Like if you were to say Pine Valley, but I just don't think Pine Valley are going to want to host the PGA TOUR --

Q. What about realistically?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. Again, there's geographical -- could you do like Olympic Club, or could you do -- I'm trying to think of West Coast. If it's going to be one week on the West Coast, one week on the East Coast, you could do Olympic Club and Baltusrol. I don't know. But those sort of older, traditional golf courses that have hosted big major championships.

Q. Brian mentioned the possibility of the 15-event requirement maybe changing or going away altogether --

RORY McILROY: No way. Really? (Smiling.)

Q. What you did this year, is this a one-off, or do you think this will be pretty typical?

RORY McILROY: I think the thing is I play at least 22 times around the world in a calendar year, which is as much if not more than some of the other top players in the world. It's just that I limit my schedule in the U.S. because I have a heavy schedule in the fall internationally.

I would like to keep that number around that same mark, like 20 to 22 events. That seems to be a good number for me. If I'm committed to playing that sort of heavier schedule in the fall to go over to the DP World Tour and support that, then yeah, my schedule on the PGA TOUR is going to be quite light compared to some others.

Q. To ask you again about the fall and the DP World Tour angle, do you envision more guys taking up dual membership with that plan, or is that the hope? Or is it more just you're hoping to pick off some guys to play a handful of events?

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RORY McILROY: Well, I would hope so. I think with what the PGA TOUR has been through with changing its competitive model and its structure, I think if the DP World Tour could do something similar, where you host all of your best events in that five-month time frame, it would allow guys to take up membership, to then have something to play for at the end of the DP World Tour season, if they choose to do that.

Because this TOUR is not starting until February it looks like in 2028, that means you could put the final events of the DP World Tour season in January. So people could actually go over, whether it's to the Middle East or elsewhere, to play those final two events, if that was something that was interesting to them, and then also could be at their first couple of events of the season to make sure they're ready to go for the Championship Series in 2028.

Q. This time of the year as the season is coming to a close, tour pros are getting their first look at new products, new drivers for the coming year. I know Taylor Made is changing their cadence on products.

RORY McILROY: Two-year cycle.

Q. You've tried to get into the new stuff. I know it's got to be tough for tour pros, especially when you have a driver that you like, being told to try to get into something new. How much are you going to enjoy next year knowing that you've had success this year with Qi4D, and did the tour pros have any say on extending the cadence of product?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think all of us have a big say in that. I think all of us really want it. You think about you really like a driver you're playing, and then something else is put in your hand say in October, November time, so nine or ten months after you get your driver, and it's like -- the thing is, all the manufacturers do a great job of fitting you into what is the best product for you, but they're all slightly different.

Thankfully I found a really good one that I like at the minute, but we call them snowflakes, like one Qi4D with the same head, the same loft, same weighting, I'm on the exact same, to me sometimes just doesn't feel quite the same. It could be me, it could be a mental thing that I have. But I think being able to use the same driver for say like an 18-month period I think just gives guys a little bit more of a level of comfort.

The other thing is these drivers only last for about 18 months anyway. The heads go. I've obviously fallen foul of that at the PGA last year, Scottie as well. You really can

only play a driver for a year to a year and a half before you've got to switch it out anyway.

Q. At the time of your career, well-accomplished, four majors at the time, what did winning the FedExCup mean to you? You weren't always the best player that year some of the times.

RORY McILROY: Thanks. I did win the most money, though.

I would say I had a really good chance to win in 2012, and I didn't win. I had a really good chance to win in 2014 and didn't win. 2016 was very meaningful for me --

Q. Just because you hadn't --

RORY McILROY: Because I hadn't. It was something that I hadn't accomplished in the game. And yeah, I didn't have the best year in 2016 in terms of other guys had bigger years, whether it was Jason Day or Jordan or DJ or whoever it was at the time. But that meant a lot to me.

Then in '19, Brooks was the best player in the world at that point. We played in the final twosome together, and I was able to go out and beat him in that, which was a big deal for me at the time as well.

Then again in '22, I was up against Scottie in that final group and overcame like a six-shot deficit or whatever it was.

They've all been meaningful in their own ways. But yeah, you could argue that each of the FedExCups I've won I maybe wasn't the best player of the entire year, but I always felt like it was a way to redeem myself or end the year on a really positive note.

Q. How might this feel different considering you have to get there, which shouldn't be a problem, but who knows, and then go through basically seven days, three days of advancing and four days of tough? Would it make it any more meaningful or add any more definition to it?

RORY McILROY: I think so. I think if anything, it feels like it's going to be such a standalone event. You're going to be crowned the TOUR champion, but it's not going to be -- the season-long champion is going to be crowned at the stroke-play event at the end of the year, whatever that is.

I just feel like this new format is just going to be its own -- it's just going to be like its own deal. Yeah, it's going to be great to get through the match play and progress through rounds and stuff, but I don't think you can sort of put your

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hand up to say -- if you got in and you were the 32nd seed, I don't think you could put your hand up and say "I was the best player of the season" if you go ahead and win the TOUR Championship.

It's went through so many different iterations and changes. But again, something only has meaning because of the meaning that you place on it, right? Some years it becomes more meaningful, and other years it mightn't be because you've maybe accomplished something else or you've placed importance or something else. Again, it ebbs and flows.

Q. It didn't come up today about the rollback of the golf ball, but I'm curious, it sounds like there's some more talk going on. Are you encouraged by that, or do you feel like we're wasting another few years?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I'd say maybe a year or two ago I was getting a little impatient and I was like, please, somebody, just do something. But I think that was to look at it a little bit too simplistically. Surely we can just do something about the golf ball, everyone will go back 10 or 15 yards.

But I think from the research that the TOUR has done, and again, like Cameron Young and now Gary Woodland played the golf ball last week, the Pro V1 Double Dot, that would be a conforming golf ball if it were the 2028 or 2030 rules.

I just think the manufacturers are so good that the governing bodies can put rules in place, but they're going to find ways to get around them. I just think there needs to be more thought being put into it. I think what is a good thing is it seems like the governing bodies and the manufacturers and the PGA TOUR are being a little bit more collaborative in terms of what they can do.

Yes, it may take a couple extra years to figure out what the need is, but I think everyone agrees that the equipment needs to be regulated. It needs to be regulated. It just can't keep carrying on at the rate it's going. Not at the elite level. Leave amateurs alone. Bifurcate. I'm all for bifurcation. But I think at this level, to keep some of those golf courses relevant that we want to go to and we're talking about, I think equipment, whether that's ball, whether that's club, whatever that means, I think it has to be regulated to a higher degree than it is at the minute.

Q. Scottie said last week that he had hand, foot and mouth disease, which is something typically you get from young kids. As a father with a young daughter yourself, I wonder if in your career you ever experienced something similar or if you could share a

little bit about what you've learned from a top golfer with young children and living this kind of life?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I heard that on Sunday. I know he said something. I was getting lunch yesterday and the first person I saw that was putting food on his plate beside me was Scottie, so I was like: Are you okay? Are you fine? Are you feeling better?

Yeah, kids bring stuff home from school. They bring stuff home from day care out here. I think anyone that's had children, it's a part of it. That's the only way that they're going to build up their own immunities. Unfortunately the parents fall foul of that at times. But that's part of life. You're going to get little viruses and little things that happen.

But it obviously affected Scottie for the first couple days last week, but he seemed to play and feel a bit better at the weekend. Hopefully he feels back 100 percent this week.

Q. First hole last year plays the hardest. Can you talk about what makes it so difficult tee to green?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's a really tough starting hole. You've got -- it was always a tough starting hole, but even since the renovation, there's a little bit of rough that comes in on the right side, which is -- if you get caught on that, then the trees on the right side of the hole catch you out sometimes.

But left isn't any good either. Obviously you've got OB left, and then you've got the bunker as well. Then the green is just so much more penal than it used to be, that falloff on the back left. It's not a very nice opening hole. But it's one that if you can just make four fours on, you're pretty happy.

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