

THE PLAYERS Championship

Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference

Q. Hi, Rory. Thanks for your time as always. Two tests of your memory, if I could, please. How much confidence do you take from the way you finished winning this tournament in 2019, the last four holes in particular? And also your memories of Tiger's Masters win in '97, please. I know you were only 7 at the time, but I think you probably would have been watching.

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I would have been. Yeah, I think, to close out this golf tournament the way I did in '19, the birdie on 15, and then to hit a shot like that out of that bunker and then the birdie on 16, to hit that drive, hit a very solid iron shot into 17 and make 3 there, and then the drive up 18 to sort of finish it off, yeah, that's -- I look back, and I see myself, not in complete control of my game because there were still some loose shots in here and there, but it was certainly good enough to get the job done.

I talked about it in the other press conference I just did there, just about trusting commitment around here, and I think I just showed a lot of trust and commitment in myself to hit the shots I needed to hit whenever coming down the stretch to try to win the golf tournament.

Yeah, that's sort of what you need to do in every golf tournament, but especially around here when there's a lot of trouble and visually it's quite intimidating off some of these tees. To have full trust and commitment in what you're doing is very important.

Then '97 Masters, yeah, I watched it all. He shot 40 on the front nine on Thursday, came back in 30, and then just completely blitzed the field after that. I remember him hitting wedge like into 15 both days on Friday and Saturday. Yeah, it was just a complete master class. I think he shot -- so he shot 30 on the back nine on Thursday, then I think he went like 66, 65 on Friday, Saturday. Then he closed with like a 69 on Sunday.

Yeah, I remember a lot of it. I remember being so excited to sit down and watch it. BBC was still covering it. At that point, you're still only seeing the back nine. You never really saw the front nine at that point. Yeah, I remember



sitting on the sofa with my dad and watching it and being able to stay up late to watch him win on a Sunday night before having to go to school on Monday.

Q. Did you have to beg to stay up late, or was your dad cool with it?

RORY MCILROY: No, my dad was pretty -- I think he knew when to -- he pick and chose his battles. That was one that he probably didn't want to fight over.

Q. First one, a lot of people enjoy watching you because they're never 100 percent sure what they're going to see, totally brilliant or maybe not. You as a player, do you ever wish you were more boring as a player?

RORY MCILROY: Not really. I think my -- I mean, my record speaks for itself. Yeah, you're going to have -- I mean, everyone has highs. Everyone has lows. But I've basically got a 50 percent top ten record in my career, and that is a pretty high level of consistency.

Yes, okay, could I have won more tournaments? Of course I could have won more tournaments, but so could everyone. Everyone could say that. Sometimes you need the lows to learn about what you need to do to go forward. I've always welcomed those low times because that's where growth comes from. That's where improvement comes from and reassessing where you are. I feel like in life you need those low times to sort of figure out, okay, this is where I am. This is what I need to do to go forward, and you just keep trying to go forward.

Q. Obviously, there's an incredible prize for this week up again. Do you think golfers are fairly remunerated? Do they earn too much? Where are you on that?

RORY MCILROY: I think we're paid as much as people are willing to pay us, I guess. You can say the same thing about footballers or any other athletes. It's like you could argue that they're paid too little or too much, but you're only worth what people are willing to pay you.

I'd say at this point we're pretty fairly -- we're fairly paid. The top guys earn a lot of money, and I think that's right. Even the guys that are not at the top, they still earn a



really, really good living. I think it's a good structure.

Q. When would be the last time you thought of money on a golf course?

RORY MCILROY: It's been a while. At this point, like I'd -- yeah, it's not about that. I think when -- I think when the conversation turns to it, so like at the end of the season, you've got these FedExCup bonuses and stuff, it's in there. But at the end of the day, you're just trying to win a golf tournament. Whether that pays you whatever, a million dollars or one pound or whatever it is, it's trying to win a golf tournament. So it certainly doesn't enter my head.

Q. I just want to ask you one question, and you've been asked this a couple times really tonight or today. In the bigger picture, what has Tiger Woods meant to the game of golf?

RORY MCILROY: Not totally everything, but I think the game of golf is going to outlive us all. There's certainly players in the history of the game that they leave their mark more than others. Tiger's left more of a mark on this game, I think, than anyone else basically in the history, especially since golf has become a profession and professional golfers have become sort of bigger.

So I think the fact that he is a person of color and what that brings to the table in terms of golf being a more acceptable sport to play if you're from a certain ethnic background, I think that has been -- that's left a huge mark on the game. I certainly think the game is more diverse because of him. And just his play in general and the excitement he created around the game of golf, he was, I'd say in his pomp in early 2000s, he was probably the most famous man in the world.

We, as his colleagues and peers, we've all benefited from that. He made golf, professional golf at the highest level a very, very attractive thing to be involved in. TV paid more. Sponsors paid more. And then all of a sudden, his peers and colleagues and other players were getting paid more because of that.

I think we all have to be very thankful for Tiger Woods and when he came along, and we should all be very fortunate that we played at a time that he was around because we've all benefited from him.

Q. Speaking of legends, on a sad note, in all your years playing the Dunhill Links, how well did you get to know Shane Warne?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, I got to know Shane very well. I spent some good times with him. Really, really sad. He

was the life of the party, lit up a room, loved golf. He was really, really good mates with some of my good friends. Yeah, it's just a real shame that he's gone so early, I think only 52.

I think he leaves three kids behind as well, which is sad. Yeah, I think we all have really fond memories of him. Obviously, one of the best cricketers ever. Yeah, really sad, but anyone you meet just had great things to say about him. So he'll be missed but very fondly remembered.

Q. I was just wondering, with Tiger being inducted into the Hall of Fame this week, what aspects of his game or the way he goes about his business do you most admire or maybe wish you could incorporate into your own game or maybe even already incorporated into your own game?

RORY MCILROY: I think just everything. I think his level of detail, I think his creativity, his imagination, his fearlessness to take on shots, just everything. He was a real student of the game. He really studied everything more than probably anyone would ever know. I think he just immersed himself in golf to try to be the best player he could possibly be. He took that to different levels that had never been seen before.

Definitely the golf that he played in the early 2000s is the best the game's ever been played, in my opinion. Yeah, geez, I think everyone would love to incorporate some of Tiger Woods' game into their own. I think that goes without saying. Yeah, he was my inspiration, and I certainly tried to model part of my game off him. There's certainly things that I'd love to have.

I think one of his biggest attributes was his head and his mind and how good he was in that regard, and that's something I'm always still trying to work on. I think I've got most of the physical aspects down, but the -- he was certainly head and shoulders above the rest when it came to the mental side of things. That's something I'd love to try to keep improving on and try to incorporate into my own game.

Q. Just as a quick follow-up, how have the strengths and weaknesses of your own game changed since you turned pro? Are your strengths still the same strengths and your weaknesses still the same weaknesses?

RORY MCILROY: I think I've picked away on my weaknesses quite a bit. I'd say the one big weakness that I had coming out was probably my putting more, but my putting's been -- I've been consistently pretty good with my

putting now for a few years, I feel. Like we're all going to miss putts and we're all going to miss putts that we think we should make and all that, but I think consistency-wise I've been a lot better.

Yeah, the strengths are still there. I've always driven the ball well. I've always been able to hit long irons well. Yeah, I've tried to pick -- you sort of have to -- I think in this game you have to keep your strengths as strong as possible and not -- certainly not neglect your weaknesses, but you just sort of chip away at your weaknesses.

Everyone's got foundations in their golf game which make them great, and I think I realized that from a pretty young age. So I had to make sure to keep the strengths as strong as possible and then just sort of try to chip away at the rest of the stuff because, if you start to neglect what makes you great, you sort of go nowhere.

You see these guys that are really, really good players and maybe rely on their wedges and their short game, and then they try to hit the ball longer and they start to really try and work on that. Then they sort of neglect their strength a little bit, then they sort of end up in no man's land. I've tried to always, tried to steer away from that because you can sort of lose your identity a little bit when you try to go down that route.

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