

THE PLAYERS Championship

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference

Q. Just some opening comments on being back at THE PLAYERS?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, always good to be back here. It seems like this tournament sort of gets bigger and better every year, conditioning of the golf course, the facilities. Seems like they're always sort of reinvesting into this tournament. Yeah, great to be back.

Obviously we had some dicey weather at the start of the week, but the golf course looks like it's in perfect shape and should be ideal by Thursday.

Yeah, it's a fun week. It's always a tough test. Yeah, excited to be back and excited to get going.

Q. What was your reaction when you saw Tiger's news yesterday?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. It sucks. Yeah, he doesn't have much luck when it comes to injuries and his body. Obviously he was trying to ramp up to get ready for Augusta, and achilles surgeries obviously aren't fun. Hoping he's in good spirits and hoping he's doing okay.

We obviously won't see him play golf this year, and hopefully we see him maybe play in 2026.

Q. Could you see him coming back competitive?

RORY McILROY: He'll try. I know he'll try. But that's a question for him, not for me. I obviously don't know what's in his head. But judging by prior behavior, he'll definitely try.

Q. This golf course seems to not suit any type of player over the years. Scottie is the only guy who's ever defended. Guys do great and then they don't do so great. Yourself, any sense as to what you did right when you won, and have you not always been able to duplicate that?

RORY McILROY: I think you just have to be so on your



game here. I think that's the main key. It's such a course on execution, and if you're not executing like 100 percent, you leave yourself in spots where it's really tough to get up-and-down.

I saw someone say yesterday, you can hit one ball in the water and then the very next shot you're faced with the same shot. Mistakes can compound here pretty quickly, so you really just have to be on your game and execute as well as you can. I think more than any other course that we play, that's what it demands. You have to hit the ball where you're looking, and if you can do that, you can do well here.

Visually it's intim -- if you're uncomfortable with a certain type of shot, and visually it's very demanding so it makes you uncomfortable, as well. It's one of the best tests of the year for sure.

Q. Have you gone out to 6 to see the tree yet?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I played it yesterday.

Q. How did it go?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's good. In a way, it forces you to play the shot. It sort of frames it for you really nicely. You have to flight it a little bit, especially when you play practice rounds all the tee markers are hanging off the back of the box, so I'd say the tee box won't be as far back as I played it yesterday, but you still got to hit it a little -- I certainly have to hit it a little lower than my preferred launch window.

Q. A lot of guys handle being No. 1 differently. Some feel the pressure, some it's like a hot potato. How do you feel about it? And talk about how Scottie has handled it the way he has.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, look, it's one thing to get to the No. 1 spot in the world, and then it's another to stay there. I think to stay there almost requires more commitment. I think that's what Scottie does so well. He's so committed to his craft, and he's always working. He's always trying to get better, and we're all trying to get better to keep up with him.



But he's obviously handled it amazingly well. He seems like he doesn't really care about anything else apart from just trying to be a good golfer and doing the best that he can. He's got a great attitude towards it.

Q. How hard is it when you get to that level of success, obviously there's a lot more trappings that come with it. Is it hard to couple all that external stuff with your golf?

RORY McILROY: I don't think Scottie cares about fame at all. But yeah, I've talked about trying to separate the two parts of yourself and trying to be the sort of normal person, but also do what we do. Yeah, sometimes -- like I've struggled at times where I shoot a bad score and I feel like I'm a bad person, and I shoot a good score and I feel like I'm a good person.

I think more than any other sport, it's very hard to separate the two sides of it. But as I said, I think Scottie does a really good job with that. He gets to the golf course, he's fully committed to doing what he does, then he seems to have a really good ability to forget about it once he leaves.

Q. Talk about the clubs in the bag this week.

RORY McILROY: 14 clubs, hopefully not 15. Yeah, it's the same setup I had on Sunday.

Q. Will that be it for the Masters?

RORY McILROY: That's the plan.

Q. Was it the same wedge setup you had earlier this year?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I just went back to the four wedges again.

Q. Is it tough to try to tinker with your bag when you've got the big part of the season coming up?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, in a way. But you're always looking for a little edge, and for me it was like, Okay, if I can find something that goes 300, that would be great, just for -- not just for what's coming -- for a lot of golf courses we go to nowadays, it seems like fairways pinch in at like 310, 320, which is just awkward enough for me to hit driver. But then if I hit 3-wood 285, 290, I feel like I'm not quite pushing it up there as far as I can. If I have to hit 7-iron into a green instead of 8-iron, I'll deal with it.

Q. You kind of mentioned the 12-month club cycle at Bay Hill. Has that ever been a problem for you over the years as companies are trying to promote new

equipment and use the players they pay to help out, and you're trying to win tournaments?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. Yeah. Some years you vibe with a new piece of equipment a little easier. Like that Qi10 that I'm using that they brought out last year, it was like love at first sight. I was like, this thing is amazing. I think when you feel like that about a golf club, it's very hard to change into something else.

It ebbs and flows. Sometimes it's easier -- some years it's easier than others. Look, they're all businesses and they're all trying to make money and innovate and try to be better. So I understand why the cycle is the way it is.

Q. Are you ever under pressure?

RORY McILROY: No, never. No.

Q. Recently it's looked like you're closer to you're A-game than you have been for a while. Do you feel like that at the moment?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it feels good. I'd say even the two finishes post-Pebble have been almost like the worst that they could be. I finished bad on Sunday at Bay Hill. I finished bad on Sunday at Torrey Pines, as well.

But the one thing I would say is from the turnaround in my putting from Torrey to Bay Hill was great. I finished, I think, fifth in putting last week, so to see that turn around was really encouraging. That's something for me to be really encouraged about going into this week, obviously, and then the next few months.

Q. As somebody who's involved in TGL himself, how much attention do you pay attention to the YouTube generation here like the Fat Perezes, Grant Horvat -- do you look at that at all?

RORY McILROY: Not really. I'm not of that generation. I'd much rather watch pure competitive -- I'd much rather watch this tournament on Saturday and Sunday than watch YouTube golf.

Q. Is there any fascination with how many eyeballs are on that stuff right now?

RORY McILROY: I'm happy for the people that enjoy it, but I enjoy something else.

Q. One of the catchphrases in the last couple weeks of the negotiation stuff is just getting the best players in the world together more often. Regardless of how these things end up, what would be a good number do



you think that would appease fans of times playing together?

RORY McILROY: You'd have to ask the fans. I don't know.

Q. You're a fan. You watch on Saturday and Sunday.

RORY McILROY: Hopefully I'm not watching Saturday and Sunday. (Laughter.)

I would say it's more than four, and it's probably -- my thing is for golf to stay where it is and be relevant, it needs to be -- like say we're trying to go for this -- the worldwide, it's a year-round calendar. It's got to be once a month if not more. I think 12 times a year or maybe a smidge higher than that I think would be a good number.

But again, that's -- yeah.

Q. Does it need to be worldwide?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think there's an opportunity for it to be worldwide. Yeah, I feel like golf isn't just played in America. It didn't start in America. It's played in a lot of other places in the world.

Look, the main source of capital for professional golf is in America, so the reason that tournaments are primarily and the bigger tournaments are primarily here is because of corporate America and the dollars that it brings into the game to fund some of the biggest championships in the world.

But I think there is an opportunity to have some of the bigger tournaments outside of America. Like I've always been a worldwide player. I play all around the world. I start my year in the Middle East. I come over here. I go to the UK. After the FedExCup Playoffs I go back to Europe and play four or five events.

Yeah, there's an opportunity. I think we need bigger events in Australia. I think the Australian Open needs to be put up and sort of held to a higher -- the Australian Open was always a very big tournament back in the day, and I think that could be one that could be elevated along with some others.

But yeah, I think there's certainly an opportunity there to be a little more global and worldwide.

Q. Do you even think any of that is being part of the discussion right now, or are we even at that point? Do you think the global idea is part of the TOUR's --

RORY McILROY: Look, the DP World Tour are part of this, so that's the international tour. They've always been a part. The narrative has always been PGA TOUR and PIF, but the DP World Tour were in that framework agreement, too. That's a part of it, as well.

Q. You saw Tiger during the TGL season. Did you get a sense that at least he was focusing on his swing during the TGL season?

RORY McILROY: Well, he said he'd only touched a club three times or something, so I wouldn't say he'd have been necessarily close. But he was obviously trying to get closer by ramping up and training and practicing and doing whatever he was doing. Yeah, I'd say he was trying to catch up on some lost time there.

Q. You've been relatively injury-free minus a few soccer games and what have you. How do you see your career winding down? You've got time, yet you hit a certain age where you're not quite as good anymore. How do you come to grips when you get to an age --

RORY McILROY: I'll be okay with that. I'm very happy to move aside for the younger generation to come through.

I look at other sports, and I've had an unbelievable -- I turned pro in 2007. I'm 18 years into a career. Not a lot of athletes can say they've had an 18-year career, and I'm only 35.

I can acknowledge how lucky golfers are to be able to do what they do for so long compared to other athletes, so whenever I feel like the time is right, I'll have no problem moving aside and letting the next generation do their thing.

Q. How do you think you'll know?

RORY McILROY: I think when I've achieved everything I want to achieve in the game and I get to the point where I don't think I can maybe do that anymore. I'd also like to walk away with a little bit left in the tank. I don't want to be out there embarrassing myself. I'd like to walk away maybe a little before I should. Put it that way.

There's always one more, but that's okay. I think if you can come to terms with that and walk away on your own terms, then that's a good thing.

Q. If Champions Tour is played like it is now, would you still have the burn to --

RORY McILROY: Absolutely not. I will not play Champions Tour golf. Look, I've said a lot of absolutes in



my time that I've walked back, but I do not envision playing Champions Tour golf. Something has went terribly wrong if I have to compete at golf at 50.

Q. How important do you think it is to have events to have influencers come out and play these iconic courses, especially for the younger fans that have so much content available at their hands nowadays?

RORY McILROY: It's important for them. That's good. Again, I don't feel like I'm of the generation, but I can obviously see the intrigue and the -- look, it's cool for some people, but I don't think it's quite for my generation.

Q. You've got the 6th hole with the tree there. You were there with the old tree there. What other adjustments did you have to make? Is it just like the old tree or are there little differences?

RORY McILROY: You've got to hit it a lot lower. It frames the entire tee box. It's sort of like you're hitting under, I guess, like a bridge or hitting through a tunnel almost. Yeah, you've got to be a little aware of your launch angle and make sure you don't get the ball too high at the start.

Q. It's similar to the pre-2014 tree?

RORY McILROY: No, I think it's better and it forces you to hit more of a particular shot.

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