

THE PLAYERS Championship

Monday, March 17, 2025

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome the winner of THE PLAYERS Championship Rory McIlroy to the media center. If you could start us off with a few comments on how it feels to be a two-time champion at THE PLAYERS Championship at TPC Sawgrass.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it feels amazing. Someone just asked me there how was my morning, and I said, it was stressful. But yeah, no, I'm super happy, super proud to win this event for a second time. Not a lot of people have done that over the 51 years of THE PLAYERS.

I go back to 2009 when I first set eyes on this golf course, and it certainly wasn't love at first sight. I've had to learn to play this golf course and adapt my game to it in some ways. Yeah, to win for a second time is awesome.

Q. Today wasn't a traditional finish. We're here on a Monday, a Monday playoff, and we had a lot of fans out there. Can you touch on the atmosphere for a Monday morning at THE PLAYERS Championship?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it was incredible. I was walking up 16 fairway, and I turned to my caddie Harry, and I was like, I can't believe how many people are here. Obviously no one works in Jacksonville. (Laughter.)

Yeah, it was amazing. I didn't expect there to be so many people out there today. It created a great atmosphere. Certainly J.J. and I really appreciated that.

Q. For someone whose driving was kind of on and off all week, the tee shot on 16 looked like it was close to perfect and set the tone for the day.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it really did, yeah. It was sort of nice when we were warming up on the range, the wind direction was sorta similar to 16. I hit a few extra drivers just knowing that that would be a key shot, knowing that I had the honor, as well.

I thought if I could get the ball in the fairway there, it sort of puts a little bit of pressure on J.J., and yeah, to step up and make that swing was awesome.

As you said, sort of struggling with the driver a bit this week, as well.

Q. On the 9-iron on 17, what kind of shot were you trying to hit, flight-wise, wind-wise, everything?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so again, I practiced this shot on the range. I just turned around and basically hit balls towards the 3rd green just to sort of replicate the wind I was going to get on 17.

I had the TrackMan out, and I have this little three-quarter three-quarter shot, and my 9-iron goes 147 with that shot. But with the wind it was going right around that 130 number, which was the number I really wanted to hit it on 17. So I knew even before I got up there, I knew that was the shot I was going to hit.

But I felt like it was a little more sheltered by the green than it was on the tee. When my ball was in the air, I was telling it to get down, and obviously J.J. hit his up in the air, I couldn't believe that it went straight through the wind like that.

Yeah, it was tricky to judge, but I sort of had that shot in my head, that little three-quarter, three-quarter 9-iron, and made a good swing at it.

Q. Just wondering whose idea it was to turn around and hit the balls towards 3 when you were warming up. Was it you or Harry?

RORY McILROY: I'll take the credit for that one yeah, no, that was me. I think, as well, this week it's been a challenge. I've went down to the back end of the range sometimes and been hitting the ball like in a left-to-right wind.

It's hard to obviously get both winds when you're warming up, but there were so many crosswinds this week that that was -- I'd go down to the back end of the range because I knew that that was the same direction as like the first tee shot, so I sort of liked knowing what that first tee shot is



going to do.

But then you turn around on the second hole and it's completely different and it's the first shot you've hit in that wind. It can be a little bit tricky. Seeing there was no one around this morning, it was nice to be able to just turn around and hit those shots in the wind I felt like there was going to be on 17.

Q. After you won Pebble, you talked about trying to play more conservative and limit mistakes. Did that pursuit of trying to do that this year help this week with maybe struggling with the driver a little bit, struggling with the swing?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think there's that part of it, where I'm just trying to get the ball in play any way I can. But then also I feel like this week, because there's so much trouble, just picking really conservative targets, especially with iron shots.

Like even with 16 in the playoff there I had a wedge in my hand, but I am still aiming 30 feet left of the hole. I'm not going at it.

I think all of that combined, you know, with the fact that I feel like I'm controlling my ball much better in the wind these days, I think that's a big part of it, as well.

Q. Yesterday after the round was over you lamented not closing the door, but now that you've gone through this playoff on a Monday morning, how much do you feel that that could benefit you in case -- at majors or whenever you get into a playoff. How much of a benefit from that? As a follow-up, did you feel comfortable that the wind was gusting as much as it was?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, honestly, standing over that tee shot on 16 this morning is the most nervous I've been in a long time. So I think that will stand to me, feeling like that and being able to hit the golf shots that I need while your stomach is sort of not feeling great and your legs are a little shaky and your heart rate is racing.

To have to go through that today, it's nice to have that in recent memory for some of the tournaments coming up for sure.

Then I would have preferred not to have played in such gusty conditions this morning. I'm definitely thankful that we didn't have to play 18 holes in that. It was only three.

But yeah, that was as tough as the course had played all week I felt like.

Q. Along those lines, how much work is required in maintaining or improving your mindset? And can you give us a sense of how you try to do that in the next three weeks?

RORY McILROY: I think just double down on what I'm doing. Double down on the work that I've been doing at home. Double down on the conversations I've been having with Bob Rotella, all that sort of stuff. It's just continuing to do the same things.

I'm feeling really comfortable, as I said, with how I'm flighting my ball in the wind. I feel like I'm always trying to refine what I have. I'm certainly a proponent of if it's not broken don't try to fix it. Everything feels like it's in good working order at the minute.

Yeah, as I said, just keep practicing and doing the right things and practicing the right habits, and day after day, week after week, they all add up to days like today.

Q. You said that you feel a more complete player at the moment than you have at any stage of your career. What is it you think you've added or improved on significantly?

RORY McILROY: I'm a better putter. I'm better around the greens. I can flight my ball better in the wind. My ability to shape shots both ways. Yeah, I'd say those are the things. Really I'm managing myself more around -- by no means did I have my best stuff this week, but I was still able to win one of the biggest tournaments in the world. That's a huge thing.

Q. You were asked about the legacy. As somebody who's won this twice and won more than one major and you knew straightaway the company you were in, were you aware of that going out or was that something --

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I'd seen it. I'd seen it somewhere, that Jack, Tiger and Scottie were the only three with multiple PLAYERS and multiple majors. It's a nice club to be a part of.

Q. Obviously we all know how hard it is to win, but in your case, it almost seems like when you get there and you're up there like you were yesterday, there's an expectation that you're supposed to. I'm just wondering if that's even unfair. Obviously you put yourself there a lot. If you'd have just shot, say, 71 yesterday, you're not even in the conversation and nobody really thinks about it. But you pushed yourself in front and then you almost seemed disappointed last

night. I'm just wondering how that works for you.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I think when I put myself in that position and I'm leading by three with six holes to go, I expect myself to win. It's more my expectations rather than anyone else.

When you don't get it done -- I was disappointed that I needed to come back this morning, but I didn't -- I couldn't let that mind frame linger for too long, and I had to reset and try to get a good night's sleep and come out this morning committed to get the job done.

That was the thing; I got here just as early as I would get here for an 18-hole round and went through my full warm-up. I was in the gym at 6:15 and went through my whole workout. I gave myself plenty of time and did all the things I had to do to get myself ready, and I went out there and hit the shots that I needed to in the end.

Q. You're closing in on 30 PGA TOUR wins and obviously if you probably had only played over here, you might be well past it. Do you even see anybody coming close to that down the road? When you look at that number now, it's pretty rare air these days.

RORY McILROY: Yeah. I don't know. Scottie keeps having nine-win seasons, he's going to get there pretty quick.

Sure, I'm sure there's -- some guys have the ability to certainly get there. But all I can do is focus on myself and try to keep playing the best golf that I can.

I mean, there's no reason why others can't. You put the work in and you do the right things, you're able to do some pretty cool stuff.

Q. You talked about resetting. How different were you feeling last night versus this morning?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I would say I was a little disappointed last night, but I also was mindful that I couldn't feel that way, that I needed to reset. Once I got back to the hotel, I just tried to sort of forget about it and had some room service, watched a little bit of Devil Wears Prada and went to bed. That was basically it.

Then when I woke up this morning -- I woke up at 3:00 this morning and couldn't get back to sleep, so I was -- I was as nervous as I can remember.

So yeah, there's a lot of thoughts that are racing through your head and you're trying not to look at your phone and you're trying to sleep, but I was up.

I was a little anxious this morning, and I just knew I needed to get off to a good start, especially I knew the wind was going to be up. I knew some of those shots were going to be really, really tough. I just -- I was just really focused on trying to make good swings.

I said it last night, but I really just needed to make five good swings today, and I made three good swings on 16 and 17, and that was basically enough to get it done.

Q. You've been backing off a lot of shots this week. Do you think you're doing that more than you normally do, or is it a concerted effort?

RORY McILROY: No, it's just the wind is so gusty, and you just get a gust, and I'm standing over it like do I back off, do I not back off. I don't know, I seem to back off more than others maybe, and I don't know if I'm just more sensitive to the wind or the gusts than some others.

But when it gets gusty like that, yeah, I do, I want to feel totally comfortable when I'm over the ball and pulling the trigger.

Q. In one of your interviews out on the green, you told Harry that this little shot would take you far. Just wondering why you believe that and if you feel like controlling the ball better in the wind is what has been behind that improvement for you.

RORY McILROY: Again, going back to the ball change earlier in the year, it's sort of forced me to play more shots like that. It's a little spinnier ball. It launches a touch lower. So if I get it up in the wind with the spin, the variation of distance can be quite a bit.

The ball change has really forced me to do that, and the first time I worked on it a lot was at Pebble Beach, and we had to contend with some really windy conditions there at the weekend and played well in that.

Look, we play an outdoor sport for the most part, apart from Mondays and Tuesday nights, that you're going to have to contend with the wind and you're going to have to -- I think back to the second round at Augusta last year, it was so gusty. I maybe didn't have all the shots that were required to go out and shoot something under par that day.

When the conditions come like that, I just feel like I'm a lot better prepared to handle them, especially it's always been okay off the tee, but it's fighting the sort of wedges and short irons, which have been the issue, and I feel like I've been able to rectify that.

Q. Why do you think you were so nervous this morning?

RORY McILROY: I think I -- I said this out on the green, too. But I think back in '19 I maybe didn't appreciate how big this tournament was and how much it meant.

Every time we come back to this tournament, it gets bigger and better each and every year, from the golf course to the facility for the players, to the facilities for the fans. I don't want to put any sort of label on it, but it is one of the biggest championships in the world. I think that was part of the reason.

Because I didn't get it done last night and I really wanted to, I think that was -- and as well, look, I'm going out there today and going back to a point, I'm expected to win, as well. That brings its own pressure in some way.

But I felt like I handled everything and handled those nerves really well.

Q. J.J. told us that he's had times in his career where he's been afraid of the moment, essentially not wanting to get his heartbroken again. You've talked a lot about your resilience throughout the course of your career. Does his line of thinking resonate with you at all?

RORY McILROY: Absolutely. I think we've all had periods where we've felt like that. I've had to go through it. I've had my heart broken a lot over the last few years when I've had chances on Sundays and it hasn't quite materialized.

But we all have to go through it, or at least all of us not named Tiger Woods.

It's a part of the process, it's a part of the learning journey, and ultimately those are the days that make us better.

Q. You've obviously been in this position a lot throughout your career. Does it surprise you that you still get nervous in these situations? It do you look at it as a good thing that you still care? How do you combat when you feel that way?

RORY McILROY: It doesn't surprise me. I think it's a really good thing. People say pressure is a privilege, and it really is. You want to feel like that on the course. That's why I spend the time that I do practicing and trying to master my craft, that you get yourself in those positions to see what you're made of.

Again, super proud of the three swings I made on 16 and 17 to basically get the job done.

I mentioned something earlier in the week, where how do you drown out the bad thoughts and replace them with the positive ones, and I just think you have to try really hard to make those positive thoughts just a little stronger and a little more powerful than the negative ones.

We all get negative thoughts, but it's how do you deal with those and how do you reframe and replace those with what you want to see and what you want to do. Because like even walking from the 16th green to the 17th tee today, I could see myself hitting it in the water, right?

That's something that crosses your mind, and it's like, okay, how do I replace that thought with a better one and visualize and get myself into the moment. I've practiced hard at that, and definitely getting better at it.

Q. You had openly pondered playing between now and the Masters. Does this make you more inclined to do that or do you want to go in on this high? How do you think about that?

RORY McILROY: No, I think three weeks going in, it's a little too much, so I'll play one of the events in Texas, whether it's Houston or San Antonio, I'm sure.

Q. Curious if you have a ritual after winning a tournament, and historically, have you celebrated victories much, or have you been towards the Tiger Woods, this is normal type of celebration?

RORY McILROY: There's certainly no ritual. It feels strange to win a golf tournament at 10:00 in the morning and I feel like I can't have a drink yet. It is St. Patrick's day, though.

Not really. There's some that I've celebrated more than others, but yeah, there has been some instances where I've maybe not celebrated enough.

I think I go back to Pdraig Harrington also said that, he wished he would have celebrated his wins more, because as you get on in your golf career, and I've been very lucky to win a lot, you still don't win all that often.

So yeah, you want to celebrate them and you want to make sure that they're meaningful in some ways.

But it's nice, I've got a few days off now, so I'll be able to have a good time tonight and maybe feel the effects tomorrow.

Q. What's the difference in nerves when you're trying to win compared with trying not to lose?

RORY McILROY: I think they're sort of the same. They're at least the same feelings. But I think trying to win and being in that mindset, it can eradicate some of those feelings.

If you play to win and you've hit an aggressive shot and you've hit a really good shot, I think that can relax you and it can calm your nervous system, where if you're playing real sort of guidey golf and just trying to, as you say, not lose, I don't think that sort of golf calms you down.

If anything, I think it just sort of keeps you in that sort of heightened nervous state.

It's much better to play to win. I think, as well, if you play to win and you don't hit the shot that you want to hit, I think you can live with that. But if you play not to -- if you play to not lose, you're never really giving yourself the best opportunity, and that's hard to swallow.

I've done that before at times in my career.

Q. Tried to play not to lose?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. Yeah.

Q. Even though this feels like two years ago, that shot you hit on 2 yesterday that set up your birdie-eagle start, what was that?

RORY McILROY: It was a 4-iron from I think it was like 225, straight back into the wind. That was probably the swing of the week. That was pretty much perfect.

Q. The three-quarter three-quarter shot, is that something that Butch Harmon taught you or suggested?

RORY McILROY: No. It's sort of -- it's a shot that I've always had with the wedges, but I've been reluctant to use it with like 9-iron, 8-iron, 7-iron down. But this year I've gotten more into using that shot with some of those lower clubs like the 9-iron on 17, the 8-iron at the last today.

But no, that's more a shot that I've always really had. But I've just started to get more comfortable using it with longer clubs.

Q. Are you a guy who celebrates St. Patrick's day? Does it carry some --

RORY McILROY: Not really. I was looking for something green to wear today but I didn't have anything with me.

Yeah, look, it's a pretty big deal in Ireland, but it's definitely -- I feel like you guys take it to another level here. (Laughter.)

Q. Is there any cute backstory on the little flower you have --

RORY McILROY: Yeah, Poppy picked it for me. She gave it to me just after I won. I think there was one more flower in it but it disintegrated in my back pocket. But she, she gave it to me.

Q. You mentioned earlier that you came to appreciate this championship more after you won it in 2019. Having the extended period of being THE PLAYERS champion, did that help you appreciate this place, this tournament and the ability to win this tournament?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I don't think it took me winning this championship to realize how big it was. I think it was more that we come back to TPC Sawgrass each and every year, and I just feel like the experience gets better and better from a player's perspective, from a fan's perspective, what the TOUR do with this whole setup, with the golf course, everything.

It's amazing, during that four-hour rain delay or storm delay yesterday, there was a few of us in the locker room chatting, and we were all sort of consensus was it's probably the best experience for a player of any golf tournament in the world. It's absolutely amazing. Very proud to win for a second time. Yeah, looking forward to keep coming back for many more years.

Q. You've been in the game for a long time, since you were a teenager. Every time you win, do you reconnect with your inner child at all, the one who fell in love with the game a long time ago?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I do, but -- yeah, look, I remember watching Davis Love win here back on that sort of rainy Sunday when he wouldn't take his rain jacket off because of the superstition. I remember watching that with my dad at home.

I remember Craig Perks chipping in from the back of the green.

Tiger's putt, obviously, in 2001.

I was always excited to sit down and watch this tournament as a kid.

Yeah, to think that I've won this now a couple of times and I've been coming here since 2009, 10 year old Rory would

think this was really, really cool.

Q. You referenced this a little while ago. There was some disappointments for you last year. Not just the U.S. Open but afterward you had a couple of close calls that I'm sure hurt, too. Yet in the totality of it now when you look back, three more wins since then, a lot of high finishes. I'm wondering how much that might have impacted your winning now, or was there a low point that you might have turned things around, that helped you turn things around?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. Honestly, I feel like I turned things -- the U.S. Open was hard. The Irish Open was hard. I bogeyed 15 and 17 on the way in there. That was a hard one to lose at home.

But I feel like where it started to turn around was the next week at Wentworth. Billy Horschel beat me in a playoff at Wentworth, but the way I played down the stretch there, that's the way I want to play. That's the way I want to play down the stretch. I lost to an eagle when Billy holed that putt on 18 in the playoff.

But I think that was sort of like the turning point, and then I did some work on my swing after Wentworth, that sort of October, and then went into the two Middle East events at the end of the year and was able to win that one.

I feel that period, like October, November, was a pretty important one, and I was able to do some good work on my swing and then test it out pretty much straight after in a couple of tournaments, and I feel like that's obviously carried into this year.

Yeah, it doesn't feel like I'm making those mistakes at the critical times like I was previously. I think a big part of that was just learning from those mistakes.

It's a long career. You have to stay incredibly patient. Yeah, I would say that some of those losses have helped me learn what to do when I'm in those positions again.

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