

WM Phoenix Open

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

Scottsdale, Arizona, USA

TPC Scottsdale

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will get things started. We would like to welcome Rory McIlroy to the WM Phoenix Open. Making your second start back here and second of the year. Let's get some opening comments for 2023 on TOUR.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I feel like it's been a while since I've played on the PGA TOUR. Last October, I guess.

But yeah, look, it's been a good start to the year, winning over in Dubai, and yeah, making my second start here. I haven't had the full experience of this event yet. It was limited fans in '21 with only 5,000 people.

I'm looking forward to it this week in some ways, but it's going to be an experience.

I think when we started talking about trying to elevate or designate some events, I think this was one of the first ones on the list, just because it's such a fan favorite, and players like it, players love the atmosphere. I think a lot of players like the golf course, as well.

Yeah, it was a pretty sort of obvious one to make a -- it was already a huge event but made even bigger. Happy to be here and looking forward to the week.

THE MODERATOR: Your last two starts on TOUR have been wins. How is your game feeling entering this week?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it feels like a long time ago, the TOUR Championship and CJ Cup. But yeah, look, I've been on a really good run of form. Basically all of last year. Yeah, I feel like I'm just in a really good place with my game and really have a lot of continuity in it and a lot of consistency.

Yeah, just basically working on the same things and trying to refine things.

It's another opportunity to go out there this week and try to play at my best, and hopefully if I do that, I'll have another chance to win a big golf tournament.

Q. Technically you are World No. 1; I'm curious, do you feel like you're the best player in the world right now?

RORY McILROY: Yes.

Q. Why is that?

RORY McILROY: Because I do. I'm playing well. I feel like consistency-wise, I've been as good as I have been ever in my career.

I said at the end of last year, I feel like as complete of a player as I ever have. If you just look at my statistical categories, there's no real glaring weaknesses there. I've worked really hard on that, to try to become a more well-rounded player.

I think the results speak for themselves, as well, over not just the past six months but really the past 18 months post-Ryder Cup at Whistling Straits, I feel like I've been on a really good run of form since then.

Q. You were not originally going to be in the Netflix show. What changed? Can you tell us a little bit about that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I sort of took the attitude of see how the first season works out, see if I like it, like the idea, feel comfortable letting cameras get into my life a little bit more. But I had a good chat with Chad in the summertime. Obviously with everything that's going on in the world of golf, he just said having my voice in there in some way could just add a layer of context that wasn't there already.

I made sure that the parameters were very much like, look, you can film me at -- you're not coming to my house, you're not coming in my car, you're not coming anywhere near my family, but you want to do some stuff with me at golf tournaments, totally fine. They were the ground rules that were sort of set, and here we are.

Q. You said around this time last year, your goals were more like oriented, hit more fairways, your stats.



Is that the same this year or are you kind of changing your goals?

RORY McILROY: No, I don't think I need to fix what's working pretty well. Again, I can sit here and say I want to win six times this year and I want to win the Masters and I want to win whatever. It's like, of course everyone wants to do that. But what helps me get to that point.

For me there's certain areas of my game that I know if I can keep as strong and as sharp as possible, it'll help me achieve those goals. Look, those goals are outcome goals, and that's great, but what do you have to put in to give yourself a chance at those outcomes, and that's the important thing.

Q. Coming off that victory a few weeks ago in Dubai, how much does that motivate you moving forward? How much does that kick start your year?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it does. I think the manner in which I won, I didn't have my best stuff all week in Dubai, but I was able to sort of piece it together and birdie the holes that I should birdie. There was some good par saves in there, but I knew I needed to tidy some stuff up. As soon as I got home to Florida last week, I got on the range and started to practice and work on some things, and I feel like my game is in a better place now than it was basically like this time a week ago.

But it's nice. It's nice to get that first start of the year out of the way, see where the areas are to improve, and I feel like I've done some good work over the past sort of six or seven days, and as I said, feel a bit better because of it.

Q. You mentioned that it was sort of an easy decision when you started talking about designated events to make one of those for this year. Can you expand upon that process, and how much were you personally involved in it?

RORY McILROY: I think all of the players were involved in terms of making a list of what their favorite events are and what makes sense to designate or elevate or whatever they're calling them.

I think this tournament is a wonderful spectacle for the game of golf. I think to have hundreds of thousands of fans at this event, I mean, I think it was obvious that this was one that needed to have that status.

I think if we were to have an event like this every single week or even five or ten events like this on the schedule, I think it might be a little bit too much, but I think to have a golf tournament where most of the fans here aren't here to

watch the golf, right; it's a different environment, and that's totally fine. If we're talking about growing the game, that's a way to do it.

Q. In Dubai you said you didn't really have your best stuff all week, and yet you still won. I was just curious, how rare is that for you, that you can actually win without feeling like you're playing your best?

RORY McILROY: Rarer than I'd like it to be. I think that's the -- I think I said afterwards, it's one of the things that made Tiger stand out all those years is he was able to win golf tournaments when he wasn't at his best. Look, I'm not comparing myself for one minute to Tiger Woods, but if I can get better at sort of piecing it together and not getting -- not wanting to play perfect golf to win golf tournaments. I didn't react to bad shots; I sort of had a two-way miss off the tee; there was a bunch of stuff going on. But I was just able to put that behind me and really win with my short game and my putting and my ability just to manage my game.

Q. Is that harder to do at bigger events?

RORY McILROY: I mean, it's probably easier to do at bigger events because you know you don't have to make a ton of birdies. Looking back, I shot 19-under par in Dubai. I'm like, how did I do that? How did I get to that score? But I think at the bigger events, U.S. Open last year is a perfect example, I didn't feel like I had my best, but I was able to sort of get it around and make par saves and not get too frustrated with it.

You know you certainly don't have to get to 19-under at a U.S. Open. It would help, but you know you've just got to hang around.

Q. In an earlier era, golfers peaked in their 30s, and that all changed obviously with Tiger, and then you did what you did in your 20s and it looked like that probably wasn't going to be possible for you given the heights that you hit in your 20s, but have you started to sort of reassess that a little bit, just the way things have been going lately, that maybe I might peak in my 30s?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I don't think I should be up here if I thought my best days weren't ahead of me. Like I can't be sitting up here and talking to you guys and trying to win golf tournaments if I think that the glory days are gone. You have to be an eternal optimist in this game, and I 100 percent believe that I can still -- I've won 30 whatever times around the world as a professional. There's no reason that I can't double that number going forward. Like I truly believe that.

Who knows whenever you've peaked or not peaked. I'm guilty of looking back to 2014 and thinking about how I played then, and are there certain things from that time in my career I'd want to put into my own career at the minute, but when I look at everything and I look at the statistical categories, I said at the start of this press conference, I don't feel like I've ever been as complete of a player as I am right now.

The highs were very high back then, but I had some lows, too. But I feel like my base level now is just a little bit higher and a little more consistent.

Q. You talked about your short game going really well in Dubai. I noticed you made a couple changes to your wedges as well as your long irons this week. Can you talk about that change?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so this is my first year of my new deal with TaylorMade, and they gave me just a little bit of flexibility with some of the clubs that I can play. Yeah, so that was really it. I was messing around with Justin -- I see Justin Thomas all the time at home and messing around with some of his wedges and some of the grinds he has. I got in touch and ordered a couple, and they've worked really nicely.

This week, as well, I feel by going back to that 760 long iron in the 3- and the 4-iron, just to give me a bit more extra flight into the par-5s -- I feel like sometimes with the 3- and the 4-iron in the blades they can come in a little flat at times, where the par-5 and the second shots into the par-5s specifically this week are very, very important, so I thought having a little bit more flight on those long irons could be helpful.

Q. Do you prefer that 760 to some of the newer models because of the look of it?

RORY McILROY: It's a little bit of a shorter blade length. Sometimes the newer models, whether it be the 770 or the 790, it's a bit of a longer blade length, and I feel like the toe just wants to close over on me a little. Instead of having to mess around with weighting or different shafts or anything, I've played those 760s before, and they've worked really well. It was just an easy transition.

Q. Obviously having the Super Bowl in town and a huge event around here, what's it like having that kind of increased presence of fans?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's amazing. I mean, to have two of these huge events in the same city on the same weekend, it's going to be really interesting because I feel

like Saturday here is going to be a huge day in terms of the numbers and everything, and it'll be interesting to see what Sunday is like with people obviously wanting to get to the Super Bowl. But that stadium can only hold a certain number of people, where obviously this golf course can hold a lot more than that.

Yeah, hopefully Sunday doesn't feel too much quieter than Saturday.

Q. I was curious, are you interested in wearing a microphone for CBS, and what do you think of those segments so far?

RORY McILROY: I think they've been great. So I think Max was really insightful in Torrey Pines and Keith Mitchell last week at Pebble. I thought they were very good. It's very unobtrusive; you just put an AirPods in your ear and just have a chat with the guys in the studio.

It would take a little bit of convincing for me, but I'd certainly be open to it. But given the last couple of weeks and how well I think it's been received, I'd certainly be open to it.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, pleasure, as always, and we wish you the best of luck this week.

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