

Arnold Palmer Invitational

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Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Rory McIlroy to the interview room here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Rory is the 2018 Champion. Making his ninth career start. Welcome back to Bay Hill. If we can get some comments on being here this week.

RORY MCILROY: Thank you. Yeah, great to be back. Nice to -- not that I don't enjoy the West Coast, but it's nice to be back on the East Coast and get back to some, I guess, sort of familiar greens.

I felt like I played pretty well from tee to green at Phoenix and L.A., but just really couldn't get anything going on the greens. So nice to get back to some familiar Bermuda over the next few weeks.

But, yeah, it took me awhile to play this tournament at the start of my career, but then once I did play I don't think I've missed a year since. So really enjoy it here. Enjoy the golf course, enjoy the challenge that it provides and looking forward to the week.

THE MODERATOR: We'll jump right into questions.

Q. Couple things. One, you've been in a lot of kind of battles for No. 1 ranking before. How is this one different and what do you think of just the all, like back and forth kind of you Jon and Scottie might have this season?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, look, as much as it's really nice to be ranked No. 1, winning golf tournaments, playing well, it sort of takes care of all of that stuff. So I think it's really exciting. If I was purely a fan of the game and I see what's going on, especially at the top, I think it's a pretty cool thing. Like I'm not -- the run that Rahmbo has been on has been phenomenal. Obviously what Scottie did last year. I've had a nice little run over the last sort of 12 months. But like everyone knows, there's so much parity in our game right now that any given week, any given tournament someone can pop up and sort of put their hand up and claim to be one of the best players in the world. So I'm just

happy to be in that conversation and I just need to keep my head down and keep playing well.

Q. The golf course has been a brute in recent years. You even commented after the third round maybe yesterday about the setup. How do you think it looks, having played it today?

RORY MCILROY: Yeah, so the greens already have some firmness to them. Which is really good. I don't mind that at all. The rest of the golf course I would say is still sort of soft. But looking at the weather this week it has the potential to get a little firmer, especially with the wind that's forecast on Friday.

But I don't see it have the potential of sort of what it was like the last couple of years on the weekend where it felt a little like pinbally in a way. It feels like a really good shot will hold. You'll be able to hold the fairways a little bit more. Just things like that.

So course setup looks great right now. As I said, I think this year compared to previous years the fairways are just a touch softer than they have been leading into the tournament. Which leads me to believe that it might not be as penal. Not as penal. It will still be penal because the rough's thick. But I just feel that good shots will hopefully get rewarded a little more.

Q. Saw Brad Faxon down at the Chubb and was asking about working with you with the putting, which really excites him. What's been the best by-product of that for you?

RORY MCILROY: Honestly, I think the friendship that Fax and I have developed over the last number of years is probably the best by-product of it, regardless of if putts go in the hole or if they don't.

Obviously an added benefit is the fact that I've become a much more consistent putter over the last five years that I've worked with Fax.

The one thing with Fax, it frees me up. He allows me not to be perfect. There's been a lot of times where I felt like



I've needed to do everything perfect for a putt to go in the hole. He's sort of allowed me that freedom to think, like, you know, it doesn't have to be perfect. Your intent has to be really good and you have to do the right things, but he sort of let's me be me. He coaches people to where they need to go. He doesn't believe in sort of a set way of teaching. I really appreciate that as well.

Q. As you start this build-up to Augusta -- it's five weeks from tomorrow we'll all be at Augusta. What's the significance or importance of going in there with a lot of confidence in your putting?

RORY MCILROY: Oh, I mean, if you can go in there with -- seeing putts go in the hole and seeing putts go in the hole the correct way. So leading up to Augusta a lot of your work on the greens will be more to do with speed. Dropping the ball in on the high side of the hole. Trying to make these big breaking putts.

There's a lot of like little fun games that we play. I don't really -- we both don't like to call them drills, because that seems like work and golf is certainly not work. So play these little fun games on the putting green trying to hole putts like above a coin and below a coin and varying the speed of the way the ball goes in the hole. And just sort of seeing that -- because that's the sort of stuff you need to do at Augusta. Just getting more comfortable with that.

Q. Do you feel like there could be even more team play on the PGA TOUR? There's limited play now.

RORY MCILROY: I mean, we have a Presidents Cup every year and a Ryder Cup every year. Obviously Zurich does their thing in New Orleans.

At the end of the day I think golf is an individual pursuit. I think these team events that are bi-annual or annual or whatever it is, I think that's enough for the game.

Q. How did you do in yesterday's event down at Seminole?

RORY MCILROY: We finished second. We had a chance, but the air came out of the balloon on 13 where we both made bogey.

Q. Who beat you?

RORY MCILROY: Brendon Todd and Jim Davis I think was his partner.

Q. A good day, I guess?

RORY MCILROY: A great day. Yeah. Any day at

Seminole's a good day.

Q. What's your reaction to this latest PGA TOUR scheduling change coming up in 2024? And as a follow, is there a concern at all with the quote unquote non-stars, the rank and file guys, in terms of not as many opportunities to play and maybe leaving them on the outside looking in?

RORY MCILROY: So, I love it. Obviously I've been a part of it and been in a ton of discussions. I think it makes the TOUR more competitive. I think we were going that way anyway. You think of, the playoffs used to be 125, 70, 30. Obviously this year they have went 70, 50, 30. So I think -- like, I'm all about rewarding good play. I'm certainly not about -- I want to give everyone a fair shake at this. Which I think this structure has done. There's ways to play into it. It's trying to get the top guys versus the hot guys, right? I think that creates a really compelling product. But a way that you don't have to wait an entire year for your good play to then get the opportunity. That opportunity presents itself straight away.

You play well for two or three weeks, you're in a designated event. You know then if you keep playing well you stay in them.

So, for example, someone like a Chris Kirk last week that wins Honda, he's set. Winning is really important on this TOUR and good play and rewarding that.

At the end of the day, I think with all these designated events and this event schedule, at the end of the day we're selling a product to people. The more clarity they have on that product and knowing what they're buying is really important. It's really important for the TOUR. I think this solves for that.

Q. What's your take on the no-cut thing? That's kind of a very not, that's moving from quite a bit of tradition from the game.

RORY MCILROY: Well we've always had no-cut events on this TOUR. If you think of like the four WGC's, you've got the three playoffs events, you've got the CJ Cup, the Zozo. So there's precedent there for no-cut events. The only reason no-cut events are a big deal is because LIV has come along. So there is precedent for no-cut events. There's been no-cut events since I've been a member of the TOUR and way beyond that as well.

So, yeah, is there maybe going to be a few more of them? Maybe. That's still TBD by the way. That's not been decided yet. But if we do go down that path there's precedent there to argue for no-cut events.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

It keeps the stars there for four days. You ask Mastercard or whoever it is to pay 20 million dollars for a golf event, they want to see the stars at the weekend. They want a guarantee that the stars are there. So if that's what needs to happen, then that's what happens.

Q. I wanted to follow on that. You just sort of answered it. Like it's not all been decided exactly. But do you know -- are you looking at all of the designated events that we have this year going to no-cut shorter fields or maybe would some of them retain or are those the things that still need to be decided?

RORY MCILROY: TBD. Obviously the majors and THE PLAYERS Championship are going to remain cut events. That's not going to change. And then it's what we do with the -- not what we, what, you know, what's decided with the rest of the events, right.

You look at this event, you look at the Memorial, you look at Tiger's event in L.A. They have got a ton of history behind them. So is there an argument to say that because of that historical context we try to keep a cut in those events. Maybe. Like, who knows. Again, that's all to be decided. But, again, I will say there's precedent for no-cut events on this TOUR.

Q. Also, do you see the prize money going up or are they, are we locked in sort of for a little while with these numbers? 20 million at these big events.

RORY MCILROY: So, I think everyone knows that the majority of the money that comes into the TOUR is from the media rights deal that the TOUR negotiated back in 2020. The next negotiations coming up aren't that far away. We're into 2024 next year. By 2028 there will be some negotiations starting again.

So I feel like what we're doing puts us in a way better position for the next media rights cycle coming up at the end of the 2020s. So that, again, whoever is bidding on them -- and obviously the media landscape is changing drastically at the minute. So whether that's NBC, CBS, whoever, or whether it's Apple TV or YouTube or Amazon or whoever it is, that we're in the best possible position to get a better media rights deal so that the prize money goes up again. So that's where the majority of the money comes from.

Q. What was your process getting into the new TaylorMade driver? I think you switched after the first round at The Genesis. So I'm just curious about why you switched mid event.

RORY MCILROY: I was sick of Tiger outdriving me. (Smiling.) Partly to do with that.

So I played the event in Phoenix and noticed that my spin numbers on my driver were a little low.

So then I went to L.A. and I put my driver up a click in loft. But I'm so particular about face angle when it comes to drivers that when I went up a click in loft, obviously I can see a little more face, it looks a little further left to me. And I didn't hit one drive out of the middle of the face the first day at Riv. So I just, I needed to go even and try something else.

I feel like this Stealth 2 head for me has just got a little more spin on it, but at a more neutral or what I perceive to be a more neutral face angle. I think if other people saw it they would probably see that it sits slightly open, but to my eye it sits square. To me it was all about face angle.

And as you said, I hit balls on Thursday night at Riv. Started middling that and started to get way more consistent spin numbers, sort of in the range that I like. Then I just went with it from there. Actually felt like I drove it pretty good for the final three days at Riv and it's been pretty good in practice over the past week.

Q. As a native of Rochester, New York and a former member of Oak Hill Country Club I would like to get your thoughts on this year's PGA Championship.

RORY MCILROY: Current member of Oak Hill.

Q. I know.

RORY MCILROY: I'm looking forward to it. I think Andrew Green's done a really good job. I think the renovation has hopefully restored the East Course back to its former glory, I would say. I'm just hoping for a good weather week. I think that's what everyone's hoping for up there in May.

But excited to go back to Oak Hill. From the last time I was there or we were all there my connection to Rochester's got a lot stronger. So I'm excited to go and play a major championship in what feels like almost like a second home to me.

Q. What was the pairing with CC Sabathia like today? Was that a unique pro-am pairing?

RORY MCILROY: It was. He's a big man. (Laughing.)

So, look, I wasn't into baseball that much growing up, but I know that he was a legend of the game and obviously played for arguably the biggest team in baseball. Some

people might argue with me on that. But, yeah, pretty cool.

I think it's wonderful to get to play with all these former athletes and sort of pick their brain on how they went about trying to master their craft. I feel like you can always pick up little things from them that you can maybe try to cross over into your sport.

Q. Did his size translate into distance off the tee?

RORY MCILROY: When he connected with it, yeah. Yeah. He needed a little work on his grip. So I tried to help him with that.

Q. Pitchers don't have to hit. You said good play will take care of itself in the No. 1 race. But as you look at the guys you're in the tussle with, Scottie and Jon, what are pieces of those guys or pieces of their games that you admire?

RORY MCILROY: All of it. I think I love Scottie's attitude. His attitude I think is one of the best out here. I think he's got a wonderful perspective on things. He does it his own way. He's got his own move. It's very individual.

You could say the same thing about Rahmbo. Rahmbo's certainly got his own move and individual. Probably approaches the game a little differently than the way Scottie does. But both ways obviously work for them.

The one thing about both of them over the past 12 to 18 months has just been their consistency. They have both been relentless. If it's not a win, they're contending. Very rarely have you seen these guys in the past 12 or 18 months outside of the top 10, top 15, top 20. So just that relentless consistency week after week, month after month, building a really great body of work between them.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, as always thank you for your time.

RORY MCILROY: Thank you.

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