

# 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 our 2018 champion Rory McIlroy into the interview room here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Making his 11th start at this event every year since 2015. If you can talk about means so much to you about Mr. Palmer's event.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it took me awhile to get here. Arnold would write me a letter pretty much every year from when I was eligible to play the event I think in 2010, and I didn't make it here until 2015. I think there was one point where he said he was going to break my arm if I didn't come, so eventually I did.

As soon as I got here and saw the golf course and I sort of instantly regretted that I didn't come a little sooner, because it's a golf course that sets up really, really well for me. I've obviously done pretty well here with the win and a lot of other good finishes. So, yeah, it's a great event. I think it's one of the best setups that we play all year. With a, you know, as strong a field as pretty much anywhere that we play. Yeah, it's good to be back.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll go right into questions.

**Q. Sort of changing the TV coverage of this event with more caddie/player interaction and more on-course interviews. I'm wondering, TGL does that same sort of thing, what do you think about that, is that good for the game?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean I think it's great for the game. I think it's great for the core golf fan, the people that want to hear that sort of stuff. They want to hear the strategy, they want to hear a player and a caddie talk through what sort of shot they're going to hit, how they're going to play it. Anything that provides more context to what we're doing out there I think is a really good thing. Yeah, it's good to see that there's going to be a few less commercial breaks to try to focus on some more of that stuff over the weekend, so I think that's hopefully only going to be additive to the broadcast.

**Q. Any distraction at all? You guys are focused out there, is that going to be any distraction?**

RORY McILROY: I don't think there's going to -- I mean, we have a boom mic pretty much everywhere we go anyway. I don't think it's going to -- it's not going to make a difference for us at all, we're just going about your business doing the same thing. It's going to be picked up and focused on a little bit more, but we don't know that stuff, we don't experience that stuff, that's just for the viewers at home.

**Q. Today in the pro-am you were paired with Nate Bargatze. Can you critique his golf game and do you think he's ready for the PGA TOUR or should he stick with stand-up comedy?**

RORY McILROY: So I've gotten to know Nick pretty well over the last few months. I do this sort of couple of day event up at Ohoopie Match Club in Georgia, and Nick came as well, in December. So we've sort of kept in touch since. I've loved his stuff for a long time. But, yeah, no, he's, you know, probably a better stand-up comedian than I am a golfer. So he's killing it and he's doing a great job. I think he did over 200 tour dates this year, so he doesn't have a lot of time to play golf, but his golf game's okay. If he had a little more time to work on it, he's got potential.

**Q. Looks like a ton of equipment changes for you this week, driver, 3-wood, 5-wood, I think you got a long iron in there, dropping the 50 degree. Curious what improvements you're seeing there and can you talk through those change as little bit?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think it's all really come from the ball change a few weeks ago. So because this ball, especially with the shorter irons, spins a little bit more, especially with the sort of three-quarter shots, I feel a little more comfortable playing those, so I actually weakened my pitching wedge by a degree and a half to sort of bridge the gap between having a 46 and a half and a 54. So that's my 48 degree, and then 54, 60. I just feel like with the ball I'm a lot more comfortable playing those sort of half- and three-quarter shots, so comfortable going back to three wedges.



Then I sort of had to look at the top end of the bag then of how I was going to configure it. For a while I've been looking for a club that sort of carries 300 in the air. I feel like there's a lot of golf courses we go to that really pinch in at like 310, 320, and I would hit a 3-wood -- I can't hit driver because it's just too narrow, but then I would hit my 3-wood that's going like 285, 290, but guys that are shorter than me are hitting driver sort of 300 or 310, so I'm actually, I feel like I was at a disadvantage in some ways, even to like people that hit it shorter than me, depending upon the course setup. So I sort of, and I messed around with that the mini driver last year, but I just couldn't quite get comfortable with it. So I've sort of been playing around with like stronger 3-woods.

So this 3-wood that I have carries like 300, 305 in the air, which is a really, it's a really good club for me to have.

And then I've went from a 5-wood to a 4-wood. And that 4-wood sort of bridges that gap.

And then I've got the 3-iron that sort of replaces the 5-wood.

So I've got a club that sort of flies 260, a club that flies 280, a club that flies 300, and then the driver. So that was sort of the reasoning behind 'em. It just sort of gives me more options off the tee. Especially with being so comfortable at the other end of the bag with the wedges and hitting those three-quarter shots that it's nice to have those options up at the top end of the bag.

**Q. Ratings have been pretty good to start the season, TGL has been a big success, feels like the PGA TOUR's on a pretty good path of its own. Do you still feel like golf needs a deal?**

RORY McILROY: I think the narrative around golf, I wouldn't say needs a deal, I think the narrative around golf would welcome a deal in terms of just having all the best players together again. But I don't think the PGA TOUR needs a deal. I think the momentum is pretty strong. As you say, TV's been good, TGL's been hopefully pretty additive to the overall situation. And yeah, I would say, you know, again, I answered this question at Torrey Pines two weeks ago, before, you know, the landscape might have looked a little different then than it does now over these past couple of weeks, and I think a deal would still be the -- I think it would still be the ideal scenario for golf as a whole. But from a pure PGA TOUR perspective, I don't think it, I don't think it necessarily needs it.

**Q. Over the years you kind of have taken a different approach to Augusta and getting ready. Have you**

**settled on a way to go about it, will you do anything different this year or what did you last year, did you settle in on that?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I'm still making a bit of a decision. I'm going to play these next two week, I'll see how these next two weeks go, then I'll sort of reassess. I don't like the idea of having three weeks off going into the Masters, so I may add one event, but I'm still between what event that may be. But it really just depends on how these two weeks go and how I'm feeling about my game. But I would imagine I would add an event leading into there, it just depends on whether it's Houston or San Antonio.

**Q. Does going to Augusta National in advance help or have you done it so many times now that you don't feel like that -- it's maybe just a leisure trip if you're going to go?**

RORY McILROY: No, it helps. I think it does help. Because you can spend as much time as you want around there, like on those days that you go up outside of the tournament. You're not under any pressure from a time constraint, like having to get to media or having any other obligations.

It's funny, when you want to spend six hours on a practice round it doesn't feel like it's that bad, but the week of you don't really want to be out there for six hours and it feels a little different. So I think being able to take your time away from the tournament and doing it is a nice thing.

**Q. You said over the off-season you spent a ton of time working on golf swing stuff, hitting balls into a blank screen. Now it's tournaments coming thick and fast, you're playing a ton. How do you make that transition in mindset or practice or whatever, but also keep the stuff that you want to keep in your golf swing?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, well, hopefully I did it enough over those weeks into the screen that some of it stays in there. I think that's why you do it. You sort of try to train that so that under pressure it stays in there without you thinking about it. I still have a nice feeling of what I'm trying to do, but I would say that for that period of time at the end of last year that was the most important thing and not actually what the ball was doing. Where now what the ball is doing is the most important thing and then that's sort of secondary. But, yeah, there is that balance between making sure that you're not getting too far away from where you want to, but still hitting the shots that you need to and executing. I think to execute a hundred percent, I think there's very little thought for technique in there, it's just a matter of visualizing and sort of letting your body do



it.

**Q. Is that a hard flip to switch?**

RORY McILROY: Absolutely. I think to go from one week to the next is very hard. I find that, like I'll, you know, I'll bring Michael Bannon over for a week of practice and we work on stuff, and then if I have to go straight into a tournament the next week, I sometimes struggle because trying to flip that switch between hitting balls on the range and focused on technique in terms of -- you know, it's like the whole golf swing versus golf. Like you have to switch into golf mode, playing golf, getting it around. That takes a little bit of time. So it's sort of the cadence for me is like, spend three or four days at home working on technique, slowly work that into playing golf at home, and doing that, and then getting to the tournament and getting focused on preparation and the things that you need to do to play well that week.

**Q. Curious, given you're one of the co-founders of TGL, what's the level of disappointment in not making the playoffs? Is it commensurate with a set back in tournament golf, is it more, just curious.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, look, I'm disappointed, like it would have been nice for Boston to at least get one win during the season. So, yeah, disappointed, but also encouraged that -- I think the thing is, like for a first season you really, we didn't know how it was going to go, and I think the thing that I've been excited about is the player buy-in, like everyone seems to be having fun out there, enjoying it and excited to play. So, yeah, I would have loved to have been playing in the semi-final in a week's time or a couple week's time, but, look, yeah, there's -- I'll probably still go. I'll probably still go and watch and, you know, it's a fun night to be there and sort of watch the guys in a bit of a different environment. Yeah, I wish I would still be out there and playing and still be involved, but I wouldn't say -- like it doesn't, you know, I would feel like if I like missed the cut this week, for example. That would be a pretty, that would be a little more disappointing, I think.

**Q. Just one other thing, not related, you said something about a bit of a sense of a different feeling with how you felt about reunification of the game or the PGA TOUR maybe doesn't need it as much. What has changed in those couple of weeks? Can you share an insight as to that?**

RORY McILROY: Look, I think it takes two to tango. So if one party is willing and ready and the other isn't, it sort of makes it tough.

**Q. Just to be clear, when you mentioned ideal**

**scenario as a deal, any deal in your mind involves players getting together more than four times a year, not so much an investment.**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

**Q. Can you figure out how that happens?**

RORY McILROY: I mean, their billion dollars would be nice, too.

**Q. Yeah, we would all take it, sure. Can you figure out how that happens as it relates to LIV, or have you given any thought to that?**

RORY McILROY: I gave a lot of thought to it a couple of years ago, but less now. No. I mean, like you could create exemption categories that you try to capture who you want to capture, you know, major winners in the last three years, plus player champions, I don't know. But, yeah, that's, again, I'm -- not my department.

**Q. Does it seem farther away than it did?**

RORY McILROY: I don't think it's ever felt that close, but I don't, it doesn't feel like it's any closer.

**Q. One more, I thought there might be a chance the one thing every player agreed on was they don't like the system at East Lake, but I'm not sure how you feel, since it's helped you a couple times, hasn't it?**

RORY McILROY: Three.

**Q. Three, sorry.**

RORY McILROY: No, I've won it both iterations. Look, I think the thing is -- look, everyone sort of talks about the match play format, and like we don't have a match play tournament. So would East Lake lend itself to match play and would that be exciting? And it might be, but I think one of the comments has been, you know, we play stroke play the whole way throughout the season, and then to decide the FedExCup champion, we play match play? It's like, I don't, I don't know if that's the best way to determine the season-long champion. It could be. Like, like I like the format, I like the idea.

**Q. Kind of the brackets and stuff?**

RORY McILROY: The brackets and seedings and all that, I really like that. But I just don't know if it's the right tournament for it. I don't know.

**Q. If they get something done for this year, does it**



**have to be right? Do you know what I mean by that?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah. I think it -- does it have to be right? I mean, it has to be close to being right, but it has to be simple. I think it has to be simple. I think, if anything, like we've sort of overcomplicated the whole thing in a way, and I think we just need to simplify it.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Rory McIlroy, thank you, sir.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

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