

Arnold Palmer Invitational

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Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Rory McIlroy

Flash Interview



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Rory McIlroy here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. You started this tournament every year since 2015, our 2018 champion. Talk a little bit about what it means to come back to Arnold Palmer's event.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, 2015 was the first time I played here and as soon as I got here and played the event and spent some time with Arnold, I instantly regretted not coming here sooner. But back then the schedule was a little bit different and but, yeah, I just said, like 2015 I haven't missed one and it's obviously a very important event on the PGA TOUR, and it's become a very important event in my schedule. So, yeah, glad to be back and it's also a golf course that I've obviously had the win but I've had quite a lot of success on, I played well on it. I'm comfortable around here, so it's good to get back.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. A lot of changes to the short grass areas around some of the greens. Your thoughts on reverting back to that or which of the holes stick out?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I do, I like it. I think it puts a premium, the ball will get further away from the green if you miss a green. Which then puts a premium on, you know, if you can chip and pitch the ball well. They have widened the, not the immediate fringes, but like there's, like say a pin's cut on three off the right, it's more cut like five or six off the right, because there's quite a bit of short grass before you get to the rough now. So I feel like around the greens they have set it up where a big miss is penalized more and a small miss is maybe penalized less, so it should even out. But I do think that it presents guys with a lot of different options on how to play shots, which I guess from previous experience that can put some doubt in guys' minds and make it a little more challenging.

Q. Where would you say your game is at the moment with PLAYERS coming up next week and Augusta soon after?

RORY McILROY: It feels like it's in really good shape. I'm really happy with the signs that I saw at Pebble Beach and Riviera. I think I did really well in strokes gained approach in those two events. I drove the ball pretty well at Riviera. I just couldn't make a putt for 27 holes. But I put that down to the sort of the very fast, bumpy poa annua. But I was really happy with where my game was coming out of the West Coast, and I've kept ticking along the past week and played some golf and I'm excited for these two weeks, I feel like I'm in good shape.

Q. There was a quote from Ryan Gerard about a shot that Scottie Scheffler hits where it kind of bridges the gap between two numbers, kind of a knock down, but it goes high and has a lot of spin. He says he's been obsessed with it. Is that a shot that you feel like you've mastered and how do you go about learning different shots like that on the range?

RORY McILROY: I definitely think it was one of the reasons I went to a softer, spinnier ball was to be able to hit shots like that. Really important weeks like this where the greens are really firm, greens at Augusta can get firm, greens at a U.S. Open for example. So to be able to, yeah, to hit a ball that comes down soft, but not have to hit it flat out, that's a skill in and of itself. You can see when Scottie does it he has this sort of high, sort of languid finish when he does it. A little bit like if you look at Tiger back in the day, same sort of thing. So, certainly when the greens get firm, the pins get tucked away it's definitely a great shot to have.

Q. Luke's coming back for a third try, I'm sure you were aware before we were, but can you just talk about how big that is, it's somewhat historic in some ways, it's been a long time since a guy did three in a row.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's amazing. I think it's obviously a huge advantage for the European team to have that continuity and that consistency. I was sort of banging on that drum going into Bethpage. And we'll have it even more so again, you know. We might not have -- the team may be a little bit different, or it could be, you know it was obviously really similar to Bethpage to what it was in Rome. I maybe envision a couple other guys maybe



breaking their way on to the team. But it's wonderful to have Luke back. There's not one player or one person behind the scenes that helps with Ryder Cup Europe that isn't thrilled that Luke agreed to come back and do it again.

Q. Somewhat related, maybe related, I'm sure you saw the deal that the DP World Tour made with the LIV guys and Jon of course not doing it. And he talked about it in Hong Kong, I guess it was yesterday their time. Do you have any reaction to this whole situation that's allowing these guys back if they want, but Jon's not?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean I, geez, in my opinion, it's a really generous deal. Like it's a much softer deal than what Brooks took to come back and play on the PGA TOUR. Look, the European Tour can only do so much to accommodate these guys. So, you know, if you want to play on the Ryder Cup you have to be a member of the DP World Tour. You have to be a member of the DP World Tour, you have to abide by the rules and regulations. And the rules and regulations were, okay, if you break the media rights agreement and you go and play in a conflicting event, you don't get a release, you're subject to fines. So the guys didn't want to pay these fines, that's fine.

So then the European Tour said, okay, let's try to come up with some sort of solution where you don't have to pay the fines, so that we can ease that burden on you, but still retain your membership. And I, look, there's a reason eight of the nine guys took that deal, right. I think it's a really good deal. Yeah, obviously Jon doesn't think so, and he's obviously well within his rights to think that way. But I just don't see what more the European Tour can do to accommodate these guys to retain their membership.

Q. So the two extra events is the tradeoff basically, right? Because he's being asked -- that's sort of what he's balking about.

RORY McILROY: Which isn't a heavy lift. I mean, to retain your membership is four events on the DP World Tour outside of the major championships. And that to me doesn't seem -- yes, okay, maybe, you know, maybe the European Tour gets to have a say in where those two events are, but I mean, I'm sure Jon doesn't want to go to South Africa next week, but he's going there. So, you know, like I don't, again, like I...

Q. Oh, you mean for LIV?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, he signed a contract for LIV and he plays 14 events and the whole thing. Like I get all that. But the DP World Tour is well within its rights to protect

itself as a members organization and as a business. And if you asked any DP World Tour member about the deal that they have cut with the LIV guys they would, I think they would all say that it was pretty generous. So, and again, there's a reason that eight of the nine took it, because they probably think the same thing, and one guy thinks a little differently, and that's a shame.

Q. The ramifications are that he will not be eligible for the Ryder Cup.

RORY McILROY: Look, the Ryder Cup is bigger than any one person. It's bigger than all of us. We come and go. Players are -- we pass through the system. Like, it's the platform that's the big thing. I mean, I think we should all be grateful that we have a platform like the Ryder Cup that we can play on and that we can showcase our skills and be a part of something that's obviously way bigger than ourselves. So at the end of the day it's about the team and no one player is bigger than the team.

Q. (Question about Shane Lowry.)

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I played golf with him on Monday morning. He was fine. He was in good spirits. I reminded him, I double bogeyed the 16th at PGA National in 2014 to lose the tournament. And I went on to win two majors that year. So I was trying to, yeah, like, look, it's one event, it was two bad holes, two bad swings. It doesn't mean that the rest of the year's going to be bad. Again, I had a horrible finish there in 2014 and ended up going on to have one of the best years of my career. So I just reminded him of that.

Q. (Question about Scottie Scheffler.)

RORY McILROY: Yeah, look, he's played consistently excellent golf for I would say ever since he got his first win back at the start of 2022, and he hasn't really dropped off since then. So you could say, okay, it's 18 top 10s in a row, but it's been four years of really, you know, excellent consistent golf. You look at his game and you would have said a few years ago that the putting was a weakness, but you wouldn't say that now. And you look at all the other aspects of his game and you don't see a weakness, from a physical standpoint, from a mental standpoint. And he seems like he has a good mindset of just, last week's done, I'll move on to this week. And there's no, you know, forget about whatever happened. He operates in the present so well, and that's one of his super strengths.

Q. He said Brian Rolapp is kind of a no BS guy. He really likes that about him. What's something you would like to see out there, like maybe one thing, there's a lot, I'm sure, but is there any one thing

specific?

RORY McILROY: Not really. I'm going to show up and play the tournaments that I want to play. And, yeah, I was in the weeds with TOUR politics for a few years and I'm happy I'm out of it.

Q. Back to Luke. Luke obviously had a heavy decision to make to come back as captain. He said he talked to several of your teammates on the European Ryder Cup team. Did you talk to him as well in regards to that decision, and can you give us some insights on those conversations?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, of course. I mean, Luke and I are neighbors. We live on the same street, so we see each other quite a bit. Yeah, we had quite a few talks before the new year. I haven't had a chance to really talk to him about much afterwards, but I know that, I know that he was having discussions with the DP World Tour and Ryder Cup Europe, just getting things buttoned up on his side, right. It's a big time commitment. He puts a lot into it. But it's also, you know, he's put his golf career on hold for six years to do this, right. So you know, he has to feel like, you know, everything else that's going on is right. And Diane has to be into it, the kids have to be into it. It's a lot more than just his decision, at the end of the day. It's a big, it's a massive part of your life. Especially with the time commitment that he puts into it, because he is so thorough on everything that he does.

But, yeah, I mean I, when we talked, I mean, we sort of tried to go through the pros and cons and what would be the drawbacks, what would be -- and I think at the end of the day we all see the opportunity for him to go down as the greatest Ryder Cup captain ever, if we go on and win in Ireland. So I'm excited for him, I'm excited for the opportunity that he has, and obviously I just, I want to be a part of that team to help him try to make that history.

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