

# The Ryder Cup

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

## Rory McIlroy

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Welcome back to the 43rd Ryder Cup here at Whistling Straits. We are joined by Rory McIlroy. Welcome to your sixth career Ryder Cup.

This is your sixth straight, so you've been on the scene for a decade, a decade of great prosperity for Europe. Maybe one thing in that decade that you've been around that's changed or evolved and maybe one thing that hasn't changed and you hope never does.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I think as the Ryder Cup has evolved I think it's become bigger, I guess, every year as it becomes more -- I thought last time in France, the size of that grandstand on the first tee and the grandness of it all, it definitely felt like that was the biggest yet.

And then in terms of things that haven't changed for us as Europe, there's a lot of continuity in our team, and I think that's been part of the reason for our success. That's something that I hope never changes because it's worked very well for us.

Yeah, I mean, I think that the Ryder Cup epitomizes everything that's great in the game of golf. It's competitive but there's also a lot of sportsmanship shown. And obviously there's partisan crowds and all of that, but that's part of being in a team environment. You're going to have a majority of the crowd rooting for one team or the other.

I guess that's not something we get to experience every day.

Yeah, Ryder Cup is one of the best events that we have in golf, if not the best event we have in golf, and just excited to be a part of another one.

**Q. With yourself and so many of your teammates spending a lot of your lives over here, does it make it any less of an away game, or will it be particularly away game style this year with so few fans from Europe?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I don't think so. I think if anything that has evolved over the years with the Ryder Cup is the European team and the U.S. Team are probably closer

than they ever have been individually. We all spend a lot of time over here. We play predominantly on the PGA TOUR. So there is a part of that.

But still, you know you're -- there's a sea of red everywhere here. It feels like an American Ryder Cup.

But then again, I haven't been here in a few years, and you first look at the golf course again and it seems somewhat familiar, and it seems -- doesn't look like a typical American golf course.

Whether that makes a difference or not, that's to be seen.

I said this in a few of the interviews before this week. I don't feel like playing away is getting any easier. If anything it's probably getting a little tougher.

**Q. A little bit of the same topic. The Americans obviously play for America. If you're Team Europe there's a lot of countries there. What's kind of the rallying point that brings you all together?**

RORY McILROY: We play for each other. I think that's the best thing that you can do. You play for the guys that are beside you. You play for everyone that's helping our team try to win this week. You're obviously playing for your country and your continent and I guess your Tour in some way, as well.

But most of all, we play for each other.

**Q. The Ryder Cup could have maybe been played last year but that would have likely meant no fans. I know this is an away game for you this week, but what does it mean to have the fans here and what role do they play in this event?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I just think it makes it a greater spectacle. There were talks of having the Ryder Cup last year with limited fans or no fans, and my argument was it wouldn't be a Ryder Cup at all. That's not -- I don't think either team -- it probably would have been to the European team's benefit to not have that, but it's not a Ryder Cup then.



So it's great to have fans back. It's funny, when the Ryder Cup was canceled last year, I still didn't imagine that we'd be doing this and everyone would still be in masks. Things went on for far too long. But happy we're here and happy to be playing.

**Q. Typically you're one of the top-ranked Europeans on this thing. Have you ever felt a leadership burden when you come to the Ryder Cup or do you defer to some of the guys like Poulter and Sergio and Westwood who have been here even more often than you, and is it something that you will maybe have to take on as an elder statesman as the Ryder Cup goes on?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think I've already tried to evolve into that role. This being my sixth Ryder Cup, 2014 I felt like was the year that I embraced the role of being a leader, and then going on from then.

But yeah, I think that's one of the great things about the European team. It's not as if we're just looking to one guy. There's a collection of very experienced players there that some of the younger guys and the rookies can look at.

And then you look at our vice captains, as well, and you look at all the pivotal roles they've played in Ryder Cups over the years. We have no shortage of leaders on our team.

**Q. Just curious what your impression of what Poults and Sergio and Lee have done, the longevity, the success, and what's your level of respect for what they've meant to this team over the years?**

RORY McILROY: It's amazing. You look at someone like Lee Westwood, for example, partnered Nick Faldo in '97 when it was Faldo's Ryder Cup. It was his 11th.

Fast forward however many years it is and now Lee is playing his 11th Ryder Cup.

I think that's one of the cool things about it is it does come full circle. We have this thing this week where we've all been given a player number, so there's been 164 players that have played for the European Ryder Cup team, or GB&I way back in the day.

So that's a pretty small group of players. I'm No. 144; I think Lee is No. 118. But then you just look at all the players before you, and you look at Bernd Wiesberger who's making his debut this year who's No. 164.

It's a small collection of people that have played for Europe

in the Ryder Cup. I think that's what brings us very close together, and that's been one of our sort of big focus points this week is just being here is very special and being part of a European team. Very few people can call themselves a European Ryder Cup player.

**Q. Was that Paddy's idea, the numbering?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah. He played a video for us last night to put it into context. 570 people have been into space. I think over 5,000 people have climbed Everest. 225 have won a men's major. When you sort of break it down like that it's a pretty small group and it's pretty cool.

**Q. You had your debut in the Ryder Cup when you were only 20 years old. Viktor Hovland is now 24. What's your advice to such a young player like Viktor before this big competition?**

RORY McILROY: I mean, I think the thing that I'd say to any rookie is the reason you're on this team is because of the golf that got you here. I mean, for Viktor I'd just tell him to be himself. He's one of the best players in the world. He's already been a wonderful teammate, and the energy and enthusiasm that he brings into our team.

For Viktor, I'd just get out on the golf course, be himself, play his game, and that's more than good enough to win points for the European team.

**Q. In your opinion is the PGA TOUR Player of the Year on Team Europe or Team USA?**

RORY McILROY: I don't care. I just care I'm on the winning team this week.

**Q. You made the point that Europe plays for each other; do you think the American team struggles with that?**

RORY McILROY: No. I mean, I was just sort of from my perspective being part of a team for now six of these things, I'm just speaking from a personal perspective and what I've seen from the European team.

**Q. I may be wrong but I think you've developed a bit of an interest in boxing, and I think you've met Anthony. I just wondered if you've had any communication with him because obviously a very big night for him Saturday and whether you've had any exchanges with him in the buildup to your big weekend and his big weekend.**

RORY McILROY: No, because the last time I saw him he was doing his camp in Miami and then he went up to New



York and didn't have a great night.

But no, it's a big night for him. Pretty big test. Usyk looks like a really good fighter. Hopefully, unless I'm rested on Saturday afternoon I'll hopefully be on the golf course so I won't be able to watch it, but wishing him the best and all the luck.

I think how he conducts himself and how he represents himself in the sport of boxing is -- talking about leadership and talking about doing the right thing, he's the epitome of that.

**Q. The last time we saw you playing Ryder Cup in America was probably as animated as we've ever seen you on the golf course. Do you think you need to tap into that same level of energy? And the fact that it's almost exclusively an American crowd, will that help with that cause?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I certainly will try to not be as animated and I'll try to conserve some energy. It's a long week. Whether I play all five again, we'll see, but it's a lot of golf. It's a lot of energy just playing, then trying to beat who you're playing against. If you try to beat the crowd, as well, it seems like a bit of an impossible task.

I will try my best for this team and I'll try to play the best golf I possibly can, but I sort of learned quite a few things from 2016 about conserving energy.

I felt like I sort of hit a wall on the back nine against Patrick that day, and I want to make sure that that doesn't happen again.

**Q. Was that the most animated you've been do you think, the most pumped up?**

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think the most animated I've been in my career has been at Ryder Cups. It just brings something out of you that you don't get playing individually. There's something more there when you're playing as part of a team, and everything you do doesn't just affect yourself but affects the other 11 players, the captain, the vice captains, all the support team.

There's a lot of emotion that comes out, but you still have to try to control that, as well.

**Q. Just in the context of what you were saying about the Ryder Cup getting bigger and getting harder to win away, if Europe were to get over the line, what would that mean in the context of your career? How big of an achievement would that be?**

RORY McILROY: It would be massive. I think winning any Ryder Cup is huge and it's a monumental achievement for all that are involved, but I think over the years winning a Ryder Cup on the road has just become more meaningful for some reason. We experienced it in 2012, which from a European perspective is probably one of the best days in the Ryder Cup that we've ever had in history. I'd certainly love to have that feeling again.

Yeah, I think it would be a huge achievement, especially you look at obviously this tournament isn't played on paper, it's played on grass, but on paper you would -- you look at the World Rankings and everything, we're coming in here as underdogs with a lot of things stacked against us, so I think that would make it even more of an achievement.

**Q. Just being here at the end of the PGA TOUR season, I was just wondering your confidence level with your own game right now and just if there's anything specifically that you're focused on.**

RORY McILROY: I feel good. Played well the last few weeks. Led the season in birdies made on the PGA TOUR, birdie percentage, so usually that works out pretty well in match play. Yeah, I'm feeling good.

**Q. Should we expect to see you wearing hats this week?**

RORY McILROY: They made some for me, so that's a start. So I've got some that fit. Maybe. I don't know. It's sort of become my thing in the Ryder Cup to not wear a hat, but I don't know. We'll see.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, thank you for finding us and have a terrific day.

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