

The Ryder Cup

Wednesday, 27 September, 2023

Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

Team Europe

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference

STEVE TODD: I'm joined by Rory McIlroy from Team Europe.

Rory, remarkably, your seventh Ryder Cup.

RORY McILROY: Thanks, Steve.

STEVE TODD: That's all right. We saw a video last night talking through being in the team environment. How has the team environment been this week.

RORY McILROY: It's been fantastic. Everyone knows this is a bit of a transitional period for The European Team and there's people that have been part of The European Team for a long time that aren't here this week. But I think the guys that we brought in are going to be awesome. Nicolai, Ludwig, Bob, that's the future of our team and the future of the Ryder Cup.

I think we came here to Rome a couple of weeks ago for a practise trip, and I thought that was incredibly important. Honestly I couldn't believe that we've never done it before. We played a practise round and we got familiar with the golf course but then the sort of time we spent off the course I thought was great. Just sort of sharing stories around the fire pit and sort of describing our journeys in golf and what the Ryder Cup means to us. Sort of just getting to know one another a little better, even people that I thought that I knew for a long time, sort of getting to know them a little better, too, was wonderful.

I think Luke and his vice captains have really sort of tapped into that emotional connection around Team Europe this week, and we have all bought into it. It's been an amazing experience so far, and it's only Wednesday. There's a lot of great things to come. But couldn't be more excited to be a part of the team, and to have those other 11 guys be my teammates.

Q. How much quality time do you get to spend with the guys on your team on the PGA TOUR or DP World



MARCO SIMONE
ROME, ITALY

Tour? Do you go for dinner or get to have long, extended quality time with these guys or not really?

RORY McILROY: With some of them. Some of them I do and some live in live in different places and it's hard, and then the weeks of tournaments are always so busy, and we are always doing our own things and have our own little teams around us and it's hard to carve out that time.

I feel like leading up to Ryder Cups, it's always a bit easier. Irish Open and Wentworth the last couple of weeks, spending more time with guys and making that a priority has been there. But yeah, during the course of the year, I'm just as close with a lot of the American guys as I am with the Europeans just because of the places I play and where I live and who I practise with and who I play with at home.

But these last few weeks have been really nice to sort of reconnect with some of those guys.

Q. Just on the fans, you've obviously experienced the odd rogue fan at the Ryder Cup and thinking of Brian Harman getting heckled, do you think it might go too far here?

RORY McILROY: No because I think that's all part of the Ryder Cup. There's not a lot of other instances in the game of golf where that happens but there's certainly a line. Most fans that come out to watch golf are very respectful and they know what that line is.

No, I have no issues about that. Yeah, we have all had our fair share of heckles over the years and whatever, and that's the a part of it. Someone said to me once, if you want to be part of the circus, you have to put up with the clowns.

Q. There's a video that Ryder Cup Europe did earlier where they had you read your 2009 quote. At what point did you come to realise that maybe that was off? Was it right away in 2010, or did it take till Medinah before you found, I misread this?

RORY McILROY: No, it was definitely that first Ryder Cup.



It was probably very early in the week at Celtic Manor. I took a bit of grief for those comments, and rightfully so.

But I remember in 2010 in one of the practise rounds, I still had the sort of long, curly hair at that point and a few of the guys on the team came down to the first tee with wigs on and like sort of made a joke of it. Yeah, that meant a lot to me.

I think just early in that week, and look, I said it in that little video piece I did earlier in the week. It's not as if I didn't play team golf before or knew what it was about.

I think in 2009, I was just so focused on myself and trying to get my career off the ground that I felt like I had sort of bigger and better things to achieve for my individual goals and stuff like that that I just didn't put any emphasis on making a Ryder Cup Team until you make one, and then you never want to be off one again.

I think that's sort of the crux of it. So I love being a part of this team. My most enjoyable moments in my career have been being a part of European Ryder Cup teams. I'm still very, very proud and probably proudest of the things I've done as an individual, but nothing -- nothing beats this week. It's an amazing experience and I want to be a part of it for as long as I can.

Q. A lot of water under the bridge in the last couple years, but in this week of all weeks, do you actually miss guys like Sergio, Poulter, Westwood?

RORY McILROY: I mean, it's certainly a little strange not having them around.

But I think this week of all weeks, it's going to hit home with them that, you know, they are not here, and I think they are going to miss being here more than we're missing them, so -- and I'm not saying that that's like -- it's just more I think this week is a realisation that the decision that they made has led to not being a part of this week, and that's tough. The landscape in golf is ever-changing and more dynamic, and we'll see what happens and whether they will be part of it in the future.

I always thought leading up to this week is when it's going to hit home that they are not going to be here.

Q. Couple things. How much did being in Greece acclimatise you to the heat here?

RORY McILROY: I live in Florida so I'm all right with heat.

Q. Your own game, how much better do you feel about where you are with your game than you were coming

in two years ago? How much do you feel more able to contribute?

RORY McILROY: Greece wasn't actually that warm. It was quite windy, though.

Yeah, coming into 2021, I felt like I was searching a little bit. I didn't feel in full control of my game. If you trace everything back, I got a lot of confidence and belief in myself that Sunday singles at Whistling Straits because I certainly wasn't believing in myself at that time. But the rest of my team did believe in me. You know, sent me out number one to go get a blue point on the board and I was able to do that, and I think that just gave me so much could have had going forward.

I said this, my first start after Whistling Straits was in Vegas and I won the CJ Cup. I said in my interview afterwards, I realised that just being myself is enough. Not trying to be something that I'm not. I think for a good part of 2021, I was trying to be something that maybe wasn't natural to me. I just went back to really trying to be myself and trying to express myself the best way that I can on the golf course.

I think the last two years have sort of proved that that's the way that I'm going to play my best golf.

So I certainly feel a lot better about things coming into this Ryder Cup and feel like I'm more than capable of contributing more than one point this time around.

Q. Coming into every Ryder Cup, it seems there's a lot of debate about captains setting up the course to suit their team. Obviously the last few Ryder Cups have been blowouts for the home team. But are we at the stage now where there isn't a really fundamentally European style of play and a really fundamentally American style of play?

RORY McILROY: I believe so. The way the golf is going, the majority of the Europeans, we are playing the majority of our golf in the United States and we are playing all the same tournaments and the same course setups.

We maybe grew up a little differently, and I think with some of the things that maybe the Europeans tried to do when we do have that home course, I'm not going to call it home-course advantage, but you can maybe tap into a little more of like how we grew up playing the game rather than how we play the game right now.

Whistling Straits, you can't really set Whistling Straits up a certain way. It just is what it is. Yes, you can do stuff here and grow the rough up and try to pinch the fairways in at



320 so you're hitting more mid and long irons into greens and stuff like that. And that's all just looking at statistics and sort of seeing as a whole what the team does better than the other team.

I think there's a reason playing, whether it be in Europe for us or in the U.S. for the American Team, there has to be an advantage to that. That's why I've said this in the last number of years: Winning an away Ryder Cup is probably one of the biggest achievements in golf right now.

Q. Is there anything anecdotal that you can share in maybe what responsibilities you're acquired as you've played more of these Ryder Cups, maybe in terms of helping captains with team-building or mentoring guys or anything like that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, every captain has a different leadership style, so they are looking for different things from different people.

You know, Paul McGinley was really the first captain that I felt utilised me in a certain way or wanted me to do certain things, and ever since then, certain captains have asked certain things from me.

Again, I'm not there giving rallying cries and team speeches. I said this, I think when we came on the practise trip, I said to every guy, I don't want anyone -- I'm older than people and I have more experience, and some of these guys have watched me play on TV.

But I don't want anyone looking up to me. I just want everyone looking at the side. I want them looking over to me. I don't want them looking up to me in any way. I want them to see me like I'm on their level. And there's no hierarchy on our team. It's we are all one part of a 12-man team and we all go forward together. I guess that's the one message I've tried to relay to some of the younger guys on the team.

Q. Tied matches, what do you feel about them as a competitor? Would you like to see them fought out to the end, and if so, would you like to do it be done?

RORY McILROY: Like 14-all? I love them whenever we won the last one (laughter).

I think it's part of history and tradition. You know, I was watching the Solheim Cup last week, and obviously there was huge celebrations when Europe got to 14 and retained the Cup. And I thought to myself, geez, they are celebrating a lot for a draw, and then I go back to Medinah in 2012 and we went ballistic when we got to 14 as well.

I think retaining it means something, and there's certainly a historical and traditional element to it. I don't know. I do like traditions of the game, and this competition has been around since 1927, and that's the way they have always done it. Does that mean that's the way they always have to do it? Probably not. But it's nice to keep some of the tradition around the event.

Q. We obviously don't know the pairings yet, but assuming you might have to use a different golf ball. I'm just wondering if you can discuss the challenges that brings with it, and how much time you would devote to maybe practising with another ball in the lead up to that.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I guess the nice thing is that you can do it in way where -- I think all these golf balls react pretty similar with a driver. It's more the iron shots and around the greens. If I'm playing with a guy that uses a different golf ball, I can just hit his golf ball off the tee. He's able to hit it into the green and we go from there. Vice versa; he can hit my golf ball off the tee, and I can hit my ball into the green and do that. Yeah, it can get a little tricky and you're chipping and putting and different feels of balls.

I think a couple of days, hitting some, getting numbers with that golf ball. Spin rates is a big thing. Especially in the wind gets up in some of these elevations. Just if you're into the wind, and, say, the other golf ball minutes 200 or 300 more RPMs more than your golf ball, that makes a huge difference into the wind. So just trying to get comfortable with that in some ways and trying to be mindful of it.

But I don't think it presents a huge challenge. I think guys are pretty much adaptable. We have 24 of the best players in the world here. If we can't adapt a little bit to a slight change of the golf ball, the game is certainly not going in the right direction. So I think we are all okay.

STEVE TODD: Rory, thank for joining us. Enjoy your week.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports