

U.S. Open Championship 2026

Tuesday, June 16, 2026

Southampton, New York, USA

Shinnecock Hills Golf Club

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome back to the interview area. We are here with 2011 champion Rory McIlroy. Rory, just some initial thoughts on Shinnecock.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's a great golf course. I think if everything is going the way everyone wants it in terms of weather, setup, I think it's the best championship test in the country. I think it tests all aspects of the game: driving, iron play, you need to have your wits about you on the greens. It's a lot of strategy, thoughtfulness.

Look, it's a golf course where it can turn very quickly. You get a day like yesterday with a lot of wind and dry, clear conditions like this, and I think we're just going to have to be mindful of that as the week goes on.

But it's a wonderful golf course, and looking forward to the test that it's going to provide this week.

THE MODERATOR: It is a little different than 2018. I know you made a few advanced trips out, maybe even before the Ryder Cup. What can you pick up from those?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, the width of the fairways is a little bit different, but again, looking at the forecast, and there's going to be a lot of crosswinds, those fairway are going to play a lot -- especially if it gets a little firmer, they're going to play a lot narrower than the 45 yards wide that they average.

And you're hitting across quite a few fairways, as well. There's a lot of different slide angles. Think about the 3rd tee shot, for example. Think about the 6th tee shot. Obviously you've got 9 and 18, which are pretty unique driving holes, as well.

So even though it's wide and has a lot of width, it has the potential to play a lot narrower.

Q. Can we get the three-peat question out of the way, please? You and Aaron obviously won the championship, the first two. Can you explain what the significance of that is, and why you think it is that UK golfers have done it? And the tabloidy three-peat

question, can it be three in a row?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, there's a lot of talented golfers coming out of Europe and out of the UK. Aaron has definitely, like, forged his own path and done it his own way. It was amazing to see him do what he did at Aronimink.

Yeah, I think as well, obviously the European golfers, the majority of our golf is in the United States, 3 of the 4 major championships are here. I think just over time we've got a lot more comfortable with the style of golf that you need to play and the setups around here.

So, yeah, obviously a historic start to the major season for golfers from that part of the world, and I would say this is more a UK/European style of test than certainly the first two majors at Augusta and Aronimink. So it certainly wouldn't surprise me to see a few players from Europe and the UK in contention on Sunday.

Q. I feel like over the years you've gotten really good at problem solving your own golf swing. When something's off, you go to the range. You generally fix it really quick. You don't have your coach here all day every day like other players. How did you land on that being a solution that works for you and what your kind of mindset is around that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've always wanted to have full ownership of my game and my golf swing. I've never wanted to hand my golf game over to someone else.

I've maybe dabbled in that in the past. Like, I worked with Pete Cowen for six months in 2021, and I learned some things from that, I guess, experiment, for want of a better word. I felt like, to me, I need it to be my own idea. I need it to be my own feelings.

Even I worked with Michael Bannon last week in London, but it's really me leading and saying, okay, this is what I'm feeling, this is what I want to do. Tell me if I'm completely off. If not, then we'll go from there.

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Yeah, I've always wanted ownership because your coach can't be out there on the golf course with you when things start to go wrong, and you need to know how to manage your patterns. I feel like over the years I've definitely gotten better at that, and I think that's part of the reason why my consistency has been improving as my career has went on.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about the strategy and imagination required to do well here, perhaps on 1 or 10, 11, 12? I mean, there's so much variety.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, there is. I think one of the biggest -- like, you look at a hole like 1, if you get the right wind direction, there's the possibility of getting it up close to the green, but then you're sort of thinking, is it worth it? Is it worth risking putting the ball in the fescue, on the wrong side?

So I think this course, it demands so much patience, and it can really lure you into taking on things that you probably shouldn't. 13 is a good example. If you get the right wind direction, as well, you can get it close to the green there.

To me, it's -- you know, they're big playing areas, big fairways, pretty big greens, but I think a lot -- especially with the weather forecast and the conditions and looks like we're going to get some pretty heavy wind for a couple of days anyway. If you can get your ball to the middle of the greens here and just putt to the corners wherever the flags are going to be, that's never going to be a bad strategy.

I think that's a lot -- you know, the strategy that I've employed at the U.S. Open over the past few years has been a lot like that, and that's served me well. It hasn't gotten me the trophy, but it's gotten me pretty close a few years. But I definitely feel like I've become a lot better of a U.S. Open player by trying to really stay patient throughout the week and not taking on too much.

Q. The plan this week is to have the course sort of gradually build up in terms of speed and firmness and all that. From a player's perspective, do you like the sound of that better than trying to have it as it will be all the tournament days starting, say, yesterday?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think as the week goes on, you have the ability for the course to get firmer and faster. I think with this golf course, only up until a certain point. We've seen what's happened here the last two U.S. Opens. It doesn't need to get that fast to play incredibly difficult and challenging.

I'd say the greens yesterday probably averaged about 11 1/2. They certainly don't need to be any faster than that. I

think with the wind they're expecting on Thursday, I'd say it seems they'd want to get the greens back to the 10s. 10, 5, something like that, just because of how heavy the wind is going to be, gusts of 35 to 40 miles an hour.

There was only gusts of 25 to 30 yesterday, and balls wouldn't stand on the 11th green. That's where you just have to use a little bit of caution.

Certainly I think, as well, Thursday, Friday is difficult because there's two waves, and you want to try to protect the competitive integrity of the tournament and try to make it somewhat fair for everyone. Obviously it's an outdoor sport, and you can't control everything.

But I think on the weekend starting times are 10:00 a.m., say, is the first time. At least they have time, if they need to put a lot of water on the golf course early, and then they let it sort of naturally dry out as the day goes on, they have the ability to do that at the weekend, which I think makes life a little bit easier for them.

So I think Thursday, Friday, they're just going to have to manage a little bit better.

Q. Just a quick follow-up on that. They let it be known they may put some water between the morning and afternoon waves. Again, as a player, do you understand that, and do you think your peers are okay with that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think, look, it's a unique golf course. The members at Shinnecock will tell you they do that every single day. Every single day at this course the members play, they put water on the course at 2:00 p.m.

So it's a unique golf course, and it seems like it's just something they have to do. For me, it's more -- my concern was you don't want to look as if you've lost the golf course and you're starting to put water on it, which is I don't think what they're going to do.

I think, especially with the heaviness of the wind on Thursday, it's probably prudent to do that. Friday doesn't look as windy, but I think just for, again, fairness and competitive integrity, they do it on Friday, too. Then I don't think -- I think they've got enough bandwidth on the weekend that they probably don't need to do it, so I understand it.

I think, when I first heard of it, my first reaction was, that's stupid, why are they doing that? Then once you actually listen and you've let them break it down to you, you're, like, yeah, that makes sense.

Q. Just to follow on that, Rory, what's the difference between a setup that's incredibly difficult and a setup that's unfair?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's a very, very fine line. I think good shots getting rewarded and bad shots getting punished. But, yeah, I think -- look, I've said this before. We're expecting wind. As long as they don't get the greens too fast, I don't think there will be an issue.

It's a very challenging golf course to begin with. I actually made this point yesterday, as well. The greens are pretty soft already, or they were yesterday, which actually makes some of the shots around the greens more difficult because the ball runs away from the greens, and then you're chipping up into the slopes, and the softer the green is, the harder it is to get the ball back up the slope and, like, bump it into the hills.

The firmer the green is, it almost makes the bump and runs a little easier. Sometimes the softness of the green actually makes the short game a little trickier and tougher. So firm and fast doesn't always mean more difficult, just depending on the shots that you have.

Q. A big football fan, what have you made of the World Cup so far? And can you give us thoughts on Scotland and the Tartan Army being back in this stage after a 20-year gap?

RORY McILROY: I've followed it a little bit. It's been interesting so far. Brazil and Morocco drawing, which obviously opens the door for Scotland to walk straight through to the knockout stages, which is great to see. Obviously Spain only drawing yesterday.

Yeah, it's a different World Cup. There's a lot more teams in it. I wouldn't necessarily be a fan of that, I think, but it means Scotland are in. So I guess you're happy about that (laughter).

It's nice that it's on, and especially this week, it's a good distraction to be able to go back from the golf course and turn the football on and forget about the golf for a little bit.

Q. The reaction towards you when you were at Bethpage a couple of months ago was pretty nasty. A lot of those same people are going to be on the course today. I guess, how would you describe your relationship with Long Island golf fans?

RORY McILROY: Look, I love playing around New York. I love playing in this area. It's got some of the best golf in the world.

This is a different -- like the Ryder Cup is us versus them, very partisan, very -- like it's just a different beast. So, yeah, I have no -- yeah, was it a rough week for me at times? Absolutely. But it is what it is. If that's a price to pay to live the life that I'm living, then I'm okay with that.

Q. What did you find when you were out on the course yesterday? It seemed like it was mostly very --

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it was great. It was amazing. Look, New York is New York, and they're going to make their voices heard, but that's a good thing. That's a good atmosphere to play in.

Q. Question about Bob Rotella. What is it about him, be it his personality, how he says things, how he says it, that keeps you coming back to him?

RORY McILROY: I've worked on and off with Bob for 16, 17 years, and there's usually nothing new in there. It's just things that you've either forgotten or you've gotten away from. He does such a great job of simplifying things and breaking things down into very bite-sized pieces that you can take with you onto the golf course and little mantras and little sayings.

Certainly it's not like I'm going to him and looking for new stuff every time, but just the way he frames it and the way he's able to relate it back to maybe other parts of life or giving yourself perspective.

Really for me, especially weeks like this when it's very easy to get like drawn into the outcome of things, like I want to win or I want to get myself -- you know, he gets you back to, well, if you do this, this, and this, then the outcome will take care of itself.

So I think it's just focusing on the things that you can control, and if you can execute on those, then hopefully you'll find yourself with a chance to win because of that.

Q. Rory, in terms of the changes coming to the TOUR, we'll hear more from Brian this week and we've heard more about the positives and benefits of those changes, but what concerns do you have about those changes and the effects they might have on players?

RORY McILROY: I don't really know. I guess like at an event -- I guess, just recency, an event like last week, the Canadian Open, potentially going to one of these track 2s. Track 2 is a glorified Korn Ferry event. That's what track 2 is going to be. So I don't think the Canadian Open should be one of those.

Yeah, I just think there's going to be certain events that

might lose their stature if a sponsor doesn't pony up \$30 million. So that's the tough thing.

But, look, I'm not in those rooms. I don't know. I play my schedule, and I'll continue to play my schedule, which is getting less and less as the years go on. Yeah, it's funny. Like I think, as they've done all this work, you start to realize that the way the TOUR was before LIV came along was actually pretty good. It was a pretty good structure, and everything sort of worked pretty well.

LIV created this false economy where we had to up prize funds and had to cut fields and try to support the top players and all that stuff, which I think needed to happen because that was the only way to retain talent at the time, but now that LIV looks like it's less of a threat, I think, as I said, the old ways of the PGA TOUR weren't actually that bad.

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