

RBC Heritage

Wednesday, June 17, 2020

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with Rory McIlroy at the 2020 RBC Heritage. Rory, you're making your first start at Harbour Town since 2009. How does it feel to be back?

RORY McILROY: It feels good to be back. Yeah, it seems like a lifetime ago that I was here last, week after my first Masters in '09.

Yeah, I've watched it a lot on TV over the years, and you sort of know all the signature holes, I guess, but there was a few holes -- I played a few holes yesterday, and there was a couple on the front nine that I didn't really recall, and then I'm going to go right after here and play the back nine. There's a couple on that side that I sort of need to get familiar with again. But, yeah, it's good to be back.

Look, it's a different schedule. I played Colonial for the first time last week, playing here for the first time in 11 years. But, yeah, excited to just be able to play golf tournaments again and get back at it. Excited for a great week.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions from the media.

Q. Rory, I got a couple for you. What did you experience last week as far as dealing with the COVID-19 that will help you go forward this week?

RORY McILROY: I don't know, I think the first couple days last week in Colonial felt somewhat normal. I mean, I think Thursday, Friday -- you know, it felt a little different over the weekend, like when we were in contention, in materials of it was very quiet and obviously not much atmosphere out there. But in terms of like dealing with it and dealing with the daily routine of temperature checks and all that sort of stuff, it's totally fine.

I think the plans that are in place are very, very good. I'm sure everyone's doing their best. I certainly don't want to expose myself and test positive and put anyone else in danger, but also, selfishly, I don't want to test positive because I want to keep playing golf, I want to keep playing in these tournaments. So I'm trying to do everything I can to limit my exposure and obviously not catch or spread the virus.

Q. And I'll ask another question I've asked of

everybody. Would you gain 30 to 35 pounds to gain 20 miles per hour ball speed?

RORY McILROY: No. I actually feel my best when I'm lighter. I was probably at my lightest at the start of the season, sort of that California swing, at Torrey Pines. I remember weighing myself at Torrey on the Sunday morning before going out to the final round, and I was like 155. I think that's half of Bryson now.

Yeah, I feel better when I'm lighter. I feel more supple. I feel like I get a little more speed. Yeah, I don't feel great when I gain weight.

Q. The restart, obviously, has been trickier for the Europe-based players for all the logistical reasons that everyone knows. Do you appreciate their play? And what do you think of their losing World Golf Ranking points as they try to figure out how to navigate this new normal?

RORY McILROY: Look, personally, I -- if I were in their shoes and I was asked to come over to the states and shelter in place or quarantine for two weeks before these tournaments, I would have done that because we've got -- I mean, if you really care about your career and care about moving forward, you should be here, I think. Last week was 70 World Ranking points for the winner, this week 74.

And I get there's different variables and families and stuff involved, but we all have the means to rent a very nice house in a gated community in Florida and -- you know, it's not a hardship for two weeks to come over and quarantine. I mean, it's fine. My caddie Harry came over and did it. He stayed in our guest house. The two weeks flew by.

Yeah, I honestly don't understand the guys complaining because there is a solution to it. You can come over here and do what needs to be done.

Q. A quick follow. One of your Ryder Cup teammates said the problem is a three week -- if you come over for three weeks, it amounts to a nine-week block because you have to quarantine two weeks, then if you were to go home, it's two weeks, then when you come back, it's two weeks. So if you have young children or whatever, that's the trick, I guess. Do you appreciate that dilemma?

RORY McILROY: I do appreciate that, but it's not as if

-- you know, most kids, it's sort of the end of the school year. I know a few kids that went back to school. Again, you can bring your family with you. We all have the means to do that.

Look I don't quite -- it might seem a little harsh, but I don't get that mindset, especially if you care about your career and you want to advance.

Q. I was going to ask you, what's sort of been the practice arrangements and accommodation arrangements this week between you and Harry? I guess you and Harry, as you mentioned last week, shared a house in Fort Worth, and you had a downstairs basement with his sort of golf driving simulator. What's the arrangement this week, and who are you sort of practicing with this week?

RORY McILROY: Same thing. So Harry and I are sharing a house. We've obviously spent the last, whatever it is, 3 1/2 weeks together. So, obviously, we're -- we get tested, and we're both negative. I feel like it's a safe option. So just Harry and I sharing a house again this week.

Then practice-wise, I haven't really -- I played nine holes yesterday, and I joined Jhonattan Vegas and Emiliano Grillo and Branden Grace, but I'm going to go play nine holes later today, but I haven't arranged anything. It's sometimes nice just to get out there on your own, especially if you want to see a new golf course that you haven't seen in a while, just to sort of go about your business with your caddie and learn a few things about the course.

Q. Hi, Rory. Obviously, you've been in a position to win a few times this year and have had a disappointing Sunday. At what point do you sort of dismiss -- like last Sunday, for example -- as just one of those days, and at what point does it sort of become a thing in the back of your head that you're aware of?

RORY McILROY: I wouldn't say that Sundays this year have been disappointing. I mean, I played -- maybe Bay Hill, I would say was disappointing, and obviously last week, but that was just more annoying, like I played crap. That was really it. Like it wasn't as if it was anything to do with the position I was in or I got off to a really bad start and got into the rough on the front nine and hit decent shots that ended up in a bunker or a bad lie or whatever and just sort of -- it's one of those things where the momentum just started going the other way.

No, look, it's fine. I played okay last week. It was a good gauge to see where I was at and what I needed to practice and what I needed to do going into the next few weeks. Obviously disappointing not to shoot a good one on Sunday, but it was fine. I learnt quite a bit

from it, and hopefully those lessons I can put into practice this week.

Q. Nick Faldo said in the commentary that it doesn't look like you've got a plan when things are going wrong. Were you made aware of that comment afterwards, and do you think that's an unfair comment?

RORY McILROY: I didn't hear that, no. Look, commentators are put in positions where, look, they have to say something. They're not just going to sit there and be silent. I respect Nick a lot. Nick's been really good to me growing up, as a junior golfer and even into the professional level. Look, I get the position he's put in with commentary where you just have to say something, you have to make a comment. I've learned very quickly out here that you don't take anything personally and you just move on.

Q. Rory, you've had kind of two weeks now to get used to this new normal at tournament sites, but you guys are creatures of habit. What's been the one thing that you've had to switch up that's maybe been the most different for you?

RORY McILROY: Honestly, there hasn't been that much. I mean, there hasn't really been anything that has been that different. I sort of like it. It's quiet. You can get from A to B and not get stopped 20 times. It's sort of -- look, we all miss the fans, and the fans make the atmosphere, but at the same time, it's sort of nice to be able to just go about your business and not have to worry about something that should take five minutes, having to give yourself 15 or 20 minutes to do just because of just getting from A to B. You know what it's like at tournaments and stuff.

I haven't really switched up that much. There hasn't been anything that I would say that I would change. It's sort of been nice.

Q. I just wanted to ask about Bryson. You played with him on Sunday. What was that like? Were you expecting that? Did you expect to see that transformation? Was it much different to what you saw from him before?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, obviously, at the start of the year, he came out, and he was a bit bigger. You could see he was getting a bit of speed and stuff, and he was hitting it a long way. But he hit a couple drives on Sunday that Harry and I just looked at each other, and we're like, holy shit, that was unbelievable.

He hit one into the wind on 11. I hit a really good one and probably hit it like 315, 320. He must have flew my ball by 40 yards. He hit it like 370, 375 into the wind. It was crazy. It was nuts. It's unbelievable.

I mean, it's impressive what he's doing. There's going to be courses where it works, and there's going to be courses where it won't. I can't see him hitting that many drivers this week, for example. But, look, he nearly won on Colonial, but Colonial you can always miss it on one side. It's not as if -- I feel like Colonial, there's maybe only trouble on one side of the hole a lot of times, where obviously somewhere like here, Hilton Head, you've got trouble on both sides. So there's not really a bailout anywhere, where it felt like last week you could sort of -- even though Colonial is a traditional golf course, there is always one side you could miss it if you wanted to hit driver.

Look, it's impressive. He's big. He's sort of gone down a path, and he's obviously very -- he's got a conviction, and he's following it. That's what he's done. He's always thought outside the box and thought a little differently to most people. He's really put his mind at wanting to get longer, and he's definitely done that.

Q. Is there no doubt that he's the longest now, do you think?

RORY McILROY: I'd still say Cameron Champ. It seems with Cameron, it's a lot more -- it's smoother speed. It's not quite as much of an effort as Bryson's putting into it. But he's getting there.

Q. Just kind of curious, back to the Sunday thing for you. When you are in contention on Sunday, which you put yourself there so often, what's different for you that day? Is the adrenaline running a little bit more? I don't know how much you analyze that kind of thing, but I'm just curious, what is different for you on that Sunday for those final 18 holes?

RORY McILROY: Nothing, I don't think. There shouldn't be anything different, I guess. Yeah, no, I -- geez, you're going out there trying to shoot a good score, and that's about it. That's what you try to do every day. Some days you play better than others. Geez, I remember going into the -- like everyone kept asking me about Fridays six years ago in 2014 when I had bad Fridays. Geez, a few Fridays in a row where I didn't play well. I don't think it's this thing.

So, no, I try to go out there every day and shoot the best score I can, and the best score I could shoot on Sunday was 74. Hopefully, tomorrow I go out and try my best and shoot something a bit lower than that. Just each day, just try to go out there and do your best.

Q. Does it become more disappointing when the one bad round is on a Sunday? Or could you make the argument, if you had that bad round, if you shoot the 74 on Friday, maybe you're not in position for Sunday, right?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, not really. Like every day's the same. Again, I always say winning is -- there's a lot of randomness to winning golf tournament as. It's not just about -- like there's other things that happen, and you looked at what happened on Sunday. There's so many guys in contention. Putts slip out. Putts slip in. Like there's so much stuff that happens. You just have to go out there and focus on yourself and, again, try to shoot good scores.

It's not like I've necessarily shot bad scores on Sundays. I got off to a couple of bad starts in some final groups, but I still was able to come back and shoot scores in the 60s. So, no, I'm not worried about anything.

Q. Just one quick unrelated thing, with a little bit of a weird silver lining to these last -- these first four tournaments, to some degree, is the fact that all of you guys are obviously jonesing for the competition, and the fields have become so strong to some of these tournaments that normally don't draw the kinds of fields they're drawing right now. How much do you think that helps you even -- you and everybody else, particularly the top guys -- when most of the big guys are there? It has a little bit of a -- at least in terms of the feel, the Major Championship feel?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it does. It feels great to look down the range and see all of the top players in the world here, or most of the top players in the world here. That is, it's a good feeling. That's what we all want. We all want to play against the best fields week in, week out. I guess, as you said, it's silver lining to all this is that it seems like all the top guys are going to play a little more often going forward, and that's a good thing for the TOUR and for us and for the people at home that are watching.

Q. Rory, no positive tests last week. Apparently, that's going to be the case again this week. What do you make of that? What were your expectations? Any worries about complacency going forward?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think, as the lockdowns start to lift -- people have called it like this coronavirus fatigue or whatever, where people could become a little more complacent or sloppy, but, again, I think -- you know, most guys out here, their careers really matter to them, and they're going to do everything they can to make sure that they're safe and the people that they're coming in contact with are safe.

Again, it doesn't surprise me because I feel like the plan has put in place here has been very good. So, yeah, it's great to hear that two weeks in a row there's no positive tests. That's what we just have to keep

doing, but like as I said, just because things are starting to lift and it's getting a little more normal doesn't mean that we just stop doing what we've been doing over the last 12 weeks. We still need to stay pretty vigilant.