

Charles Schwab Challenge

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Rory McIlroy

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Rory McIlroy at the Charles Schwab Challenge. With the TOUR being off for three months after the cancellation of THE PLAYERS Championship, could you fill us in on what you've been up to and your excitement level to get started back up this week?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, back to work. I'm excited. I'm excited to be back on the road and doing what I'm supposed to do, play golf and compete. I think that's the one thing I'm looking forward to the most and the one thing I've missed the most over the past few months is just the competition.

I think I sort of realized over the few weeks or like three months, I like golf and golf has given me a lot of great things, but the thing that I missed the most was the competition. Not that I could take or leave golf because I think once -- I was very happy to put the clubs away for a few weeks, but once you sort of saw the light at the end of the tunnel and you knew what you were practicing for and getting up for and preparing for, that's when you sort of start to get those feelings back again.

But yeah, what did I do? I tried to be as responsible as possible, like everyone else during the whole lockdown. Yeah, rode the bike a lot, did a lot of Peloton, did a lot of jigsaw puzzles, laid by the pool. It's probably the most tanned my pasty Irish skin has ever been, so that's been about it. I tried to sort of take a little bit of time off but then over the past few weeks sort of gear back up.

We played the charity match at Seminole a few weeks ago, and that sort of started my preparations back to where we're at today.

THE MODERATOR: And as far as this week and the competition itself, you've won in tournament debuts before, most recently last year at the RBC Canadian Open. What are your impressions of the course as you begin to make your first start here?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, look, Colonial is a course that I've always wanted to come and play. I've watched it on TV over the years, and it's just the schedule has never worked out. It always clashed with the BMW Wentworth tournament back on the European Tour,



and I just never got a chance.

And then last year playing Canada for the first time, Memorial, Canada, U.S. Open, if I added here it would be four in a row. So the schedule never worked out that I could actually get here, and now that I can, I was excited to see the golf course and play it and try to learn it.

Obviously it's not the longest course on TOUR, but you really need to position your ball around the golf course very well. It reminds me of a few different places. I can sort of see a little bit of TPC Southwind in Memphis out there, a little bit of Valderrama in Spain, just really having to hit it in certain parts of the fairways and not taking on too much.

Yeah, I mean, it's a very historic venue, and a lot has happened here, and obviously Ben Hogan had a huge influence, so it's been cool to come and see all that.

Q. I know you've played in the TaylorMade Relief match, but have there been any other matches that have tried to get you back up to speed? Is there anything specific you've done to try to get ready after three months off?

RORY McILROY: Not particularly. I think I've tried to play with a lot of the guys down in Jupiter. I played with DJ a bit, played with Rickie, played with J.T., played with Shane Lowry a bunch, as well, so I tried to play with really high-caliber players all the time and see where everything measures up against them and tried to get sharp by playing a few money games and things like that. No, that's really been it. I sort of played a lot more than I practiced over the last few weeks, which has been nice because I sort of wanted to hit the ground running once I got here to Colonial, and I feel like my game is pretty sharp. It's never going to be -- nothing can compare to getting out there and playing under tournament conditions, but as far as I'm concerned, I'm as sharp as I can be coming in here, I guess.

Q. How frustrating has it been for you that this break came when it did, unlike in 2015, something completely out of your control, and can you just -- how confident are you you can turn the tap back on again and pick up where you left off? Do you say to yourself, look, three months ago you were in the



best player in the world, there's no reason why you're not still?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, there's no reason why I'm not still. I'm not frustrated. I wasn't frustrated at all. It's not as if -- I don't feel I've been hard done by or anything. It actually gave me an opportunity to work on a few things. I spent 90 days in a row at home for the first time in my adult life. Didn't get on a plane for three months. I did a lot of things that I didn't imagine that -- I never thought I would do for years.

I wouldn't say I'm frustrated. I'm eager to get back and I'm eager to play and get back into competition mode, but I'm sort of -- expectation-wise, we'll see how it goes. As I said, I feel like I'm as sharp as I can be coming in here. I've played a lot of golf over the last few weeks and I've practiced a bit. My game seems to be there. It seems to be there at home anyway, so if it's there at home, there's no reason why it shouldn't be there when I get out here.

Yeah, as I said, I'm feeling as good as I can, but in terms of expectations and how I'm playing, I think the first couple of days here will be the real test, and I'll learn a lot about myself and my game over those first couple days.

Q. Sort of on the societal issue at the moment, it does feel there's a real will to change this time, certainly on this side of the pond. How much have the events over the last couple weeks had an effect on you, and I wonder whether coming from the same country as I did, a country that's been divided by hatred and intolerance, whether that gives you an understanding of it?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think it does in a way, and yeah, I think -- a great word that I've sort of been thinking of over the last couple of weeks is tolerance. I think everyone can just be a little more tolerant, and a little more educated and not as ignorant.

Yeah, look, it's -- I would say nowadays, but any days, even going back in history, there's never been a place in society for what has went on in the world over the past I don't know how many hundreds of years. The fact that it does seem to be this real will to change and have reform is amazing. It's been a great thing to see, and I hope it continues to be in the conversation. Yeah, as we move forward, I think people have learned a lot over the last few weeks, and hopefully we'll see things change as time goes on.

Q. Kind of along those same lines, obviously you won't be on the course tomorrow morning at 8:46, but on Friday morning you will. Just curious what your thoughts are in terms of the moment of silence and what golf specifically can do to

address these issues.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I think what the PGA TOUR has done with the moment of silence at 8:46 and not using that tee time is a wonderful gesture. And I think if you look at golf -- look, I grew up -- my hero growing up was Tiger Woods. Tiger doesn't look the same as me, has had a very different upbringing to the one that I have had, but he was my hero growing up, and it didn't matter what color his skin was, what his beliefs were. Tiger was my hero, and he's been a lot of kids' heroes over the years that have grown up playing golf. We have had him -- we've been very lucky to have him in our game.

I think that there should be more people like him in golf, and I think what the conversation that Jay and Harold Varner had about these issues I think really hit home with me. Harold said, it maybe just isn't about the players, it's about everyone in the game of golf. There's so many people that are involved with the game, and as long as we continue to give people from different backgrounds opportunities to be in golf, that can only be a good thing.

Q. In the past you've expressed doubts about playing in front of no fans. You get the buzz off the fans and all of that. Is that a concern for you this week, that you really play better when the atmosphere is there?

RORY McILROY: No, not -- whenever I've made those comments, I feel I've been talking about Ryder Cup, and obviously playing in front of no fans at a Ryder Cup is very different than playing in front of no fans at a TOUR event. Look, it'll be slightly different. It'll be a little eerie that you're not getting claps and you're not getting feedback from good shots and stuff like that, but I think at the same time, it's -- it's what we have to do, right. It's what we have to do. It's what we're going to have to live with for the foreseeable future, and if that's what I have to adapt to to be able to get out here and play on TOUR and get back to work essentially, then I'm happy to do that.

Q. You just addressed the Ryder Cup a minute ago. You've been vocal in the past about the fact that it should not go on without fans. We were just speaking to Brooks a couple of moments ago, and he was asked if it was possible he felt some players might not play, might sit it out if there were fans not permitted, and he was asked if he might be one of them, and he said he would consider that. I'm kind of curious where you stand on that and how strongly you feel about that, and if that's something that you, as well, would consider if they carry on without spectators?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I would just say that I'm pretty sure they won't. I'm pretty sure they won't carry

on without spectators, so I don't think that would have to be an option that I would have to consider.

But look, I love the Ryder Cup. But I just think there's too much -- I just can't see it going ahead without fans. I don't think I'll be put in that position to make that choice.

Q. How important do you think this week is just for the game of golf being able to step into the spotlight when other sports aren't happening and to kind of demonstrate a sporting world with social distancing and so forth?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, that's a very good point. I think this week is very important because golf will be the center of the sports world, which it usually a few weeks a year is, but for people to have something to watch on TV where they actually don't know the outcome I think is going to be nice for them. So I think that'll be a good thing.

And yeah, I think it's an important week because golf can show that we can play in a socially distant manner. We can conduct a tournament and adhere to all the safety protocols that have been put in place.

Yeah, as long as everyone does their bit -- I said in a previous interview, it is going to be very easy to fall back into old habits because it's just what we've done. I'd say for the viewing public just to give the players and the caddies a little bit of leeway in terms of if they see something on TV that isn't quite right. We're having to figure it out as we go along, as well.

But I think golf can show that it can be played, especially at the highest level, and adhere to the guidelines that everyone else has to adhere to.

Q. And does it feel like you're in a safe environment at the moment? Obviously you see figures from America, we see it from afar and it suggests that numbers are still rising, but within the bubble that you're living, does it feel safe?

RORY McILROY: It does. It really does feel safe. Everything at the course -- yeah, everything that's been put in place for us has felt very -- I keep using this word, but it's felt very robust. It's felt very safe. Everyone is doing the right things, and the people that are involved with the tournament are wearing masks and wearing gloves, and there's sanitizer everywhere you look. It feels safe. I feel safe, and I would say basically everyone else that's here feels the same way.

Q. We've heard from Keith Pelley a lot over the last couple days and weeks talking about the European Tour, and obviously they're not going to start until next month. As a European Tour member as well as

a PGA TOUR member, are you concerned about the health of that tour?

RORY McILROY: I mean, yeah, of course I'm concerned. It's not great when they're having to do things and they're taking such a financial hit because of the coronavirus and this pandemic. So am I concerned? Yes. But I don't know what else I can do. I don't feel like I'm responsible for the health of the Tour. I'm a player; I play on the Tour and I'm very grateful for the opportunity that they've provided me over the years.

But if anything, I think this pandemic has highlighted the fact that the game of golf at the highest level needs to be simplified. I think there's too many funnels, there's too many channels. I don't know if everything being under one umbrella is the solution, but definitely fewer umbrellas I think is a way forward, and I think that's what -- trying to sort of figure out everything as we've been going along, and I think the major championship organizations and the bigger governing bodies in the game of golf have realized that there's so many moving parts, and I think more cohesion in the game is better. I'm not saying that it's been a good thing, but at the same time, I think it's opened some people's eyes up to the fact that we can all sort of work a little bit better together in this world.

Q. Just to follow up, there has been a lot of discussion about the potential of a European Tour- PGA TOUR merger of some type down the road. Would you be supportive of that?

RORY McILROY: I would be. I've sort of been calling for it for a while. Yeah, I would like to see that. I think for the health of both tours, a world tour is something I've always wanted, but it had to be done the right way. I think the PGL coming in and trying to do it their way wasn't the right thing, so trying to make change from within the game already and not letting an outsider come in is the right way to do it, so I'd be supportive of that for sure.

Q. Just to follow up on that, when you're talking about fewer umbrellas, are you thinking more tours consolidating or more tri-sanctioned events among tours? What do you have on your mind?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. I'd say tours consolidating -- yeah, tours consolidating, whether it's some European Tour events offering FedExCup points and some PGA TOUR events offering Race to Dubai points, I don't know, but yeah, just a little bit more cohesion, and then I think, as well, trying to figure out the schedule going forward this year. The major bodies, so USGA, R&A, Masters, PGA of America, whatever it is, they're thinking about one or two weeks a year, and I think speaking to the PGA TOUR, speaking to the European Tour, having everyone together and trying to

figure this out has definitely opened some people's eyes to what actually goes on and how many moving parts there is.

So I think the more that all these bodies can sort of work together for the greater good of game can only be a good thing.

Q. And speaking of speaking, you spoke of the Ryder Cup being held with fans with great confidence a minute ago. Do you know something we don't, A; and B, has anyone outside of a media podcast or function asked your opinion on this? In other words, has anyone from Europe or even the PGA of America sought your opinion, and if they haven't, should they have?

RORY McILROY: So when I say that -- so I think there's enough people within the game that don't want the Ryder Cup to happen without fans, that's why I sort of have this conviction that it wouldn't happen if fans wouldn't be allowed. That's sort of what I'm saying. I think there's enough people against it within the game. So that's why it's either going to be played this year with fans, if we can do that, or going to have to figure out kicking it down the road to a later date.

What was the second part to that question?

Q. Has anyone from Europe --

RORY McILROY: Oh, so I talked to some -- I talk to Keith Pelley maybe once every two weeks. I talk to Jay a little bit. I'm in constant communication with a lot of -- I'm in constant communication with a lot of people from the PGA TOUR and PGA of America. Yeah, people have sought my opinion, but my opinion doesn't really change anything. I can voice something and say this is what I think should happen, but that doesn't mean that it's going to happen or even that that's the right thing that should happen. It's just what I think, and they can take it or leave it.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, we appreciate your time.