

Travelers Championship

Wednesday, June 21, 2017

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Rory McIlroy to the Travelers Championship. Rory, it's your first time here in Hartford, so from all of us, welcome to Hartford.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

Q. What are your initial impressions of the course and this event?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I love the course. The course is nice. It's a little change of pace from what we played last week at Erin Hills. It's started with the storm on Monday, so the ball's not going anywhere where it hits. So it's pretty much target golf from there. Hopefully the breeze continues over a few days and it firms up a little bit.

But the golf course is great. I can see why Jim Furyk hit 58 last year and why guys can go so low. If you're on with your scoring clubs, it gives you a lot of opportunities.

So, yeah, it's good to be here. The event is for the Wednesday Pro-am this morning and teeing off before 7 a.m., it's very well attended. It's also supported by the local community. So happy to be here.

I like what the PGA TOUR is doing with, not making us, but it's nice to be able to play an event you haven't played the last few years. It makes you go to different places. This year it's Hartford. I mean, I may come back next year because I like it so much. But the year before it was sort of I added Riv, and I loved that. Next year, hopefully, if I win the tournament, I want to go to Hawaii.

So it's nice you get to go to different places. It's a good incentive to get guys to play different tournaments.

THE MODERATOR: Great. Well, welcome.

Q. Last week you mentioned rust coming off the break after THE PLAYERS. Can you force yourself back into a competitive mindset or does that just come naturally?

RORY McILROY: I think it comes naturally. In a perfect world, last week wouldn't have been first week back at the U.S. Open. It's a high pressure, high-stress sort of event. I just wasn't -- I just hit my stride a little too late. I played well the last nine holes on Friday, and I was just trying to shake the rust off before that.

I started well on Thursday, but it all sort of caught up with me. So, yeah, I think once you get into a run of events, there are certain situations on a course that you're just going to handle better because you've played a little bit and you've had a scorecard in your hand and you experienced it, whether little things, but concentration-wise, there's a little slope behind the hole, and you're putting behind hills and you're obviously trying to hole the putt, but you're not really concentrating well. If this goes two feet by, it could roll another six feet type of thing.

Some of that stuff where I was mentally just wasn't as sharp as I needed to be, and that just comes from playing rounds of golf. So hopefully I can get on a good run over these next few weeks, and I can get all that sort of stuff out of my system and hopefully this is the start of that run.

Q. This is your first year here, but I remember a few years ago you were up here practicing when you were down in new haven watching the tennis. But what is your relationship with the tournament? What has Nathan done to attract so many top golfers a week after a major to this thing?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, he would somewhat argue that a week after a major is not the time you want to play just because -- perfect for me, I missed the cut, so I had a few extra days to prepare.

But, again, the U.S. Open is a little different. I could see it's a feel-good event. It's nice. The U.S. Open is such a grind. Maybe not as much this year as in previous years. But if you want to play a round of golf, there is no better place to come than here where you can make birdies. The U.S. Open can zap your confidence a little bit as well. So it's nice to come back to a venue where you can see shots going close to the hole, you can see putts going in, you can make birdies. Sometimes you need that.

I actually think it's a great time to have an event straight after a U.S. Open. Honestly? If there's one event that I'm going to -- one major tournament that I'm going to play the week after, probably would be the U.S. Open. It is a grind, and sometimes you can get a little bit -- I'd say the last couple of years I was a little frustrated with the U.S. Open. Part of the reason why I added this

event is because I expect it to feel like that after Erin Hills this year again.

I didn't feel like that because I felt like they did a good job with the golf course, but it's nice to get straight back on the horse and try again after a disappointing week last week.

Q. A lot of people that travel from tournament to tournament, not really players, but they say Travelers is, if not the best sponsor, certainly one of the best, from what you've heard from players here before about Travelers, what specifically do players look for in a sponsor? Apparently Travelers does a lot of the things that players are looking for. But what specifics do you think make a good sponsor?

RORY McILROY: I think listening to what players want, whether that's they put a charter on from the U.S. Open on Sunday night for a lot of the guys. We stay in downtown Hartford which is great. There are a lot of nice restaurants and places to eat, and places to sort of get away from the tournament a little bit as well. And the guys, Andy and Nathan, they always have a presence at every PGA TOUR. They always come up and introduce themselves to the players. Basically asking, What can we do to get you to Hartford this year? It makes players feel good. It makes them feel wanted and feel like the tournament sponsor wants you to come and play their event.

There is an awesome feel this week with the likes of Jason Day, Jordan, myself, Justin Thomas, Bubba, Jim Furyk, there are a lot of great players here. I think with the rule that the PGA TOUR has implemented over the past couple years on how good a sponsor Travelers is, I don't think that that's going to change anytime soon. I'm sure this event will continue to get a strong field for the foreseeable future.

Q. Two questions. One, it's been nine majors since your last major victory. Is it harder now to win those compared to four years ago, just given the depth of talent and seven straight first-timers?

RORY McILROY: I think so. I think guys have started to play this modern game of golf that we know. Obviously last week where you hit a lot of drivers and you could over-par a golf course.

But I mean you look at the last few major winners, DJ, Henrik, I mean, Jimmy Walker gets it out there. Sergio and Justin going down the stretch, they don't hit it short, Brooks. It's getting to the point where guys are going to hit driver more often. I felt like when you watched Tiger dominate, it was a little more of a conservative game and the strategy was a little more where guys say, OK, I'm going to hit driver, and I'm

going to get it down there, and I'm going to be aggressive. And if you're on that week with driver, and you can get it down there and you're hitting it in the fairway, the course becomes so much easier. I think that's part of the reason.

Guys aren't afraid to be aggressive and to score. I don't necessarily think it's gotten harder. It's always been hard to win a major championship. I just think as you said, the depth of talent out there is as deep as it's ever been. There are a number of factors. The teaching is better, the knowledge is better. Yeah, there are just more players.

I think as well if you were to say what was Tiger's biggest impact on the game, it's the fact that there are so many kids now that are trying to -- it used to be kids used to play golf as a hobby and something to do in the summertime. Now it's kids want to play golf to win tournaments and to be a professional golfer. So that's been a huge impact as well. That's why you see -- I mean, you look at this class of 11, I guess, you've got Justin Thomas, and Jordan, and Daniel Berger, and all these guys are coming through. So it is, it's deep out here. It's great for the game. You might not see a dominant player in the game like we've seen in the past, but it's not necessarily a bad thing.

Obviously, I'd love to try to emulate some of that dominance, but I think in this day and age, it's a little more difficult.

Q. Just a bigger picture question. You've got the new equipment, newly married and so forth. Does it feel like you're sort of in the second phase of your career at this point?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I had a chance to think about that. It's going to be ten years in September that I'm a pro, and I'm sort of looking at it as a ten-year journey. If I look back over ten years, am I happy with where my career's at? I would say, yes, I guess. But I definitely feel like in the next ten years, 2018 to 2027, that I can do better.

You know, so I definitely think -- I always felt 17 was going to be a bit of a transitional year, with obviously, Nike going out of the golf equipment business and getting married, moving and changing residences, and all that sort of stuff, it was always going to be a transitional year. I didn't factor an injury into that as well.

But, yeah, it feels like the first ten years of my career is nearly over. Not quite yet. It's still got two majors to play in. So I'd like to try to finish that ten years very well. But I feel from me it seems 2017 is my window to do as much as I can to make my mark on my game, I guess, and see how many tournaments in majors I can

win. So, yeah, I guess it's a bit of a part two of this thing we call a career or journey or job or whatever.

Q. Your press conference last week happened to coincide when they brought all the mowers out, and everyone wasn't exactly sure what was going on. You were asked to comment on it. Do you feel like you were sort of unfairly criticized for what you said without really knowing what was going on?

RORY McILROY: No, not really. I still think -- I mean, it was only four holes. At that point I didn't realize it was only four holes and it was this much. So it was still, you hit it off line, you got punished, as I can allude to.

Look, I felt the fairways were big enough, and they were big enough. But someone shot 16-under par last week and wheels on driver every time he could. So the fairways were definitely big enough if you were hitting the ball well. And you could get -- I think what guys really -- I missed it a couple of times two yards into that fescue. It was really tough when I had to hack out when you missed it in the crowd and you have a clear shot to the green.

So I think people got a little bit, you know, peeved at that. But I thought it was a good set-up last week. Without knowing everything that was going on, it's not as if they just chopped it all down. They chopped it down in four holes, so, yeah.

Q. Any update on the injury? Did it affect you at all last week? Any apprehension to play a second week in a row?

RORY McILROY: Not at all. I feel good. Yeah, I feel really good. Again, it's just a matter of I feel it's improving each and every week. I felt better than I felt last week, and last week I felt better than the week before. So I think I'm managing it the right way now and concentrating on playing, concentrating on my short game, not hitting as many balls. I'll hit balls maybe 30, 40 minutes max, and that's really it.

But if I can get my work done, it's quality over quantity at this point. If I can get quality practice for those 40 minutes that I hit balls, I should be totally fine.

Q. And when you're playing in a Pro-Am today and in events like this, what is your responsibility do you feel, and what is your philosophy going out and kibitzing and talking with the foursome you're playing with and signing autographs? What is your philosophy about Pro-Am day?

RORY McILROY: I think sports is a real unique position where sponsors and recreational players can play with professionals on or at the same venues that we play at. So it's a great thrill for the guys to come out and play 18 holes with us. I feel like it's our responsibility to

show them a good time. For some guys it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Some guys play a lot of Pro-Ams.

But I feel golf, more than any other sport, can really add value to the sponsors in that way. They get to spend some really quality time with the guys that are playing in their events. For the money that they put in to tournaments, they deserve that. They really do. So it's responsibility to make sure they have a good time, but you're still making sure that you're getting to know the course and learning the greens and making sure that you're ready for Thursday as well.

But, yeah, I mean, Wednesday is it's all about the sponsors, and it's all about them having a good time. Because if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be in a position that we're in.

Q. Tiger this week tweeted he was getting professional help for some of his off the field problems. Any thoughts on what he's going through right now?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's tough. Look, it's a tough one. I mean, I reached out to him whenever everything broke a few weeks ago and just making sure he was OK. I felt I built up a good relationship with Tiger over the last few years.

He's okay. He's gone through a rough time the last few years with injuries and being in pain and not being able to sleep. I totally understand how that can happen. So it's good that he's getting help. It's good that he's on the road to recovery, I guess. I guess everyone in golf and around the world just wishes him the best.

That's really the thing that he feels more than anything else. He's felt an outpouring of love over the past few weeks after all this happened, and he really appreciates that. Hopefully forget the golf for a minute, and go back to being able to lead a normal life, raise his kids and have good times doing that.

Q. I think you've talked about blood testing before. Can you react to yesterday's news?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think it's good. I said in a press conference at the Open Championship last year and openly said if we're not blood tested we're not doing all we can to make sure that golf is a clean sport. So, I obviously welcome the news yesterday.

If golf really wants to be taken seriously and wants to be a sport in the Olympics and a part of the Olympic program, it needs to get on board with everything that all the other sports do as well. So blood testing in golf is a massive step in the right direction.

I was asked yesterday does anyone have anything to fear from it? I really don't think that golf has any sort of drug problem at all. So, yeah, I don't think anyone should be fearful. I'm so careful with what I take in terms of supplements or even if I have a cough or a flu, I can't take Sudafed. I don't know if I couldn't. You can now, but there were a couple of years where you had a call for a cold and you couldn't take Pseudoephedrine.

So you have to be so careful about what you take, but that's part in parcel about being an athlete. I'm not sure how many people would call me an athlete, but it's part of being a sports person and a golfer, you have these responsibilities, and I think it's a good thing.

Q. First of all, congratulations on your TKO victory on Twitter the other day. But my question is at this mark in your career, it seems people are questioning you both on how passionate you are, but conversely how hard of a workout you are if you're too passionate. I was wondering if you feel you've done that or if one bothers you more than the other?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's hard. You feel like golf is a nostalgic game, so people are very -- it wasn't like it used to be. But there is this new way of coming through that you need to modernize golf. There are some people that are sort of stuck in the era that they played and some people that want to move on from that.

Honestly, I haven't lifted a weight all year, and it's tough for me to come out and sort of say I don't. But I literally have -- the most I've lifted in the gym is 15 pounds this year because of my injury. I'm nowhere near as strong as I used to be. I'm not. But I don't need to be. I feel like physically if I'm stable and I'm strong in the right areas, I'm okay.

So at least I can't be criticized for that this year. Yeah, it's tough. Because anytime, even what Justin Thomas did last week shooting 63, everyone compares it to something somebody did in the 70s. It's like why do we have to do that? Why can't we just see it as what it is, an unbelievable score. 9-under, the lowest score ever shot in the U.S. Open, and leave it at that. Not have to compare it back in the day when people think golf was better, not better, whatever. So it's a tough one.

All we can do is play the best we can on the golf courses that we're presented with and do our best.