

Travelers Championship

Wednesday, June 20, 2018

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Rory McIlroy, 14-time major champion, 14-time TOUR winner. You played in this event for the first time last year, shot 64 in the final round and finished T17 if I remember rightly. Just some comments on coming back here and the reason that you come to play here, one of them being this event has been voted No. 1 on by the PGA TOUR as the tournament of the year plus the players' choice. Can you talk about that, as well?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. I mean, I -- at this point last year, I needed to play. I had an injury, and I was sort of -- I came back at the U.S. Open, but even before that, I wanted to play a little bit, and I added this tournament to the schedule. More because I needed to play. I felt like I needed to play some rounds and some golf. But anyone that I talked to could only say good things about the tournament, about the golf course, you know, how the guys are treated here, how the fans come out, like how the community always gets behind this event. Obviously I witnessed that for the first time last year.

I really enjoyed it. Sometimes having a tournament right after a major doesn't help, but having this tournament right after the tournament last week, I think it gets guys back into their normal routines. They play a golf course which is -- you can make birdies, you can get on runs, and that's a nice thing. The golf course sets up well. It's a nice part of the world to be in this time of year. The weather is always pretty good. Because of that, the course is always in really good shape. It's just all of that together just makes it a really enjoyable week.

Q. You mentioned sort of needing to play with the injury and so forth last year. Just curious, you've obviously played a lot this year. How do you assess where you're at with your game right now?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I feel like I'm -- I've had five realistic chances to win this year, and I've been able to close out one of them. That's a bit disappointing, I guess, but at least I've given myself five chances to win golf tournaments, which is much more than I did last year. In terms of what I've worked on and what I needed to do from last year into this year, I feel like I've improved in certain areas, which is good.

But obviously I -- you get anyone up here would tell you that they've probably wanted to do better than they've done this year. But there's still a lot of golf left.

Whatever it is, one win and six or seven top 10s or whatever it may be. But I've given myself chances to win. I've played myself into quite a few final groups, so that's been good. And it's just a matter of trying to keep doing that and putting yourself in positions and see if you can step through the door and get a few more wins.

Q. Of those five, what was the one that was maybe the most frustrating or you feel like got away from you?

RORY McILROY: I mean, I was two ahead with eight to go in Dubai. I was tied for the lead going into the last round at Wentworth. I don't know, obviously Augusta I got myself into the final group but I was three behind. You know, there's been some good golf in there. I feel like I let Dubai and Wentworth get away a little bit.

But you know, I've played good golf. I've shot some really good scores, and if anything, I just need to be a little bit more consistent. I feel if I can do that and my consistency level, just get that up a little bit, I'll give myself plenty more chances this year.

Q. Last week was a big mental test for a lot of players; how do you -- is there something you like doing that kind of takes that off coming into a new week, a new tournament?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. Some guys endured that mental test for four days, and some others like me endured it for two. I wasn't beaten up too badly compared to some of the guys.

But I think just, again, getting to a PGA TOUR event where it's more familiar to you in terms of golf course setup and surroundings and all that stuff, I think that's why this tournament works so well, because it is directly after a week like last week and guys can get back into a normal routine, whether it's seeing good golf shots being rewarded or putting some red numbers on the board, that sort of stuff. It just gets you back into a nice routine, and obviously it makes you feel a bit better about yourself when you're shooting some under-par scores.

Q. A lot of big names obviously missed the cut last week, so is there a different in how you approach the next tournament after missing a cut, and is there something that you want to accomplish

between Opens that this helps you do?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. You know, look, I think -- I didn't necessarily play that badly last week. I feel like if I play similarly this week, I might have a good chance to win. I don't know, I did some practice. There's a couple of things that -- I think when you play in conditions like that, it magnifies parts of your game that maybe don't stack up quite as good as the rest of your game, and it magnified a couple of things for me that I worked on over the weekend. And I guess as long as I -- out there on the course, I am seeing myself eradicate those bad ones, the sort of squirty ones to the right that I was getting last week, it would be a good week. But yeah, I mean, I'm playing here, I'm playing the Irish Open in between the two majors, and I'd love to give myself a chance to win both of those.

Q. Phil came out this morning and issued an apology; he said that anger and frustration got the best of him on Saturday. I wondered what your reaction was both to what he did and the subsequent fallout?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I didn't -- I was practicing when it happened. When I came back in, I saw what happened. Honestly, I laughed. I felt there was a massive overreaction to it. Knowing Phil, he knew what he was doing. Look, it's -- a player that's been in that head space at that tournament, I can see it happening to people. Look, it's a tournament that Phil has come so close so winning over the past few years. He's probably seen what's happened over the past few years at that tournament, and it's frustrated him because it's the only one that he hasn't won, plus it's probably becoming the hardest one to win for anyone because it is a bit of a lottery at times.

You know, I don't know if I'd go to the lengths that he went to to make a statement like that, but I thought there was a massive overreaction to it.

Q. What are some of the challenges that TPC River Highlands presents, and what are you doing to prepare for those?

RORY McILROY: You know, it's almost the complete opposite to last week. It's a relatively short golf course compared to what we play week in, week out. It's only just over 6,800 yards, and any time you play a practice round here, you feel like if you don't shoot 65, you haven't played that well.

But I think it's just knowing that that's not going to happen every day, and obviously there's been a lot of low scores shot here, but knowing that even if you are even par or 1-under, 1-over, whatever it is, just to stay really patient with it because it does present a lot of opportunities. I think it's easy on a golf course like this to get ahead of yourself and see all the chances that

are coming up instead of just playing one hole at a time and trying to execute your shot.

So I think that's more the challenge. It's quite similar to -- we played an event on the European Tour every year in Hong Kong. It's a par-70, same sort of thing, quite short, you feel like you have a wedge in your hand every hole. But if you don't hit it in the fairways and don't put yourself in position, it can be a little tricky. You need to be accurate here and not feel like -- you feel like you can be super aggressive but just sort of reigning that back a bit but knowing that there's plenty of opportunities and just to stay patient.

Q. How much do you use ShotLink information to really drive what you're practicing on and how you prepare your game?

RORY McILROY: Massively. I made the decision at the end of last year to really look at my stats, and that's one of the great things teaming up with TaylorMade, they have an in-house stats guy, James Cornish, that provides me with not just -- it could be a quarterly look of all my stats, but also like turning up to this golf course this week. He'll provide a little PDF for me in an email that says, okay, hitting driver on No. 2 will give you a .33 percent better chance of making a birdie on that hole because that's what people did last year. Also, it doesn't just tell you what to work on, but it tells you maybe how to play a golf course and how the best way is to tackle or try to get your way around a certain golf course each week.

I think they've become very important, and I think the strokes gained stats, whether it's tee to green or putting or around the green or whatever, I think that's been one of the biggest changes for good that we've seen in golf because it really just lets you see how your game stacks up against everyone else.

Q. Which one of those stats would you want to improve the most that you feel would be the most impactful for you specifically?

RORY McILROY: Strokes gained approach to the green. That's something that I was very strong at a few years ago, and it's something that I've let slip a little bit. So that would be the one. When Tiger was at his prime, he was gaining about a shot a round on the field, strokes gained approach. Obviously that's really, really good. But if you can just get yourself to even .5 or something like that, that's a huge -- and also, with all this knowledge now, you know that from 175 yards if you hit it 22 feet from the pin, you're gaining .2 on the field or whatever it is. So everything is now -- it's a very objective way to practice, and it's great.

I think whenever people make the argument about which generation was better, if this generation isn't

better than the last, because of all this information that we have, then something has went terribly wrong.

Q. Last year if I remember correctly, you were tinkering with different putters during the tournament. How many did you use during that tournament, and how set are you on your putting this year compared to last year?

RORY McILROY: I mean, I think I turned up on Saturday morning with about 10, whittled it down to one. I think I used three over the course of this tournament last year.

Q. (No microphone.)

RORY McILROY: No, I don't think so, but obviously this year I've putted a lot better. I've started to do a little bit of work with Brad Faxon, which helped. My putting has been probably as good as it ever has in terms of strokes gained in looking at the stats. Yeah, comfortable with it. The greens are much different here than what we experienced last week, so it's a little bit of an adjustment not playing as much break as what you were used to seeing, but yeah, I feel comfortable with that part of the game.

Q. Some years ago you needed a place to practice, you had been in New Haven, you came here and used the range. It seems that Andy and Nathan do a great job of forming relationships, and I don't know how that compares, but are they kind of just different than the rest and do a great job of getting out to you guys, being there and forming relationships with you?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think the Travelers is one of the first tournaments to do that, where they sent their guys on the road and they did form relationships -- I had a great relationship with the guys here even a few years before I actually played the tournament, and I think a lot of tournaments have followed their lead in terms of doing that, which is great.

It makes a slight difference, and that slight difference could mean you get a field like you get this week, so they've done a great job with that for sure.