

US Open Championship 2017

Tuesday, June 13, 2017

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



BETH MAJOR: Good afternoon. Welcome again to the 2017 U.S. Open at Erin Hills in Erin, Wisconsin. It's my pleasure to introduce 2011 U.S. Open champion, Rory McIlroy, who is World No. 2 playing in his ninth U.S. Open this week.

Rory, I know you've spent a good deal of time here preparing, can you give us your impressions of Erin Hills and talk about your preparations?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, excited to be here. I got in Friday afternoon, walked a few holes on Friday, Friday evening. And then got two really good looks at it on Saturday and Sunday. One of the course architects, Dana Fry walked around the course with us, as well, which I thought was really beneficial. From what I've seen so far, it's really good. It lets players be aggressive, I feel like. You can be aggressive off the tee. You can be aggressive with your approach shots. If you do miss a green, it's not that you're going to be chipping out of the thick rough. It goes in these collection areas and runoffs. It's a little bit of a different challenge than what we faced in U.S. Opens in the past.

But it's really good. I'm excited for it and I think it's going to be a huge success.

BETH MAJOR: And how are you feeling coming into this week?

RORY McILROY: I'm feeling better. Obviously I've had a few weeks off to try and rest this injury that I've had all year, but I feel good. I've played, over the past ten days, I've played eight or nine rounds of golf. And I feel really good, as long as I manage the load that I put through in terms of practice and hitting a lot of balls. But I'm totally fine to play. I don't feel it at all. It's just a matter of managing that sort of practice load, which isn't a bad thing. It means I can go out and play. I've added a few events to my schedule, so looking forward to a busy summer.

Q. Can you just expand on sort of the limitations you have right now, both in your swing and in your preparation?

RORY McILROY: No limitations on my swing whatsoever. Preparation-wise, I may be -- instead of hitting five bags of balls, I'll hit two, just something like that. It's not as if I can't hit balls, it's just a matter of

managing how many repetitions I put through it. I mean not really many limitations.

It's at the point in the year, as well, you don't need to be practicing that much. You want to go out and play. I feel like -- you figure stuff out on the golf course more than on the range sometimes, anyway, and it's let me concentrate a bit more on my short game.

I don't feel like -- obviously I haven't had many tournament rounds under my belt. But at the same time I'm coming in fresh to this part of the season. And as I said, added a couple of events to the schedule and want to play a lot over the summer and try to make up some ground on the rest of the guys.

Q. You've mentioned being able to hit a lot of drivers here, being able to be aggressive at this golf course, is it your sense that when you can do that at a tournament that it kind of seeps into your whole game, that it just gives you a different kind of mojo to be able to attack and hit more drivers?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I don't think it's a secret that I feel like my driver is one of my biggest weapons in my bag. If I can get that in my hands more regularly, and I think if the field has to hit driver more, as well, that plays into my hands, too. I wasn't crying when I saw that rain last night and this morning. It's a long golf course and it's only going to play longer. That benefits a few guys, and luckily I'm one of them.

You go like at Chambers, we hit a lot of drivers, but it was obviously very dry there. Last year at Oakmont was a little bit of a different story, it's more of a tactical sort of golf course, even though it was wet and played quite long, too.

But I think driving the golf ball is a big skill in golf, and I feel like this golf course definitely tests that. And you need to have driver in your hand here if you want to take advantage of the golf course.

Q. Two quick ones, thoughts on the fescue that's going on out there?

RORY McILROY: What do you mean?

Q. They seem to be cutting down a lot of the fescue?

RORY McILROY: Really? We have 60 yards from left

line to right line. You've got 156 of the best players in the world here, if we can't hit it within that avenue, you might as well pack your bags and go home. These are the widest fairways we've ever played in a U.S. Open. Even the first and second cut is another ten yards on top of that. So if you've got 50 or 60 yards to hit into and you're complaining about the fescue that's wider than that, I don't think that's an issue.

I get that it's thick and whatever, but it's a hazard. If you put red lines just right along that people wouldn't complain, it's a hazard, and you'd go -- and so, I don't know, I just -- it's a U.S. Open, it's supposed to be a tough test. And if guys can't put it into play within a 50-yard zone I don't think they've got much to complain about.

Q. Secondly, you've had a couple of times in your career where you've come off these sort of long layoffs, injuries, what have you, what's the difficulty or toughest part for you in doing that, particularly coming into a major?

RORY McILROY: I think it's -- it's just more having rounds under your belt. You encounter certain situations in tournaments that you don't really encounter when you're practicing or preparing for one. It's just a matter of doing that. I played one ball out here on Sunday, just to try to simulate what a real round of golf around here would be like, and I'm going to do the same tomorrow. I'm going to play the back nine, play one ball, obviously chip and putt and sort of get my bearings on the green. But that's really it.

It's just a matter of scoring and being sharp and taking advantage of opportunities and getting it up and down when you need to, and all that stuff just comes with playing competitive rounds. And I haven't had that many of those this year. I sort of need those, that's why I'm going to have a busy summer. But hopefully it doesn't take me too long to get into that mode again and I can get off to a fast start here.

Q. I was wondering how you design your workouts around a four-day tournament?

RORY McILROY: Not much working out going on at the minute, unfortunately. I'm sort of resting. There's been a lot of sort of rehab stuff, resistance bands. But usually I don't really adapt it that much around a tournament or an off week. I just sort of stick to my schedule, whether that's two days on, one day off. I'll always make time. I feel like I've worked out enough that my body has adapted to the feeling of maybe a little bit of soreness or tightness. And I actually like that feeling in my body. I feel like it gives me that sort of stability. I feel like I swing my best, actually, when I've got a little bit of tightness in my body.

I don't really adapt it too much. I might just go a little bit lighter on the load. But try to just keep a pretty -- sort of try to keep the continuity in it, I guess.

Q. Just from what you were saying earlier, half a dozen tournaments this year, it's been impossible for you to build up any real momentum. Do you feel you're playing catch up to guys like Dustin and people like that who have got the winning feeling already?

RORY McILROY: A little bit. You look at DJ and at the lead he has in the World Rankings, he's far ahead of the rest of us right now. And, yeah, I wanted to play a pretty heavy schedule leading up to the Masters and I wasn't allowed to do that. And then I wanted to play a lot this year and it just hasn't panned out that way. But I'm going to, as I said, play quite a lot this summer.

I don't feel like I'm playing catch up, so to say, but I miss playing golf. When you're away from it you realize how much you miss it, how much you love it and how lucky you are being able to play this game for a living and I just want to get back to that.

Q. Two questions that may or may not be related. I understand you have a new putter in the bag this week, can you talk about that. Your record since winning this in 2011 and obviously what you like in this tournament, any reason you can pinpoint why that's the case?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, the new putter I've been working with it for a while. I've sort of been messing around with it since after Augusta, really. And I went over to Southport to the Phil Kenyon studio, and we just tested a lot of putters, and that was really the one that came out better than the rest in terms of launch conditions and how fast it got the ball rolling, side spin, even face rotation, as well, I felt like I could bring it back to square more often than anything else I had tested. And I've had a few weeks to chip and putt around and get comfortable with it. It's a bit of a different feel than what I had been playing previously. But from what I've seen in practice so far it feels good.

And, yeah, look, I've had a mixed bag here at the U.S. Open. The wet ones I've done all right at, the firm ones I haven't. Top-10 at Bethpage starting off. Pebble was tough, shot a couple of high scores there. One at Congressional. And then -- yeah, it's a weird one. I've struggled on the West Coast a little bit. I missed the cut at Olympic, and Merion I did okay. My driver face cracked at Merion on the third hole on the third round, so that didn't help.

Yeah, I don't know. This is one of those tournaments that if you let it get into your head I feel like you're already defeated before your tee off. And there have

been a couple of times where I have let it get in my head. 15 at Chambers, even though I made a bit of a round of it, I was a little bit disillusioned along with some other guys with the way the course was and everything. But if you let it get into your head you really have no chance.

And that's why I feel like some of the players this week, the rough's already got into their head. That's not the way you want to start off. You want to start off with positivity and a positive frame of mind, and that's the way I'm trying to approach it this week.

Q. Your second straight major in Wisconsin coming off of injury. And I realize the circumstances were different, the time off was different. When you look back, what were your expectations at Whistling Straits? What are they now? Are they lower than they would be if this were any other Open?

RORY McILROY: No, I mean my expectations going into Whistling, I was playing well. I didn't feel like my body was restricting me in any way from doing what I wanted to do. So going to Whistling a couple of years ago after the injury I felt like I had a good chance to win. The previous starts I had I was playing well. I won a couple of times in May, had a decent showing at the U.S. Open. And then obviously missed that little length of time. But I felt like coming back into it I was playing well enough to win.

And I feel like it's the same thing here. I don't feel like my body is limiting me from doing what I want to do out there. It's just a matter of being able to do it. And I fully -- if I play the way that I know I can I fully expect to have a chance on Sunday.

Q. With Bethpage and Chambers and Torrey in the past, and Erin Hills this week and then you guys going to LA Country Club here in a few years, the USGA is fitting a lot of different venues in the rotation, do you like that trend? How many is too many in your mind is too many?

RORY McILROY: I think it's always new and exciting to get to new venues. I'm a little bit of a traditionalist, I like the smaller rota of courses, a little bit like what they do at the Open. But it is -- it is good to bring -- to have the ability to bring it to different parts of the country. That's a big thing. But, yeah, I mean I'm looking forward to playing Shinnecock next year, Winged Foot, all the traditional courses that I grew up watching the U.S. Open on. But at the same time it's the same for everyone and you show up to the golf course that you're playing that week and you prepare as well as you can for it and you try to play better than everyone else. Yeah, I mean I know what they're trying to do and I know that it's beneficial for the game to bring this

tournament to different parts of the country. So it's -- I sort of put a foot in both camps there. I like the tradition of the old courses, but I still like what they're doing with trying to bring it to different spots in the country.

Q. Take yourself back to your first major triumph and relate it to if you can to Sergio Garcia and his experience at Augusta National. In general terms, when you see a fellow professional winning an emotional first major like that, what's it like?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's -- for me it was different because Sergio and I have such a great relationship and we've become very close friends over the years. So that was a different one for me. If it had been another first timer that had just won, without taking anything away from DJ or Jason Day, but I didn't feel the same when they won their first as Sergio did, just with all he's been through and everything.

Just the emotion, 72 or 73 tries, without being able to do it, having all those chances and for it to be there, to be the Augusta where he's had his struggles before, I don't think you could have written it any better. It was great to be able to watch. It was cool to see him. He came to my wedding a couple of weeks after and I hadn't seen him since, and it was awesome. He was nice enough not to wear the Green Jacket, just so I could steal the limelight for a day.

It was awesome. I'm so happy for him. And he's in a great place right now in his life. When he is he seems to be playing very well. I look for him to do well again this week.

Q. It seems like the last few majors the weekends have been a little bit unfriendly to you, is it focus for you to not have to dig out of a little bit of a hole to put yourself in more of a chance to attack on the weekend than trying to dig yourself out of a hole?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, definitely. If you look at how I've started the majors that I've won, I've sort of led from the front. I shot 65 or 66 at Congressional. I shot 67 at Kiawah. I shot 66 at Hoylelake and shot 66 again I think at Valhalla. So it is imperative for me to get off to a good start, I feel like, and I haven't been able to do that. I don't know if that's putting a little too much pressure on myself and I don't know if that's -- that's something -- I've had a lot of time to think over the last few weeks and sort of figure out what I need to do to get back to winning majors and being in contention. Because there was a period there, in sort of '10 and '11, and obviously '14, as well, but '10 and '11 where I would start majors very well, and it's just a matter of figuring out why that was.

I think it's a lot to do with preparation. I feel like if you

prepare 100 percent the right way, mentally that puts you in a great frame of mind to go out there and attack the golf course. So that's what I've tried to do this week, and hopefully it pays off.

Q. (No microphone.)

RORY McILROY: No, I think -- no, if anything, it's more just putting too much pressure on myself and the expectation there where -- in Congressional in '11, I maybe just wasn't putting the pressure on myself as much. The expectations were still high, but I still went out there and sort still sort of free wheeled where sometimes over the past couple of years the first round of majors I've been a little bit tight and a little bit tentative it. I need to get away from that because that's not how I play my best golf. That's why I like this golf course, it allows you to be aggressive and swing freely and get after it.

Q. With your busy lifestyle, do you ever make time to play your Old Course from your childhood just for fun?

RORY McILROY: I don't know when the last time I played Holywood. One of my best friends is the assistant pro there. I go up there a lot and catch up with him and sort of have a coffee or whatever.

But, geez, it's got to be -- I'll tell you the last day I played Holywood. It was the day before I busted my ankle in 2015. So obviously it's not good luck. So there you have it. It was a couple of years ago. But I probably don't get to play it as often as I like.

Q. You mentioned you're added some events to your schedule there. Can you confirm what they are, and is the Scottish Open in your thoughts at all?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it is, yeah. I'm going to play Scottish, so I'm going to play Irish, Scottish and The Open. Which is great, great links round. And then contemplating a couple -- another one in the summer. But we'll see how it goes guess. If I'm able to knock off a couple of big ones, that schedule changes a little bit, but I'm definitely going to play Scottish.

Q. Do you know much about Dundonald, the venue, and secondly, I'm interested in how you spent the downtime you had over the last month?

RORY McILROY: I don't know much about Dundonald. I know it's close to Troon. That's really about it. I know I can drive there. Have to get the boat from Larne to Troon will be fine.

How I've spent my time? The first couple of weeks I had off I was sort of back to rehab and just trying to rest it and make sure that it was healing properly. I went for scans and I went to -- spent the day over in

England with Phil Kenyon to test some putters and do some work there. And then I spent two weeks in Portugal at the beginning of the year.

It's nice to get back to warm weather where I can practice again and play a few rounds and not have to rely on the very unreliable British weather. And that's been it. Just trying to get back and trying to get ready for this event. And I feel like I've been able to do that. And as I said, I'm just excited to get on the run of events and just play some more.

Q. You came off the rib injury and had a chance to win in Mexico, then you were right in the mix at the Masters. Does that give you confidence coming into this major, that a string of tournaments isn't really necessary for you coming in?

RORY McILROY: Yes, I took a lot from that. I opened up with 65 or 66 in Mexico coming off the injury. So as I said, I think it's all in the preparation. And if you prepare and you feel like your game's right where it needs to be it allows you to play with that confidence and that little bit more of freedom. And I feel like I've sort of reached that point again.

But playing the first World Golf Championship in Mexico and the U.S. Open are slightly -- two different things. So we'll see what happens. I don't feel like I need a run of events to get back into it. I feel like I can pick up confidence pretty quickly.

I think the only thing that was to my detriment in Mexico was being in contention, I just felt a little -- I felt like I hadn't been in contention in a while and I struggled to sort of play with that freedom that I had over the first three days. So hopefully that won't be the case this week, if I do get myself in contention, again.

Q. When you talk about managing better your practice schedule. You just mentioned your ankle injury. Are you concerned at all with picking up those niggling injuries, and also going ahead in the next ten years?

RORY McILROY: Yes and no. I mean the ankle injury was completely -- that was completely my own fault. That wasn't really anything to do with golf. I haven't stepped foot on a football pitch since. At least I know what this is from, this rib thing. It's just a matter of me hitting a lot of balls and that repetitive stress on it and that strain is just -- I can only take so much before you hit a hundred drivers a day and you swing at ball at 120 miles an hour, it's going to take its toll a little bit. So it's just a matter of managing that. And it means I can concentrate on the other areas of the game. I don't feel like I have to hit balls all day to be a great player. I feel like I can go out and play and shoot scores and play with my friends and get confidence that way. I'm

not worried about picking up -- everyone is going to go through these things. I feel with how the modern golf swing is and modern technology and the travel, everyone is going to pick up these niggling injuries, but I feel like I've went through enough of them to know what my body can and can't handle. So it's just a matter of managing that, yeah.

Q. More about the equipment that you'll be using this week. I understand there's an iron prototype in your bag. Will you be using that? What will be your most important weapon do you think to win this week?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've had those. I played those prototype irons at The PLAYERS, my last start. So they're still in the bag. Driver and putter are going to be the two big weapons this week. If guys can drive it long and drive it straight that sets up to -- you can be aggressive with your iron shots. So everything is going to be important. I think it's a great golf course. It's a long enough golf course where it's going to test every aspect and every club in your bag. But I think with any U.S. Open if you can drive the ball well and you can hole a few putts you're going to be okay.

Q. We've seen six straight first time major winners. Why do you think we're seeing this trend in the game right now?

RORY McILROY: Honestly I don't know. I don't know if it's just -- it's their time or -- it's hard to say. I don't know, I think it goes like that. I think there was cycles where back maybe ten years ago where you were getting some first-time winners, as well in between all of Tiger's wins. But honestly I don't know. I don't know if it comes from experience. Some guys need a little bit more experience in the majors to break through, to get that first one. I don't know. I just hope I end that streak this week.

Q. Wisconsin is probably most well-known for beer, cheese and the Packers. With a couple of majors here in the last couple of years, is it growing in your mind in the golf world or what do you think of when you think of Wisconsin?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think so. I think the more big tournaments that come back here, obviously we've had three PGA's, I guess, in the last few years. We're going to have the Ryder Cup here, I guess, in 2020. U.S. Open, obviously, this year. I think the more big golf events that come here the better for the state and the better for just the awareness of golf and maybe getting people to try it out and to play. Obviously the golf season here isn't quite as long as other parts of the country. You can only play for probably four or five months. But, yeah, I mean, hopefully bringing tournaments -- big tournaments and the best players in the world to this part of the country can inspire kids to

take up the game and try to emulate some of us. I think it's great for it. I've enjoyed my time. I've had two good weeks at Whistling Straits when I played here. I've been enjoying my time so far. Yeah, I think it's a good thing.

Q. With the downtime, have you been able to spend a little more time on some of your host duties with the Irish Open and how has the Rolex Series helped elevate the status of the event?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've spent a little bit more time on that. It was good to -- we announced today that the manager of Manchester City and the co-manager of Barcelona, Pep Guardiola, is going to come over and do the night with me on the Tuesday night, so that will be really cool. Obviously there's a lot of interest in soccer back home. And that's probably the best manager or one of the best managers in the world.

It was nice I met up with him in Manchester. Sort of a chance encounter. We had a little bit of lunch and I asked him if he would come and do it and he said he would, yeah. Hideki is going to play, Jon Rahm, Justin Rose and myself, pretty strong European field. But I think with the Rolex Series and the European Tour and \$7 million prize, that's elevated the tournament from it's one-and-a-half million dollar prize a few years ago. I'm glad I've been able to help some way to get it to that point. And hopefully it continues to grow.

BETH MAJOR: Rory, thank you so much for joining us today. Always a pleasure. We wish you well this week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.