

TaylorMade Driving Relief

Thursday, May 14, 2020

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



Q. Rory, you have an eclectic personality. You like to read we have seen you on the Peleton bike--inspiring and shaping us to get into shape and obviously we have seen you work on the game the last few days, and weeks, as well. During this time at home, is there something that maybe is new that you've picked up that could enhance your life?

RORY McILROY: I think patience has been a big one. Just trying to stay as patient as possible. For a TOUR player to spend this prolonged length of time at home. You're just trying to find ways to fill your time. I think if anything, just appreciate the little things, the things that we took for granted before this all happened. You know, that's -- that's the stuff that I'm looking forward to get back to. I mean, you know, didn't think anything of going and grabbing a coffee first thing in the morning, and now you can't wait to go and do that. It like the highlight of the day.

Yeah, I think just not to take the little things for granted, and find some pleasure in the small stuff. I think that's one thing that I'm going to try to do going forward.

Q. You've been working on your game a bit to get ready for the TaylorMade driving and relief event coming up this weekend. Your coach, Michael Bannon is in the U.K.; is this something that you -- in regards to your game, you're working with on your own? Are you enlisting his help somehow?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, actually I received a package from him the other day, a tripod. I haven't really started in earnest to work. It's been nice to get on the golf course and not think of anything technical and just go and play. That's been nice to get back out there. But I think once we play this event on Sunday at Seminole, then I can turn my attention to maybe, you know, focusing on the restart of the PGA TOUR season and really getting back into it then.

Yeah, Michael and I will probably be on FaceTime quite a bit. I'll be sending him a lot of swings, and you know, we are just going to have to it remotely or the time being, which is, you know, it's a new normal for a lot of people. As I said, you just have to make the best of it.

Q. You've given your time, your energy, your monies to many charities throughout the world and including a lot from your foundation. This weekend, you're playing for of COVID-19 relief. How impactful

is it to raise millions and millions of dollars for something that has affected everyone globally?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think it is very important. When TaylorMade and the United Health Group came to us with this proposal to play a golf match for COVID-19 relief and try to raise money for the frontline healthcare professionals, I think all of us that were going to play were all on board. Look, it's not as if we're doing that much -- yes, we're giving some time and we're playing golf, but that's what we do. We're all wanting to play golf at the minute.

So to do something and to help -- to me, it's not something that feels like that much of a deal; I don't feel like I'm giving that much, but the impact of it can be huge. The fact that TaylorMade and United Health Group are putting it on; the fact that we have already guaranteed 4 million dollars for the two charities, for the American Nurses Foundation and for the CDC Foundation, and then hopefully going to raise millions of more on the day through the help of the NBC broadcast and people being able to donate from home.

So for us to get to play a golf match, it's awesome that we can do that and bring some entertainment to quite a few people, but also help in some way. What we're doing, it's a great thing. It's a very small piece of all of this, but just happy to be able to help in some way and bring some joy to people, I guess, when they haven't had anything to really look forward to for a couple of months.

So happy to be involved and I'm very grateful to TaylorMade and to the United Health Group for purchasing this along and getting it done.

Q. There's a competition aspect. You're going out to play golf and entertain, but this is different than playing with your buddies. You're going to be playing against some of the best in the world, who are your friends. That being said, how much are you looking forward to it?

RORY McILROY: I can't wait for it. I'm so excited. The fact that I have Dustin Johnson as a partner, that eases my little bit of anxiety a bit; the fact that I have someone like that alongside me. But as you said, we're playing against -- two of the best players in the world, very explosive and can make a lot of birdies.

Yeah, I think it will be the first time that we are all on a golf course and it's somewhat competitive, for at least a couple of months. I think we will all be feeling it a little bit, especially with the cameras around and just it's -- you know, I'm excited for it. Just for the competition and for the competitiveness and hopefully the little bit of back and forth that we're going to have on the course, I'm excited for that part of it, as well, for sure.

Q. You mention that, Rory. Should we expect some needling and of the four, who has got the sharpest needle?

RORY McILROY: I would like to think there's going to be a little bit of needle. You know DJ and I can maybe assert our senior place in the game over Matt a little bit, who is obviously Rickie's partner. Rickie, DJ and I have all been on TOUR for years and Matt is a rookie. Maybe DJ and I can target Matt a little bit and put him under the gun. Yeah, we'll see. It's going to be fun, but I'd like to think that there will be a little bit of trash talk. Rickie, DJ and I go back a long ways. We played against each other in the Walker Cup in 2007 and then fast forward 13 years and we're doing something like this. We've got a bit of history.

Q. You mentioned your partner, Dustin Johnson. I've talked to a lot of players out on the PGA TOUR and globally and they say the two most talented, gifted natural players are Dustin Johnson and Rory McIlroy and you're teamed up together. This is an interesting question. Is there an aspect of DJ's question that you wish you could apply to yours?

RORY McILROY: Every time I think of DJ and his game, I always think of the same thing. I don't want this to sound in any way disrespectful, but I love how he doesn't care. I love how he could forget a bad shot and can forget a bad round. He really takes everything in his stride. He doesn't get too high. He doesn't get too low, and I think that's one of his greatest strengths is the fact that he is like that.

They say in golf that you need a selective memory, and he's definitely got that. Any sort of setback is like water off a duck's back for him, and that's probably his greatest strength.

Obviously his athleticism and his ability to drive the golf ball and all around game is extremely good, but I think that mentality that he has is what sets him apart.

Q. Let's talk about the golf course, Seminole. You told me your dad plays there and is a member there; and maybe he can give you advice on how to play it properly. But the golf course that rarely been seat by the public. What challenges will Seminole bring to your game?

RORY McILROY: Seminole, I think is going to be a

treat for everyone to see on TV. It's a golf course with a wonderful membership. I don't know how my dad was able to get in, but that's for another day. I think -- I think people are really going to see the -- I think it's designed by Donald Ross, and I think it's Donald Ross's greatest course he ever designed. He had a wonderful piece of land beside the Atlantic Ocean, and he probably -- some of the best green complexes in the world in terms of, you know, the thought that need to go into playing your second shots into the greens and then just how thoughtful you need to be on the greens and around the greens.

I've actually played there on Friday with Justin Thomas and Jimmy Dunne, who is the club president and Tom Brady who is a new member, actually. I putted off the fifth green from about 30 feet. If the wind gets up and the greens are as fast as they were last Friday -- birdies might be hard to come by, but there are going to be some chances. But it's going to play fast and fix and looks like it will be a little breezy on Sunday, so it will be a good test for everyone.

Q. The PGA TOUR is set to resume on June 11 at Colonial. Have you figured out your schedule for the resumption of the PGA TOUR, or is that still a developing process for you?

RORY McILROY: No, I'm pretty set. I mean, I think everyone's just -- I mean, I can't speak for everyone, but for me personally, I just want to get back out and play.

So right now, I'm planning to play the first three events, Colonial, Hilton Head and the Travelers, and then see where we go from there.

So that's my plan, play the first three. I think it will be nice to get back out and play. Obviously we're going to have to take as many precautions as possible to be able to put TOUR events on again, but I think the PGA TOUR has got a very robust plan in place, and if they can execute it the right way, I see no reason why we can't start June 11. If we do, I'll be ready to go in Fort Worth.

Q. There is, obviously, the playing aspect, getting on the golf course and trying to shoot the lowest score, but there's also, as you and I both know, there's getting to the city; there's getting into a hotel or a rental house. There's traveling to and from the golf course. Are there any concerns or hesitations for you in regards to those aspects?

RORY McILROY: I don't think so. I think if you take the necessary precautions, you know, wearing a face covering, washing your hands frequently, sanitizing your hands frequently, practicing social distancing, I really do think it's possible. I think if everyone follows

the guidelines and does the right thing, I see no reason why you wouldn't be comfortable with the logistics of getting to an event and from. The TOUR are going to putt on a charter and there's going to be a lot of testing and make sure that no one is getting on these planes or into these hotels or on to these golf courses that have tested positive for COVID-19 or showing signs that they may be positive. They are going to have to self-isolate and take all those precautions.

Again, I believe the PGA TOUR has a very robust policy in place, and if they can execute it, I feel comfortable getting back out there and playing and traveling.

Q. There's been a lot of discussion about no fans on the golf course, at least for the first four events and you're going to play the first three. And there have been times we've played on the PGA TOUR a day or two because of circumstances without fans, but you're going a whole stretch there without fans. Is that going to have some kind of dulling or numbing effect over those first three weeks for you, or is it something that you feel like you could adapt to pretty easily?

RORY McILROY: You know, I think it's just -- it's the new normal for right now. That's just got to be for us to keep everyone safe and get the PGA TOUR back up and running again. I don't think it will dull anything, especially these first three events, because I think everyone is going to be so excited to get back out there and play.

It's very rare TOUR players have nine or ten weeks at home, and just to be back out there and playing again, I think people are going to be excited for that. The TOUR players are going to be excited. I think the people are going to be excited to watch some live golf on TV.

I don't think it will dull it down at all. Look, the atmosphere isn't going to be the same as if there's, you know, 50,000 people on the golf course, but I don't think it in any way will take away from the integrity of the competition or the quality of the golf.

Q. From August, with the PGA Championship, the Playoffs, you move to The Ryder Cup, the Masters, from August to the middle of November it's going to be intense, mentally, physically. How do you prepare for those months?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it looks as if things could definitely be coming thick and fast once we get into the late summer and into the fall.

Look, you have to be ready to go. You know, stay sharp. Stay ready. You know, I sort of joked a little bit;

at the start of this whole thing saying, well, guys wanted an off-season. Well, now's your off-season. It's pedal to the metal to the end of the year to try to get as much golf in as possible.

I personally am looking forward to that, if it can happen. It's unfortunate that we had to lose one of the majors this year and The Open was cancelled. But if we can get the other three majors in, you know, again, do them in the right way and make sure that you're keeping everyone safe while -- while they are on, it's something I'm looking forward to.

It's amazing, you take nine or ten weeks off from competitive golf, and there's sometimes you maybe play three or four weeks in a row and you want to take a few weeks off, but once you do, you realize how much you miss it and you really want to get back to it. I'm eager to play again and I'll play as much as necessary to give myself a chance to win tournaments and keep myself at the top of the World Ranking.

Q. What have you missed in this time off in regards to playing globally?

RORY McILROY: You know, I -- I miss the competition. I really do miss the competition. I miss the buzz of -- of getting into contention and playing in those last few groups on a Sunday and really feeling that. I also miss the locker room. I miss people. I miss being around people. I miss the -- I miss the banter that goes on in the locker rooms and the camaraderie that people don't see.

You know, that's something that is a real part of the TOUR and I miss that. I miss, you know, sitting down for lunch with a few guys after we've played and we talk about our rounds, talk about the golf course, talk about anything else. I miss all that stuff. I'm, for one, definitely excited and looking forward to the day when, you know, we can do that again and return to some sort of normality.

Q. Any changes, as you call this a little bit of an off-season now, you say players wanted an off-season, they got it. Any changes for you in regards to equipment, outlook, perspective, goals moving on from this point forward?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, no changes to equipment. I feel like I had everything dialed in when -- you know, when everything was postponed. I had played really well leading up to THE PLAYERS, and so all that I don't think I need to change.

I've tried to -- I've tried to use these last few weeks, and if I couldn't get on the golf course, what can I do to improve myself in any way. I've tried to stay as active and as fit as possible. I've tried to read. I've tried to,

you know, there's been a few things. I've been watching The Last Dance, the Michael Jordan documentary and trying to pick up a few things about how he navigated his career and how he motivated himself. There's always things that you can pick up along the way.

But I was playing pretty well when this all happened in March, so I would like to just really pick up where I left off. That would be nice.

Q. And you have a chance this Sunday. How would you describe the intensity? What it will be like on the back nine? Will be different from the early part of the match?

RORY McILROY: It will be. Obviously it's a skins match and every hole is worth a certain monetary amount, and as the match goes on, the closer you get to the end, the holes go up in value. So I think the 18th hole is going to be worth half a million dollars, that's -- the last few holes, especially if you have maybe tied a few holes going to 18. You know, the 18th could be worth at least a million, maybe.

So I think there will be -- you know, we're going to be feeling it a little bit. Especially it's not as if we're playing for ourselves. We're playing for two different charities, and you want to do the best you can for those two causes. That's the thing about a skins game. All it takes is one whole and the look of the game and the look of the match completely changes.

Yeah, I think the intensity will be ramping up as we get to the end.

Q. Your partner, Dustin Johnson, you talked about aspects you like about him and how things roll off of him. But he's got a power game and you have a power game. Do you enjoy, frankly, seeing who can hit it the farthest?

RORY McILROY: I do. Every time I play with DJ on Tour, I have to say to myself before I go out: Okay, don't get drawn into a long-driving contest. Just shot a score. Just shoot a better score. Doesn't matter how far you're hitting it.

Inevitably we'll start off pretty smooth, but by the back nine, we're trying to give it everything we have to out-drive each other.

You know, Seminole, it's not really -- it's not that sort of golf course. You don't need to overpower it -- not that you don't need it but you can't. It's all about the second shot and positioning and leaving yourself below the hole. I'm not sure. There's four par 5s and maybe we can use our length to our advantage there if the wind is air certain way. But Matt hits it a long way and Rickie is no slouch, either.

I think people on Sunday will see that Seminole is more about precision with the iron shots and being really sharp around the greens.

Q. Right now, you and Dustin are favorites over Matt and Rickie. With that, some say could come a little pressure. Do you like being a favorite or would you rather be an underdog heading into a match?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, look, you're the favorite for a reason. People think that you're going to come out on top. I guess that's a good thing.

You know, when it's an 18-hole match, anything can happen. I'd be more comfortable being the favorite if it was over 36 holes or 72 holes, but an 18-hole match, it's a sprint, and you know, whoever gets off to the fastest start or a bit of momentum early can keep it going -- yeah, look, on paper with our World Rankings and everything we've achieved, Dustin and I are favorites, but I'm not taking Rickie and Matt lightly. They are two really good players and they are going to give us a fantastic game on Sunday.

Q. We were talking off-air, and the next time we see you, you will have a different look as far as your hair goes. Is this going to be a different look for you or just the normal Rory McIlroy haircut?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I'm so happy that hairdressers and Barber shots have opened again, so I'm going for a haircut this afternoon. I have not let my wife anywhere near my hair since this whole thing but it's sort of under the hat now, but as you can see, it's sort of covering my face. So I'm ready for a haircut.