

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
August 1, 2018

RORY McILROY



BRIONY CARLYN: Well, delighted to be joined here by Rory McIlroy. Rory, you've had a week off, a couple of very good results, but here at Firestone, tell us how much you enjoy coming back here.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, this has always been one of my favorite weeks of the year. I'm sort of sad it's going to be the last one here. It's a great week. It's a great week to work on your game, to look ahead to obviously the PGA Championship next week. I think guys use this week as a -- you get four rounds of golf. There's stuff that you can take from the range to the course and try things out and not have the -- you know, have the luxury of playing four rounds, I guess, not worry about having to make it to the weekend. I've always played great here, I think, because of that attitude. I use it as a week to try and work on my game. And if I get myself into contention, then that's just a bonus. So, I've enjoyed it. I love the place, I love the golf course. I've played well here, and hopefully I can play well one last time.

Q. Rory, Monty had very glowing remarks about what this European Ryder Cup team may be. What do you fancy about the European Ryder Cup team as it sits right now?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, the team looks great. You know, Francesco, what he's done over the past few weeks has been phenomenal. Yeah, the eight guys that are in it at the minute, it's a very strong team.

And then you've got a couple of obvious choices that if they don't make the team, will be wildcard picks. It's looking good. I think there are some obvious choices for pairings, there's some other pairings that might come out of the blue a little bit.

But Paris National will be a course that sets up well for most of the Europeans as well. We know the golf course very well, which helps. And I think that's been a massive thing in Ryder Cups the last few times. Home course advantage has been a big, big thing. So, look, there's a lot of golf to play between now and then, but that was -- Hazeltine was the first time I was part of a losing side, and it didn't feel very good. Try to sort of get one back over them whenever we go to France.

Q. What do you know about Bellerive? Have you been there at all?

RORY McILROY: No. I don't know much. I don't think a lot of guys know a lot about it. Camilo won back there in 2008 at the BMW. But actually, I did a little bit of practice with JT last week in Florida, and I asked him about it and he said it's sort of typical PGA Championship venue, and it's sort of long and the greens are quite big and slopey. I don't really know that much about it. I'll have to do my homework next week.

Q. You said sad to see that they're leaving here. What will you miss about Firestone, or about the area, or anything about this week here?

RORY McILROY: I mean, the golf course, condition of the greens, you know, it's always in perfect shape. I'll miss the chicken wraps in the locker room.

Yeah, I think when you come back to venues quite a lot, you get to know people and you get to know the staff, and you get to know the people involved in the tournament. Obviously, there's still going to be a tournament coming here in the form of the PGA TOUR Champions, but I've enjoyed it here and I've played well here, and I think that's probably part of the reason why I'm sad to see it go.

Q. You've had a chance now to reflect on Carnoustie. What would be your assessment of that, and does it give you some momentum heading into this big fortnight?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it was a weird one. Usually when I come that close to winning a tournament, I usually -- I'm not able to see the positives right away. Then as time goes on, I start to see, okay, I did this well or did that well. It was almost the opposite there. I saw the positives right away. And as last week went on, I started to kick myself, going maybe I could have done this or done that.

It was a very strange Sunday, I thought, with the leaders starting at 9-under par. I thought someone was going to get to double digits easy. It was breezy and the greens were a little firm, but I still thought it was pretty playable. Some of the pin positions were tough to get there. There were a lot of crosswinds. Say ninth hole, for example, it was left-to-right wind and the pin was on the left. There were a lot of holes where it was hard to get it close, 13th hole up in that back right.

Yeah, it was one of those days you just had to hang around. Francesco made 13 pars in a row, or whatever, and all of a sudden he was leading. I think for me it was good, because I definitely didn't have my best stuff that week and I still had a chance to win. So that was a positive, knowing that even if I don't feel like I'm swinging it my best or I don't have everything quite under control, I can still find a way to give myself a chance.

Q. I know this is a little bit skewed because Tiger's won a whole bunch of tournaments everywhere, but when you see that someone's won at a course eight times and rarely finished out of the top-10 when healthy, do you ever wonder why that is? And secondly, to you, what would be your version of Firestone? What would be your course where -- I'm not saying you won eight times, but where you would show up and even your bad golf was going to turn out good?

RORY McILROY: I really think it is horses for courses. There are just courses that fit your eye better than some others. Tiger's proved that with here, with Bay Hill, with Torrey Pines,

with -- well, actually, anywhere.

I don't know what mine would be. I feel like I play -- like I play well here, I guess, but obviously not at times winner-well.

Q. You're young.

RORY McILROY: Ish.

I've only played Bay Hill the last few years, but I've got a win and a couple of top-5s. I finished the top-5 in The Open the last four years that I played it and won once. I'm finally becoming quite consistent, which is nice, but I don't know if I'll ever have a tournament -- I've won four times in Dubai, twice on each of the tournaments, DP World, and rarely finish outside the top-10. So, desert golf's sort of my thing. I like desert golf, it's nice.

Q. This may surprise you, but that was a way better answer than Dustin gave.

Q. Rory, being a fellow European, it seems like you're the one European player that Americans have really accepted and embraced. How does that make you feel?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. I mean, I think I live here and all. I'm married to one of them, I think that helps. You know, there's 100 million Americans that class themselves as Irish-Americans, so I think that angle isn't a bad place to come from, either.

Yeah, I've embraced it. I love it over here. I love the lifestyle, I love the people, PGA TOUR. I've embraced it, and I think if you embrace something, that there's more of a chance that they'll give you that back. But it has -- it's been nice.

I've received a lot of support since coming over here and playing. Yeah, I don't know. I don't know if it's because of the way I play as well, if I'm more aggressive and I go for things. You know, that seems to gravitate to people. I don't know, there's a lot of different things, I guess, but I'm just glad that they do like me.

Q. Rory, could you take us through the 16th hole, how you play it shot for shot? And do you do anything prior to the tournament to prepare for that particular hole here?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I think the 16th hole is a great hole. It gives you two opportunities in two different ways to make birdie. If you really hit a great tee shot, there's probably only about a five-yard area where you can land your tee shot on that gives you that bounce forward that you can maybe go for the green, especially from the way-back tee.

And if you're within -- I mean, the second shot plays a lot downhill. If you're within 270 yards of the green, you can have a go for it and know that if you knock it over the green, it's a relatively simple chip back.

Or if you do miss the fairway, you can lay it up and wedge it on. It's a good par 5.

There's probably the majority of the field, when it's from that back tee, can't reach the green in two shots and they play it as a three-shotter. I would say there's just as many people make birdie that way as there is people that try to go for the green.

Yeah, it's a good golf hole. It gives you options. It gives you options off the tee. It gives you options where you want to lay back to 120 yards or whether you want to get it up a little closer near the water and give yourself 60 or 70 yards, and I think that's a great design of a golf hole, where you can play it different ways.

Q. Rory, you mentioned earlier that you often arrive here just trying to get your game in shape and a lot of times you being in contention. Is there some secret to sort of having that mindset and having that work for you?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think you're not focused on the result, you're just focused on -- I think the more you can get away from focusing on the score or the result, or whatever, and just the shots, and just being happy that you hit the right shots or whatever. At the end of the day, if that's all you're thinking about and you start hitting good shots, it all adds up to a decent score anyways. So I think getting away from the mindset of I have to make birdie or I have to shoot this certain score, I think that's probably the reason why I've played well here.

Q. Rory, kind of piggybacking off of that, is it hard going into the PGA Championship to stay away from the results-oriented mindset? You said at the Masters that it has a different feel because you wait so long to play it. Does the PGA Championship have a different feel, because if you haven't had the success you wanted in the other three majors, it's your last shot of the year?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it -- I mean, for three guys it's not going to have that feel, because they've won, but a little bit. But I think -- I've always felt less pressure at the PGA because it's a golf tournament that I've always felt comfortable at. I don't feel like I've needed to -- I don't need to change my game, I don't need to try and, you know, manufacture different shots or really work -- you know, I think just I can go with what I have and know if I do that well, I'm going to have a good chance.

So yeah, no, I've always felt like it's my most comfortable major, and I think the results back that up.

Q. Rory, considering that this is the final year of the tournament here in Akron and having won the event in the past, do you have a favorite memory, or is there something that you could recall from the year that you won it that stands out to you at all?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I remember the first five holes of Sunday. I started -- I started three behind Sergio. We teed off in the final group, and on the 6th tee I was two ahead, I

think, maybe. I got off to a really hot start. I birdied four of the first five holes, and that was me off and running.

It was cool because I had -- again, it was the mindset of coming here, trying to work on my game a little bit, and then all of a sudden you find yourself in the final group and you get off to a hot start like that, it's like jeez, this tournament's mine, you know, so then you get into that mindset. It was cool. It was nice to get off to that hot start, and then you sort of control the tournament from there and find a way to win.

Q. I can't imagine too many major courses that you don't see ahead of time on the other three. Augusta doesn't really count, but you're usually somewhere at the U.S. Open before you get there and you know most of the Open courses. The PGA, you wouldn't have seen Valhalla before you went there, did you?

RORY McILROY: Nope.

Q. And it seems there will be a lot of guys in the field that will see it for the first time on Monday. And is it worth pointing out that the one PGA course you knew the best was last year and you didn't do so great?

RORY McILROY: Where was last year?

Q. Quail Hollow.

RORY McILROY: Oh, Quail Hollow. Doug, this is very true (Laughs.)

And the way the schedule works out next year, I will not arrive to Pebble Beach until the Monday of the golf tournament, because I've tried to prepare every single way for the U.S. Open the last few years and none of them have worked. So I think you can overthink it.

Shinnecock was the only major championship venue that I've walked with a wedge and a putter. I've never done that before. I walked it on the Saturday with a wedge and a putter. I did all my preparation, I did everything, and I was 9 over through 10. So, you know, maybe there's a secret to just showing up and going with what you have and not overthinking it.

Q. What did you do at Congressional?

RORY McILROY: I actually did go there. I went and played a couple of practice rounds. But I actually didn't get into Congressional until Tuesday night, so I went to Pine Valley the weekend before and practiced there. I didn't fly into Congressional until Tuesday night, played a few holes on Wednesday and then just went.

Q. I've always wondered if the PGA -- and this is the last one in August for a while, if everyone's so tired, for lack of a better word, and you guys are all professionals, and you just get there and play it, and it almost makes it harder to win --

RORY McILROY: Because I was in Florida last week, I contemplated going over to Bellerive for a day and checking it out, but I told myself I've never done it before for a PGA and I've won it a couple times and I played well, so why would I change what I've always done? So it did cross my mind, so you're on the right track.

Q. Have you ever been to St. Louis?

RORY McILROY: I have.

Q. What for?

RORY McILROY: My uncle's wedding.

Q. In St. Louis. Are you kidding?

RORY McILROY: I'm not kidding. He's from Northern Ireland, he married someone from that way, somewhere in there. There you go.

BRIONY CARLYN: And on that, thank you, Rory, for your time. Wish you all the best this week and in St. Louis.