

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 24, 2021



RORY McILROY

RACHEL NOBLE: I would like to welcome Rory McIlroy to the interview room here at the World Golf Championship Workday Championship at The Concession.

Rory, a different venue for the event this year. I'm sure you've seen the course. Just some opening comments about the course and your thoughts heading into the week.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's different than Mexico, that's for sure. Yeah, it's a great golf course. It's sort of a typical Florida layout. It sort of reminds me a little bit of the Bear's Club. I guess Jack had a hand in this with Tony Jacklin. Sort of generous off the tees, but if you start missing fairways, not much rough and you sort of get into trouble in the brush and the trees.

Yeah, it's good. It's a big golf course, undulating greens, and I think that's sort of the defense of the -- you know, they can tuck some pins away here and put them in some difficult spots.

Yeah, I'm excited. It's a bit of an unknown. No one's been here before. But it's certainly a great venue, and yeah, I think everyone's just looking forward to seeing how the scores are and how everyone sort of plays the golf course.

Q. Rory, you mentioned Tony Jacklin already, and I was curious how much you know about the incident at the Ryder Cup in '69 that inspired the name of this golf course, what you thought of the concession, the idea of Nicklaus doing it, and whether that's something that if, in a similar situation, you would do.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think it's part of golfing folklore, that everyone knows about that and what happened there. Obviously a very sporting gesture from Jack. Whether it would happen in the Ryder Cup the way it is nowadays, I doubt it very much. Feels like there's a lot more on the line than there was back then. I don't know. It's hard nowadays as well, because you think about the people that are betting on the Ryder Cup and what that means to everything and like it's a different business than it was back then. Obviously a very sporting gesture, and obviously the creation of this club because of that is a pretty cool story.

Q. To put you on the spot, who would be the most likely and the least likely of the current American crop to concede a putt like that?

RORY McILROY: Most likely, Webb Simpson. Least likely, Patrick Reed.

Q. Before the inevitable Tiger question, can I just ask about your form coming into this? Obviously a missed cut last week, but it was a very impressive stat of your last

five missed cuts that have been followed by two wins, a second place, a fourth and a 12th. A, were you aware of that? And what does that mean for you coming into this week?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, like, of course I know the last two missed cuts I've had I went and played well. I won Canada and I bounced back after Portrush and got into the final group at a World Golf Championship.

It's funny, it's going to sound really weird, I worked so hard the week before Riviera in that week off, but I felt so unprepared to play, if that makes sense. I stood on the range for hours a day hitting golf balls and working on my swing, but didn't play golf. Didn't chip, didn't putt, didn't do any of the things that you need to do to shoot scores. So even though I worked hard and worked on some stuff, I feel like it's sort of like clockwork. I have these weeks where I want to work on some things and fix some things and I try to cram everything in in the space of a week when it's probably something that should take two or three months to iron out. So it's just one of those weeks where, like -- I went to Riviera after feeling like I worked hard but was completely unprepared because I had sort of neglected sort of all other aspects of the game.

Q. We've all seen the terrible news about Tiger, but also the good news, that it's not life threatening. He's had the operation, et cetera.

RORY McILROY: Yeah.

Q. Of all people, is he the one person who can come back from this, do you think?

RORY McILROY: He's not Superman.

Q. True.

RORY McILROY: He's a human being at the end of the day. And he's already been through so much. At this stage I think everyone should just be grateful that he's here, that he's alive, that his kids haven't lost their dad. That's the most important thing. Golf is so far from the equation right now, it's not even on the map at this point.

Q. I know you guys are used to distractions and compartmentalizing, but does it make it any more difficult to play a golf tournament when there's this massive global news story that's swirling around?

RORY McILROY: I don't think so. I mean, he's here, he's fine. If he's got -- he's got some pretty bad injuries, but he's going to be okay. It's not as if -- I was looking at some of the coverage yesterday and they were talking as if he was gone. It's like, he was in a car crash. It was really bad, he's very fortunate to be here, which is great, but I mean, that's the extent of it. So no. Of course we're all going to play a golf tournament and seem no different. It's obviously going to take a bunch of attention away from this golf tournament, but that's

nothing to do with us, that doesn't fall on us, and we don't really feel that when we're playing anyway.

Q. Just real quick follow-up. I know it's less than six hours since you probably found out the news. Has there been any talk among the players as to how to pay tribute to Tiger?

RORY McILROY: I guess it's -- like you say "pay tribute to him." He's not gone. I don't see -- like he's been in a very bad accident. We're very lucky that he's still here. I feel like we should pay tribute to him every day for being on the PGA TOUR and what he's done for golf.

Q. It's obvious that Tiger's not going to be out here for a while. You've seen both sides of this. Can you talk about how the Tour is different when it's known that Tiger won't be playing for a while?

RORY McILROY: It's always great when he plays at a tournament or is out here because it gives that tournament an extra dimension that it usually doesn't. I think we were all -- you know, we're all sort of heading towards that day that Tiger wasn't going to be a part of the game. I'm not saying that that was soon. He's still -- before this accident, he was rehabbing a back injury and hopefully going to come back and play this year. It's inevitable that one day he won't be a part of it, and that's going to be just something that the game of golf and the Tour is going to have to deal with and adapt to. Obviously, hopefully he comes back and is able to play, but if he's not, I think he'll still be a part of the game in some way, whether it's obviously his design business and his foundation and hosting golf tournaments. We might -- it may be the end of seeing the genius at work with a club in his hand, but there's still a lot of other ways that he can affect the game in a great way.

Q. Would you please share a story of a time when Tiger's mental strength really impressed you, or something along the lines of his previous comebacks that really impressed you?

RORY McILROY: I had lunch with Tiger in sort of April -- March, April 2017, just after he had the fusion, and then to work his way all -- you know, from hardly being able to walk to stand to being able to get his game back into shape. He won the Masters two years later, in 2019.

I don't think people to this day, people don't realize -- a few of us out here do, JT, Rickie, Dustin and myself, the guys that are in Florida that have gotten a little bit closer with him -- the struggle and the things he had to deal with to get to that point to win Augusta in 2019.

Look, I don't want to take anything away from what Ben Hogan did after his car crash or any of the other comebacks that athletes have had in other sports, but right now I can't think of any greater comeback in sports than the journey that he made from that lunch we had in 2017 to winning the Masters a couple years later.

Q. And then what's your strongest recollection of the walk on 18 at the TOUR Championship?

RORY McILROY: I mean, it was like a stampede. I was just trying to run in front of the crowd, because obviously I knew all the security guards were going to go to one guy, and he was wearing red and I wasn't, so I was just trying to get out of the way.

Q. You had some pretty good finishes to start the year. I'm just kind of curious what you were working on so intensely leading into Riv.

RORY McILROY: Just sort of the same stuff I've been sort of struggling with the last few weeks. The club gets behind me on the way back, goes up, gets across the line, and then starts to -- the club goes behind. You want the club to get back out in front of you on the way down, and it just got too much this way, club gets in steep, and then I hit pulls or I hit these sort of spinny cuts, which isn't like me. If anything, I'm usually the other way and the club shallows too much and I get stuck.

So it's a different pattern for me and a different pattern to try to work with and tease back into the right positions. Yeah, it's just sort of a work in progress. It's sort of -- yeah, it's okay. It's just a very different pattern than what I'm used to, so I'm always fighting it and I'm trying to see shots that are going against my natural way of playing. So sort of stuck in between that at the minute. So just a little bit of work to be done and yeah, just trying to sort of iron that out.

Q. Do you feel prepared to play this week as opposed to last week, I suppose?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think I learned a couple of things last week. I was thinking way too much about the golf swing last week, even when I was out on the course. Like, I probably spent five to 10 seconds over the ball longer than I usually do. There's quite a lot going through my head. You can't play golf like that. It doesn't need to be perfect, and I realize that, but you just want your bad shots, your bad swings, to not be destructive and over the past few weeks those bad swings have just been a little too destructive and put me in some bad positions. So I need to play with more freedom and I need to be able to swing away. So it's sort of like do the work on the range and just trust that the more work you do, the more that it's just going to naturally find its way in there.

Q. Now that Tiger (inaudible) way off topic (inaudible) and the questions you were asked and on your mind, et cetera, can you try to compare that to what it must have been like for Tiger 20 years ago to have a once-in-a-lifetime chance at doing what he did at the Masters? In other words, you don't win the Masters in '15 but you still get to keep coming back and trying until you get it done, what it must have been like for seven months of what you would think would be a once-in-a-lifetime shot?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I guess the only thing I can compare it to is other athletes getting

prepared for an Olympics that happens every four years and it's -- it could be their one-time shot. You're going to put everything into it to know that you haven't left anything out there, I guess. That's the only thing that I can maybe compare it to.

RACHEL NOBLE: Thanks, Rory, for the time. Good luck this week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.