

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW  
MARCH 30, 2022**



**RORY McILROY**

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**JOHN BUSH:** We would like to welcome Rory McIlroy into the interview room here at the Valero Texas Open, making his second start in this event, finished second here in 2013.

Rory, welcome back. I know you wanted to be back a couple years ago, COVID hit, but you're here now and we're glad to have you. If we can get some comments on being here.

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, it's been a while. I played well here back in 2013 and 2013 wasn't a great year for me anyway, but I definitely thought that the finish here gave me some confidence going into Augusta, and ended up having a decent week there.

Yeah, I just wanted to mix it up. I sort of haven't really enjoyed the format of the Match Play the last couple years and I just wanted to mix it up and I still wanted to feel like I was sharp going into Augusta.

I don't want to make this week all about Augusta, I still want to be here and compete and try to win this golf tournament, but yeah, I just wanted to mix it up and I'm glad to be back. I played the week before the Masters a few times when it was in Houston and now here.

Yeah, glad to be back, at least got to refamiliarize myself with the golf course a little bit this morning. It looks like hopefully the wind's going to die down for the tournament days and it's going to be a good week.

**JOHN BUSH:** And before we open it up to questions, just recap your season for you. Your fifth start, you won in Vegas back in the fall. Talk a little bit about how your game's coming together at this point in the season.

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, obviously got off to a great start of the PGA Tour season back end of last year, started pretty well over in the Middle East on the European Tour. I've had some decent finishes. The start at Riviera, I finished 10th and I felt like I played well there. Got off to a good start at Bay Hill and the weekend just got really tough and I struggled. And then THE PLAYERS was THE PLAYERS. It was a weird week and I was out in that wind on Saturday and felt like I did okay. I finished the week there with a really good round of golf. I've had a couple weeks off to do some practice, looking forward to getting back into some competitiveness.

**Q. What would you usually be doing if you were on a week off before the Masters? What would your mood be like?**

**RORY McILROY:** I'd just be playing at home and practicing. Yeah, sort of -- it's great, one

of the great things about playing the week before is you're staying busy. Sometimes being idle at home you can just start to think about things or overthink things or whatever it is. So to keep yourself busy and keep your mind on something else is a good thing. Yeah, I mean, I'd just be basically doing what I did last week, practice and playing and just sort of waiting to go up there.

**Q. Would you be tense?**

**RORY McILROY:** No, not really, no. Like it is what it is. I try to, as best I can, live in the present and not think too far in the future. I'd be fine.

**Q. Just quickly going back to something you touched on, what about the Match Play format don't you like? Is it the pool exactly, or what is it that doesn't match up for you?**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, I'd love to see it just go back to single elimination and if you don't have a great day one of those first three days, just to be able to get home and do what you want to do. I think that's -- there's pros and cons to both formats obviously, but I think just going back to like a pure match play knockout format I think would get a better field.

**Q. Was that an odd feeling for you, that field and you not part of that last week?**

**RORY McILROY:** No, not really. I had a nice week at home and played some good rounds and got some good practice in. I think I'm past the point -- I used to take weeks off and feel like I was letting guys overtake me, but I'm sort of, I'm past that point now where it's not -- whatever's happening over there is really none of my business and I can focus on myself.

**Q. For this week, this is a pretty wide open golf course, you can kind of get after it a little bit. Is that something that was appealing to you to really kind of blow the lines out before you get to Augusta?**

**RORY McILROY:** No, I think it was more just getting four competitive rounds in. I wanted to -- and I wanted to play stroke play as well, I think that's the other thing. I wanted my last competitive start before Augusta to be a stroke play event instead of match play. It's two completely different mindsets, so that was part of the reason, too.

**Q. Is there anything about this course or this event that helps kind of fill that spot in the schedule before the Masters or anything that prepares you for that challenge? Anything about the Texas Open in particular that sets up for that?**

**RORY McILROY:** I think around the greens here is, it can prepare you. I think the runoffs around the greens, the undulations on the greens, some of the shots you face if you do, if you do miss it, I think that's -- and some of the bunkering around this course, the bunkers are pretty deep around the greenside. I think more so around the greens and sort of off the

tee. This is a generous course off the tee, Augusta's somewhat generous as well, but it's just a different look. I think around the greens more sort of the chipping and pitching aspects are good preparation.

**Q. As a journalist, I don't want you to speculate on this, but I have to ask you if Tiger plays in the Masters, what does that do in terms of the buildup around it? Obviously it's a question that everybody's asking this week. I know we don't want to have to put you to that while you're here, but what is your take for all that?**

**RORY McILROY:** I mean, I think for golf and for the Masters tournament and for everyone, to have Tiger there would be phenomenal. I think it just adds to the event. Obviously, it does. Anything Tiger Woods does in the game of golf is heightened whenever he's there. I mean, it would be awesome for him to be there. You know, he was there yesterday obviously and he's trying to see what he can do. Obviously no one knows but him if he can make it around and think, you know, if he believes he can compete.

**Q. Does anything he does surprise you anymore?**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, everything. I mean, people -- I've said this so many times, but from basically March of 2017 fast forward two years and he wins the Masters and where he was with his body and what he had to do to get back to being somewhat healthy. And it's not even being somewhat healthy, it's also what he has to do before the round and after the round just to get himself ready to go and play golf. Yeah, the sheer will and perseverance, yeah, it is incredible. If he comes back from this again, it's just, he likes to prove people wrong, he likes to prove himself wrong, I think. Regardless of when he does come back, whether it's next week or a few weeks, few months down the line, he's a wonderful addition to the game and the game of golf is better when he's playing and when he's playing well.

**Q. Two questions. First one, is there anything different this year about your preparation for the Masters?**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, I mean, a little bit, I guess. I was at Augusta the last couple of days and I just went there on my own. I didn't go with any members, I didn't -- I didn't sort of do the whole stay on property. I just wanted to come and see the golf course.

Obviously there's some changes to the golf course on 11 and 15. Three new greens, 3, 13 and 17 are all brand new greens. I just wanted to go there and just see that for myself and sort of do a little bit of a scouting trip that I haven't really done the last couple years. That's a little different maybe.

But it was good to be there, good to see the place. At least coming into this event and playing this week, I don't feel like there's a rush to get there next week and cram and prepare. I feel like I've already done most of my work, which is a nice feeling.

**Q. Second question is, anything specifically regarding your game that you're really**

**trying to sharpen this week in preparation for the Masters?**

**RORY McILROY:** So off the tee feels really good. Iron play is feeling good.

I think just distance control, that's so important at Augusta. And then just around the greens, holing out from inside six feet. You're not going to have a lot of lag putts here because the greens are a lot smaller than they are at Augusta, and the green speeds (no audio.) It's a really good guide to see where my game is, especially if you're having to hit shots under pressure to try to win a golf tournament, that's when things start to stand out and things that you maybe need to work on. For the most part, my game feels good, so it was just a case of just continuing to do what I've been doing over the last couple weeks.

**Q. Rory, what did you hit into 11?**

**RORY McILROY:** I hit 4-iron on Monday and then yesterday I hit 6-iron.

**Q. And how much has that hole changed since you first went there back in 2009?**

**RORY McILROY:** I think this is the first change? I don't know if it's changed since then. There's been so many changes to the golf course, I can't really remember, but it's a big change. It's obviously a longer hole, the fairway's much wider, so even if you miss it right, you still have a chance to hit the green.

The green complexes are the same, but the surrounds of the green are much more penal so that sort of bail-out to the right is much more difficult than it used to be. Overall I think it's going to play tougher than it has in previous years and it was already one of the toughest holes on the course.

**Q. And when you look back on where you were this time last year, you're in a much better spot.**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, chalk and cheese. Actually, I wanted to play this event last year, but after THE PLAYERS and the Match Play, I felt like it was better for me to just work on my swing at home and just work on my game because at least I had an opportunity to do that going into Augusta.

So yeah, it's way different. I'm way more comfortable with my game, I'm happy with where everything is. Everything seems like it's a lot more settled.

**JOHN BUSH:** Rory, we appreciate your time. Best of luck this week.

**RORY McILROY:** Thank you.