

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
19 October 2022

RORY McILROY



RACHEL NOBLE: We would like to get started here and welcome our defending champion, Rory McIlroy, to the interview room here at the 2022 CJ CUP in South Carolina.

Rory, you're coming off a great season where you hoisted the FedExCup for a record third time. You're making your TOUR season start here after coming back from DP World Tour starts.

Just some opening comments on the state of your game and where it's at heading into the season.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I'm feeling pretty good about my game. It's been a busy stretch for me, played six of the last eight weeks or whatever it was. It was nice to take a couple of weeks off and be home.

Yeah, sort of continued the form that I showed through the Playoffs in Europe. Had a decent chance to win at Wentworth and then a couple of pretty high finishes in Italy and at the Dunhill. Yeah, game feels good. It's nice and consistent.

I took a little bit of time off after the Dunhill and then had my coach, Michael Bannon, in town last week in Florida. So we just did a little bit of work and trying to, you know, get myself in the best place possible for here this week. Then I've got another three weeks off before playing the season-ending championship in Dubai over on the European Tour.

Yeah, two events left and still I feel like I have a little bit to play for. I've put myself in a nice position to try to get back to No. 1 in the world and trying to finish off the European Tour title over there, too. Still plenty of motivation this time of the year. Again, it makes coming to a new golf course, makes things interesting and trying to learn that for the first time. Yeah, excited to be here, great field, great golf course and defending a title. Yeah, looking forward to getting going.

Q. Rors, you get a chance to go to No. 1 again this week. Just wondering what's your favorite memory about being No. 1 previously and what was a drag, what was more of a hassle than you thought it would be being world No. 1?

RORY McILROY: I think it's the -- it's sort of the same. So I got to No. 1 in the world after I won the Honda Classic in 2012. It had been a goal of mine for maybe six months up until that point. I won the U.S. Open the previous year, I think I got up to like it might have been my first time cracking the top-5, so then it became a goal of mine. Went on a good run, ended up getting there after the Honda.



But I remember waking up the next morning and being like, is this it? You know, you sort of, you work towards a goal for so long and then you wake up the next day and you don't feel any different after having achieved it.

So I think then it's a matter of having to reframe your goals and reframe what success looks like. I think that's one of the great things about this game, no matter how much you've achieved or how much success you've had, you always want to do something else, there's always something else to do.

I guess that's where I say like the cool thing about it is you get to No. 1 and it feels great in the moment, and the bad thing is you almost got to work just -- well, not work just as hard, maybe work harder to stay there. I think it's -- it's not -- I think when you're striving towards something, not that it's easier to get there, but like once you get there, it's great. But I think the hard work is actually staying there.

I think if I get back to No. 1 this week, it's like my ninth time getting back. It sort of illustrates you can have your runs and you can stay there, but I think the cool part is the journey and the journey getting back there. It's sort of like a heavyweight boxer losing a world title and it's a journey to get that title back. I feel like that's the cool part of it and that's the journey that I've sort of been through over the past 12 months.

Q. You just answered at the very end there what I was going to ask, but it makes me wonder, I just looked it up, this would be the ninth time you get back. How did you know that? You must have looked it up. Surely you don't know that off the top of your head.

RORY McILROY: I know everything, Doug. I even knew what question you were going to ask me, that's why I answered it before you asked it.

Q. Surely you looked that up, didn't you?

RORY McILROY: I might have researched a little bit maybe.

Q. OK, fair enough. And then I tend to recall sometime around '12 or '13 it feels like that you used your check your phone, like I think maybe the first time you got to No. 1 and it would send a text or alert or something like that of where the rankings were. Do you still do that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so there's a Twitter handle VC606, he tweets it out pretty much every Sunday night, so you check that. Then you check the OWGR website on Monday morning just to see where you are in terms of points and how close you could get and all that sort of stuff.

I maybe don't keep as much of a close eye on it as I used to, but still it's a point of pride for



all of us out there to be highly ranked and to get to No. 1 in the world at whatever you do is an unbelievable accolade and something that you should be proud of.

Obviously I have a chance to do it this week, but I'm proud of the fact that I've at least given myself a chance again because I was last, we were coming back from the lockdown out of COVID in July 2020 and I feel like my game and my life has changed considerably since then, so it's nice to have the opportunity again.

Q. I remember that you mentioned Tom Kim when you won TOUR Championship and Tom was very excited and he puts like the graphic that you talked about him. Then I wondered if you watched him, that he played Presidents Cup and he won another tournament and you're paired with him tomorrow. So I want to get some comment about him and how excited you are to play with him tomorrow?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. So I think that the journey or the rise that Tom's been on over the last few months has been incredible. He finished second at the Scottish Open, I think, and then winning the Wyndham and starting the way he did and winning in the style that he did was, I think it made everyone really take notice of the talent that he has.

And then I got to play a nine-hole practice round with him in Delaware a couple of weeks after that, which was fun to just see him play in person.

And then I was watching the Presidents Cup a lot. I think there's a lot more Tom Kim fans in the world because of the Presidents Cup, right? He was really fun to watch, he showed a ton of emotion, he played great. And then he wins in Las Vegas a couple weeks ago. He's been on a great run. He seems like he's a really good character, he's pretty funny. I'm excited to play with him this week.

Q. I want to get your reaction to Phil Mickelson's comments last week about LIV trending up and the PGA TOUR trending down, and if you had to guess, where is men's professional golf a year from now, do you think? Do you hope there's more cooperation or do you think it's the same?

RORY McILROY: Look, again, I've spoke about this at length and I think the people that have decided to stay here and play these tournaments, they or we haven't done anything differently than what we've always done, right? We're playing these events, we're PGA TOUR members, we're sticking to the system that has traditionally been there. The guys that have went over to LIV, they have -- they're the ones that have made the disruption, they're the ones that have sort of put the golf world in flux right now.

I guess for them to be talking the way they are, it's bold and it's, you know, I think there's a ton of propaganda being used and all sorts of stuff. I certainly don't see the PGA TOUR trending downward at all. All the talent, most, 95 percent of the talent is here. You've got people like Tom Kim coming through who that's the future of our game.



I don't agree with what Phil said last week. I understand why he said it because of the position he is in, but I don't think anyone that takes a logical view of the game of golf can agree with what he said.

Q. Rory, I had to look this up, but a year ago you were 13 coming into this tournament, you had even fallen as far back at 16 in the world. Still a great number, but what was your level of disgust at that time at having your game fall to that point?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I didn't have a great run. I played OK through the summer, but I think as well it was a perfect storm. I wasn't playing great and then the tournaments that were coming off -- the tournaments that were coming off my ranking, it's a two-year cycle, that the tournaments were all like very, very good performances that were still holding quite a lot of points for me. So when they started to drop off, when I started to play averagely then, my ranking just sort of dropped a little more quickly than maybe the ranking suggested.

I finished fourth at the Olympics and I finished -- I had a couple -- I finished top-10 at the BMW Championship, I finished top-10 at East Lake as well, so it wasn't as if I was playing poorly.

I think the real low point for me last year was the Ryder Cup, I had a terrible Ryder Cup individually, played poorly, didn't really help my team that much at all. I think that was like the reset button for me to sort of think about things. And you think about the golf that I've played post Ryder Cup last year with the win here, I played well sort of into the end of the season over on the European Tour and then I've been very consistent this year.

Yeah, it's never fun to feel like you're not getting the best out of yourself. As I said, Ryder Cup was like a hard reset for me and I sort of had to think about things and ask myself some tough questions, and thankfully I've come out the other side of it and I'm better for that experience.

TOM KIM: Rory, I have a question for you. What's it like having so much success as a young player? Coming out and many years on tour, how do you manage all that?

RORY McILROY: I didn't have as much success as you're having at such a young age.

Like I think when you start to have success at a young age, you're going to -- I think the biggest thing that I realized is managing your time. You're going to be pulled in so many different directions.

You've got one, two, three, four, I can see five sponsors on you at this point, right? So it's just trying to manage your time to realize what got you to this position, right? Why are you a two-time PGA TOUR winner, why are you such a great player? And it's the time that you put into it and it's the practice, it's not losing sight of that. I think that's the thing.

I was speaking here just before you came in that I've almost found it easier to get to No. 1 in



the world than staying there. I think staying there is harder. I think you've got a bulls-eye on your back, you've got to work harder, everyone's coming after you. That's the one thing I would say is just managing your time and not forgetting why you're in this position and why you're so lucky to get to play with me the next two days.

And that was a joke that went over everyone's head.

Q. Hopefully this is as good a question as Tom. Do you share any of Jon Rahm's concerns about the three nonelevated starts in addition to your European Tour commitments, and would you welcome a scenario in the future given the strategic alliance where those tournaments overseas kind of count towards your overall total?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so for example, we're going to be able to count -- like so this event for me is going to count, so like one in the fall, for example. PGA TOUR is transitioning to a January-August season, I think everyone sort of knows that, or FedExCup season should I say.

You know, they're going to let us, for this, whatever the -- elevated events, but then you've got the three. Like so CJ this week is one of them for me. So I think Jon, myself, Viktor, Matt Fitzpatrick, Tommy Fleetwood, Tyrrell Hatton, there's a few of us that are in this position that play both tours.

I think, yeah, if you can let us play one PGA TOUR event in the fall, you let us play say another European Tour event in the fall and that's two of the three mandatory, so then you really haven't only played one during the middle of the season, I think that's a good outcome for everyone. That's something that's been talked about and I think that could be sort of a good resolution.

Q. In addition to tomorrow, you're also paired with Rickie. As a friend, as a peer of his, what's the importance for the TOUR in having him return to prominence as one of the marquee players?

RORY McILROY: It's a big deal. I think I've been really happy to see Rickie play as well as he has over the last few weeks. It wasn't just the ZOZO, but even before that he started to show signs of getting back to playing the way we all know that he can.

And he is, he's one of the most marketable golfers in the world. I think as the PGA TOUR goes forward, I think Rickie is -- there's a reason Rickie was in that meeting in Delaware, right? He is not only one of the most marketable players, but I think we all believe that he is -- his potential is up there as being one of the best in the world. He's shown it before and I think he will show it again.

He's important. Look, there's a ton of guys that are important to the TOUR, but I think Rickie just brings a different dimension, a different element to things that make people tune in, right?



I think Rickie being a part of that meeting in Delaware I think gave him a ton of motivation as well, talking about things, talking about where the PGA TOUR may evolve to in 2024. He obviously wants to be a part of that, but he knows to be a part of that he's going to have to play a little better. So it's been great to see him start really well and hopefully it continues.

Q. One other thing on the schedule, what do you think the fall will look like? What do you think it should look like?

RORY McILROY: Football. I mean, it's football season, right?

I think we need to get to the place where it's not over saturated, it's -- I would love us to come back in January and people will have missed watching competitive golf. I don't think that happens right now because there's 47 events a year.

So I think to get the most fan engagement that we possibly can, we have to let people miss it for a little bit. You know, people -- I'm not comparing golf to football at all, but you think about the exclusivity of the NFL and they play 18 weeks a year. Then people are just so ready for football season to start again. I'm not saying that golf's going to be that way, but you've got to let people miss it a little bit.

And I'm not saying we're not going to play any golf in the fall, but the fall is maybe more of an international flavor, it's an opportunity for guys to travel the world a little bit, grow their brands in different countries, but the real competitive golf season is January to August. That's where I see it.

RACHEL NOBLE: With that, we'll end. Appreciate the time as always, Rory. Thank you.

