

ROUND 4 INTERVIEW
23 October 2022

RORY McILROY (-17)



RACHEL NOBLE: We would like to welcome our 2022 THE CJ CUP in South Carolina winner, Rory McIlroy, into the interview room.

Rory, you successfully defended your title here at THE CJ CUP, world No. 1, 23rd victory. What's going through your mind right now?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, if someone had told me on the Friday night of the Valero Texas Open when I missed the cut that I would be world No. 1 by October, I would have asked them what they were smoking because I would not have believed them.

Yeah, it's just been a wild six months. I figured a few things out with my game and I've just been on a really good run.

Everything sort of feels like it's came together for me and today was just a continuation of how I felt like I've been playing over these last few months. Now it's all about going forward and trying to just keep this going.

Yeah, but it's amazing. Yeah, you know, it's a lot to process right now just with everything, but just really proud of myself with how I handled this week knowing what was at stake and really just how I've played over these last few months.

Q. Rory, congratulations. You had a lot at stake today, as you say, and you went out and really seized it, seven birdies on a tough course. How did it feel to win in that type of fashion?

RORY McILROY: It would have felt better if I had finished 4-4 instead of 5-5. I guess you're only as good as your last hole played.

It was amazing. I think I three-putted the eighth hole and then actually felt like it was a really good two-putt on 10, got lucky with my tee shot on 11, was able to make a 4 there, and then from then on in, great recovery shot on 12.

The turning point, seemed like there was always four of us today that had a chance to win and I think that the birdie on 14 was really the -- that's what separated -- the birdie on 14 was big. And then with me getting up and down out of the bunker on 15 and Kurt not -- you know, three-putting from driving the green, those two holes were huge today.

Yeah, I knew I needed to go out there and shoot a good score. I wasn't -- I knew if I went out there and shot even par, it wasn't going to get it done, but I knew there was opportunities,



right? There's the three par 5s and there's the two drivable par 4s, so you take care of those and you try and navigate the rest of the way, and if you play solidly enough, hopefully that was going to be good enough and ultimately it was.

Q. Fourteen, club? What club on 14?

RORY McILROY: Five-iron, like 227.

Q. Nice shot.

RORY McILROY: Thanks.

Q. Two things. Was there any part of you that was sweating when that putt ran about eight feet by on 18?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, yeah, I said to myself, I had a three-shot cushion on 17 green and I had that 10-footer, 12-footer for par, but I knew that it was still a really -- I knew it was still a really important putt because all of a sudden two ahead going up the last, I bogey, Kurt birdies, all of a sudden you're in a playoff that you don't want to be in. So that was important. Unfortunately, I missed that, I hit a good putt.

Yeah, on 18 when I ran it eight feet by, Kurt had a good look for birdie there and thankfully for me it ran by on the left side, so it made it a little less stressful. But at the same time, like the competitor in me wants to finish the tournament off the right way. I didn't feel like I quite did that, but it was nice that I gave myself the cushion at least.

Q. Secondly, we've asked you about this all week and you've mentioned pride quite a bit as it relates to No. 1 and also that you've done this many, many times. Your voice still seemed to catch a little bit out there when you were talking to Todd.

RORY McILROY: Yeah.

Q. Are you surprised at all about the emotion that hits you, and why did it, do you think?

RORY McILROY: You know, this tournament last year was the start of me trying to build myself back up to this point. I had a really rough Ryder Cup, I've talked about that at length. I think I was outside the top-10 in the world. It's not a position that I'm used to being in.

I think just the steady climb back up to the summit of world golf and what it takes, right, what it takes. And it's not just me, it's everyone that's a part of my team. It's not a solo effort. I just think about everyone that's made a difference in my life obviously not over the last 12 months, but ever. Just thinking over that last 12 months, there's a lot of people that deserve a lot of the plaudits and I'm the one that sits up here and takes them, but there's a lot of stuff that goes on behind the scenes that people don't know about. All of that stuff combined is



just as important as what I do out there trying to get these wins.

It's a team effort and I think whenever I think about that, that's what gets me a little bit choked up and emotional because it's really cool to be on this journey with other people that you want to be on the journey with. That's a really cool part of it.

Q. Like who?

RORY McILROY: My wife, my daughter, my parents, Harry, Sean, Michael, Ro, Fax, Donal. There's a ton of people, right? There's a ton of people who have done a ton of work for me behind the scenes and all of their input culminates in me being able to go out there and try to do these things.

Q. Lastly for me for now, you've also spoken about since you were last No. 1 and how much has gone on since then. We think about Poppy's birth last September, I think, and COVID. Is there more that we're missing?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think so. I think those sort of life changes, they're bound to change you, right? I'm not going to be the same person that I was before Poppy was born. All these experiences in some way change you and hopefully they've changed me for the better.

So yeah, I'm not saying that you're missing anything, but I just think that the last two years, a lot has went on in my life and the vast majority of it for the better and it's great.

But the only thing I would say that has been a downer at times has been my golf, but it's nice to have come out of those little ruts and get to this spot.

Q. A year ago when you kind of drew the line in the sand and decided to take ownership or whatever you were going to do going forward, you were going to own it. Did this feel like a close destination to get back to No. 1 or far away?

RORY McILROY: Far away. Yeah, it did. I felt -- I think the last I was -- I think Jason Day -- no, Jordan Spieth got to world No. 1 at Whistling Straits in 2015 when Jason Day won and I didn't get back to world No. 1 until 2020. So it was nearly five years.

But it wasn't five years of -- it was just five years of top-5, top-10, but it's important, right? So anyways, it took me five years to get back in 2020. Then COVID hit, I struggled through COVID. Coming out the back of COVID, sort of struggled a little bit, too. It's been a couple years since I've been world No. 1.

Again, yeah, it felt far away and I am surprised that over the last six months I've played as well as I have to get back to this spot.

Q. And then this week with the putter, you looked just very comfortable, knocked



down some big putts. How much does that free you up across the board?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's massive. I feel like with being able to fall back on your putting, it takes pressure off your iron play, it takes pressure off your short game, it takes pressure off your driving. You know that if you can get it up there within 10 feet, whether it's for birdie or for par, feeling really comfortable with the flat stick, it makes the rest of the game just that little bit easier.

I think last year was the first time ever I finished in the top-20 on TOUR in strokes gained: putting and definitely a big part of it and the work that I've done with Fax and with Rotella. Again, it's not like I'm -- I'm not handing them the reins of my putting, I'm taking ownership of it, but with their input and that's really helped.

Q. Sorry, my computer's not acting quick enough, but I think getting to No. 1 is hard and you mentioned staying there is even harder. I would ask you from experience now how difficult it is to get back once you've dropped out of that top-10 range, because sometimes being beyond 10 can feel like a lot farther away than it really is. How would you measure that difficulty compared with some of the other things I mentioned?

RORY McILROY: You're correct, because the difference between the 15th ranked player in the world and the 8th ranked player in the world is tiny, right? It really is. It's fractions you're talking about. Sometimes you can feel further away than you actually are. But again, that's the great thing about this game, you're only a couple of weeks away from feeling really good about yourself and getting some good finishes and getting some momentum on your side.

It didn't concern me that I dropped out of the top-10 for a couple of weeks last year, but again, like being used to the position in the world of golf that I am, it probably made me feel further away than I actually was.

Q. We are not sure that CJ CUP will go back to Korea or held in U.S., OK, but will you try to defend your title third time in a row next year?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, yeah. So next year I've got a couple of international events I'm trying to go for three in a row. I've got hopefully Canada, I'm going for three in a row there, and then CJ CUP and hopefully at that point it's back in Korea.

I haven't been in Korea since 2013. Last time I was there I played the Korean Open. Yeah, it will have been 10 years by the time next year comes around. Hopefully, I can defend the title in Korea.

Q. Just curious to get your thoughts on how Kurt kind of hung in there and just kept -- he didn't give in a whole lot today.

RORY McILROY: No, not at all. Great player. I've played a little bit with him, obviously seen



him quite a bit over in Europe. He travels, he plays all over the place. I think he's playing Mayakoba, he was telling me, and then he's going to play Dubai in a few weeks' time. Kurt is back and forth between Europe and the States a lot.

Yeah, this was a great week for him. He hung in there, as you said, the entire day. A couple of putts just slid by on him coming down the stretch and that was really the difference. Yeah, a really solid player. Yeah, showed a lot out there.

Q. You mentioned the Valero Texas Open. I know you missed the cut there. I'm just wondering if that was any type of a memory for you in terms of a turning point?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I remember. So for whatever reason, couldn't get out of there on Friday night so I had to wait till Saturday morning to get back to Florida. That JW Marriott there in San Antonio is massive. I guess there was some party on Friday night and I was feeling pretty bad, missed the cut. Got back up to my hotel room and went to order room service and they said it will be a two-and-a-half-hour wait. So I basically missed the cut, went to bed on an empty stomach and I was like, let's just wake up tomorrow and start again.

I don't know why that sticks out, but I think there was a couple of things that happened that week. I changed my golf ball the following week and that definitely helped get me on this path. I played a new golf ball at Augusta and that was really the turning point to sort of turn the year around.

Q. And then lastly from me, three wins this year. Do any of them stand out as more significant based on any other type of meaning that we might not see?

RORY McILROY: I think they're all sort of different. Battling with J.T. and Tony in Canada was a lot of fun, great atmosphere, needed to pull some good shots out at the end.

Battling with Scottie and then K.H. was actually up there in TOUR Championship as well. Yeah, I mean, all three wins I've had to go out there and win them, right? I shot 62 to win in Canada, I shot 66 at TOUR Championship and then went out with a lead today and shot 4 under to win.

I think that's been the most satisfying thing. I've put myself in position all those three times and went out there and got the job done and did what I needed to. They're great strides and great steps in the right direction.

RACHEL NOBLE: Appreciate the time as always. Congrats.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

