

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 15, 2023

RORY McILROY



MARK WILLIAMS: Like to welcome Rory McIlroy to the interview area for the 2023 Genesis Invitational. Thanks for joining us, Rory, for a few minutes. I guess we'll just start with you just finished playing the pro-am, first look at the course, just talk about that and the state of your game and then we'll take some questions.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I don't think there was much to learn out there this morning. Cold, windy. Thankfully, most of us have played Riviera quite a lot, so nothing really new to learn when you come back.

Yeah, conditions were pretty tough out there this morning and looks like the weather forecast is going to improve as the week goes on. Hopefully that's the last of the wind that we have to deal with.

Q. Yesterday Tiger was saying that he can't fathom being a ceremonial golfer, that once he feels like he can't win, whether that's a rationale belief or irrational belief, he can't wrap his head around just being out there for fun. As someone who you could be potentially be one of those future guys, ambassadors of the game, do you see yourself hanging around doing the ceremonial tee shot, or do you feel the same way, where it's like if I can't win what's the point of being out here?

RORY McILROY: The answer that I want to give you is that I love the game enough to be OK with being a ceremonial golfer, but I don't know if my competitive drive in this game -- I'm not a very competitive person, I only really am competitive in golf, but I don't know if that competitive drive towards this game would let me be happy not contending to win golf tournaments. That to me is a pretty frustrating place to live when your entire career you've strived towards trying to win golf tournaments.

If I want to play golf, I can play it at home with my friends and my family and enjoy it that way. I don't think you would need to struggle in front of thousands of people to enjoy the game of golf, so I'd sort of be in a similar boat to Tiger in that regard.

Q. Isn't it sort of like a right of passage, Jack and Arnie, those guys all hung around, Gary Player, they've hung around the game forever?

RORY McILROY: I think Tiger will still hang around the game forever. You think about his presence, you think about -- like he'll host this event hopefully for a lot of years, I'm pretty sure he'll still turn up to the Champions dinner at Augusta; I'm pretty sure he'll be involved in the game whether it be his investment of entities that are sort of to do with the game of golf and trying to be an ambassador and trying to bring the game into the 21st century with some



of the stuff we're trying to do as well.

Still being around golf and making his presence felt doesn't necessarily have to mean hitting the golf ball in tournament play.

Q. Rory, last week you lost your No. 1 spot in the world rankings unfortunately. Is that something that you really care about or is it just something that you kind of dust over because you are still playing good golf.

RORY McILROY: Thank you. (Laughs.)

Yeah, of course I care about it. I think it's a really cool thing to be ranked No. 1 in whatever you do, but I think it just goes to show the level of depth and the level of talent that's out here. I literally have one average week, it wasn't even a bad week, just an average week, and there's always someone waiting not wings to overtake you or to come and try to take that mantle from you. I think it's a great thing for the game, the fact that there's always someone there waiting to take the title away from you.

I've got a chance to get it back this week. You know, hopefully it's a bit of a sort of hot potato thing where me, Scottie and Jon sort of pass it around a little bit because it means we're all playing great golf.

Q. Along those lines do you think it's going to be musical chairs on the top spot for a while or can somebody cement it?

RORY McILROY: I don't see Scottie or Rahmbo going away, and I don't certainly don't plan to either. Obviously you've got so many other guys in there that would have a chance to sort of be up around that conversation as well.

I just think with the way the game is right now and sort of how we play, it's becoming harder and harder to separate yourself from the field. So it seems like it's been that way for the last basically since Tiger was in his heyday that that No. 1 spot sort of been's passed around a bit between us all.

Q. Have you had a chance to watch the Netflix Full Swing show yet? What are your thoughts?

RORY McILROY: Just my episode.

Q. You've been very involved with just the new look of the PGA TOUR, how the schedule will look in the future and designated events are a big part of that, big discussion kind of recently is who will play in these events. I'm just curious where you stand on how you think they should look, how big the field should be, and who should be playing in them.



RORY McILROY: The best players should be playing in them because ultimately the PGA TOUR needs to be built around the best players because that's what will maximize the value of the product. But that doesn't mean that there's not great storylines further down that list, which we're all very cognizant of. I've had tons of conversations with guys that are worried about what events they're going to play next year and all that. The one thing I said, look, no one's trying to screw the bottom half of the tour here. If anything, we're trying to lift it up. We're trying to -- if you have a, you know, I hate calling it a product, but a product that this year's forecast to do \$2 billion in gross revenue, you're trying to grow that product as much as possible.

So the way I've tried to describe it is if you look at like the NBA's trajectory over the last 20 years, they've built that league around their best players and their stars, not around the 12th guy on the team, but because they've built that league up around the stars, the 12th guy on the team does way better than he used to. So that's sort of the way I've been trying to tell it.

Does it mean that the Tour's going to get more competitive? Yes. Does it mean that instead of -- even look at the Playoffs, like 125 used to make the Playoffs, now it's 70. It's just become a more competitive product. I think honestly that's a good thing.

Q. Along those same lines, it feels like "improve the product" has become the new "grow the game." That's kind of the new buzzword for the PGA TOUR, whether it's the in-round walk-and-talks or the Netflix series or the TGL thing. From your perspective, why is it necessary that the periphery stuff is also included in just the PGA TOUR tournaments as well?

RORY McILROY: Periphery stuff as in like the Netflix show, TGL?

Q. Why is it all necessarily packaged together?

RORY McILROY: So I think like the demographic of golf is pretty old, pretty, you know, pretty much has been for a lot of years. I think all this peripheral stuff is trying to engage a different type of audience so that -- for example, last year was the first time ever that more golf shots were hit on nongreen grass golf, like Top Golf, like whatever, there was more golf balls hit in those styles of golf rather than actually on a golf course. So to me, that means that people are interested in the game, so to get people in the doors of those things to get them to enjoy that to then say, OK, if we enjoy this, maybe we'd actually enjoy the real thing.

Because the thing is you want to get eyeballs on the game and viewership and ratings and all that, I get that, but it's converting those eyeballs into people that actually participate in our sport, that's what growing the game is and I think all of what we're talking about has a role to play in that.

Q. Yesterday Tiger said that there were some mixed emotions to the response to the three designated events that we've seen so far from the membership. What is your perspective on the feedback that you guys have gotten to far?



RORY McILROY: Yeah, so the feedback is I would say similar to what Tiger said yesterday. It's the top half of the membership being really happy that they're in them and, but then the guys maybe on the outside looking in being worried about if they're always going to be on the outside looking in.

I think that the big thing has been, is this going to be like a closed shop for the same guys every single week, and it's not. This tour was built on meritocracy. This tour was built on if you shoot the scores, you can move up the levels and play the biggest events. That's not going to be taken away.

As I said at the start, it's just about making it more competitive. Ultimately I think that's a good thing. Like we're not -- like I'm not saying that we're going to have field sizes of 50, it's going to be closer to what you've seen in the past. We're not -- like again, we're not trying to limit opportunities out here, but we also want to make sure that when people get opportunities, it's the most competitive, most competitive tournaments and the most competitive product that we can put out there.

Q. You were a late addition to the Netflix series. Why did you ultimately decide to participate?

RORY McILROY: I had a conversation with Chad, Chad Mumm, the producer, back in August. Basically with everything that went on last year and sort of the way I played and with the way the storylines were, he just said to me, I think this show would be missing something if we didn't at least get your perspective on things.

So I agreed to sort of get mic'd up at the TOUR Championship and things obviously went well for me that week and coming off the back of the Delaware meeting and all the dynamics that were at play at that point, I felt for me as well it was just a good -- you know, it was maybe a good way for me to get my side of the story out there as well.

And again, I said this last week, but I set some ground rules. I wasn't going to be as accommodating with the cameras as some other guys were, but I think they understood that and honestly, I was pretty happy with how my episode turned out.

Q. Rory, following some of the other questions about the designated events, I believe there's five right now that don't have a cut, including the match play, which we're not quite sure of its future. Are you OK with that increasing? There's been a lot of rumblings that maybe a tournament like this would become a no-cut event. Are you good with that and how does that fit in with the product?

RORY McILROY: If you look at where we've historically been, whenever the WGCs were still a thing, we had four of those, we had the two playoff events, now that's went to three, so that's six, then you had the two fall events, CJ and ZOZO. Historically we've had tournaments that haven't had cuts and really wasn't any grumbling about it before LIV came



along. So I think you're going to see a mixture of both, to be honest with you.

I think some tournaments more than others lend themselves to maybe having cuts and trying to keep some sort of history here, like we're at the old L.A. Open that has a ton of history here. Is this an event that maybe should keep a cut going forward? Potentially, because of the history of it.

So we're thinking about all that sort of stuff. There's a ton of conversation around it.

Q. Is worrying about the product ever hard to balance with your primary occupation?

RORY McILROY: A hundred percent. I sort of needed to go off the grid for a few weeks in December. Part of the reason I didn't play Hawaii, I just didn't feel I was ready to go out there and play golf again, I just needed to reset.

Look, it was a busy year for me, I had a ton of stuff going on, but I sort of knew going into this year that it was sort of going to be maybe not quite repeat of last year, but there's still a lot of stuff that needs to be decided. For better or for worse, I'm part of that conversation, I'm on the board of the Tour, and I need to be a part of it.

Yeah, like would I love to just get back to playing golf at some stage? Absolutely, but hopefully after this year and the schedule's set for '24 and beyond and we sort of get everything else in place, hopefully I will be able to go back and concentrate on the day job a little bit more. Not that I don't concentrate on it, but a lot of my extra time's taken up with a lot of this stuff.

Q. Just kind of on that topic, Rory, busy year, you have events you have to play now, major championships are going to some places that you have some history and then one you don't have history with, and then the Ryder Cup.

What are you doing to prepare for those events while juggling all this other stuff? Are you still like go to the venues separately kind of guy or is your time now, just is that impossible to do?

RORY McILROY: It's not impossible, it's just whether it's worthwhile. Obviously a lot of guys went to LACC this week to see it. I thought in these conditions and in the way the golf course is, I didn't think there was much point. It's playing way longer than it's going to during the week, the ball's not running the way it's going to during that week. So I just, I just didn't think it would be a worthwhile trip to go there on Monday and see the place when I could get there the week of and get a better idea of really put a lot of work into those three days and get a better idea of how the golf course is actually going to play.

Yeah, I just didn't feel like it was -- you know, maybe nice to go and see it and play that I've played LACC, which I never have, but I just think I'll get a better idea the week of.



Obviously there's Augusta, Hoylake and Oak Hill. I've played Hoylake and Oak Hill quite a few times. I'm actually a member of Oak Hill. I've been up there, I think the redo by Andrew Green's really good. Again, I've only seen it in the sort of fall time, so which I guess could be similar to spring depending on what weather we get up there.

Yeah, I think the one thing I would say about preparation and sort of seeing golf courses is you can be as prepared as possible, but if you can't execute on that given week, I'd take execution over preparation any day of the week.

Q. So rest over --

RORY McILROY: Rest and making sure your game's in good shape rather than worrying about what spots to miss it in.

MARK WILLIAMS: Thank you, Rory, appreciate your time.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

