

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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RORY McILROY



DOUG MILNE: We will go ahead and get started. We would like to welcome 24-time PGA TOUR winner Rory McIlroy to the 2024 Valero Texas Open.

Rory, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. Making your third start here at the Valero Texas Open highlighted by your runner-up finish in 2013. Just some thoughts on the decision to be back here and what you like about the course, San Antonio and so forth.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's good to be back. I've always -- it's a good golf course. It's tough, you've got to -- it's visually intimidating. If you start missing it off the tee, you can get yourself in some pretty big trouble out here.

Especially looking forward to a week like next week, it's good preparation to get a card in your hand and actually have to step up and make some really committed swings. If I realized anything over the last few years, it's I definitely play my best golf in runs, so this is the first of probably a four-week stretch for me. It's nice to try to play my way into form, especially with next week coming up, and then the week after's a pretty big week on Tour as well, obviously with the main focus being getting myself ready for the Masters next week.

DOUG MILNE: Speaking of getting ready for the Masters, you're making your sixth start of the season this week, first since THE PLAYERS. What are you feeling good about and what are you kind of focused on tweaking and fine tuning?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think my game's been -- it's shown signs of life in all different departments over the course of the year. Some week's the driving's good, some weeks the irons are good. Just sort of trying to put it all together.

There was some signs of life at TPC, but I feel like I've worked hard over the last couple of weeks and I've made some pretty big strides, especially with some of the things I was struggling with. That's why this week is a great week to tee it up and see sort of where the last couple weeks of work has sort of gotten me.

Q. There's some word that you had gone to Butch for a lesson a while back. When you do that sporadically, what's the specific reason that you're going to see him?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've done this a number of times in my career. I met Butch when I was 14 years old, so we've always had a good relationship. If there's one guy that I want to go and get a second opinion from, it's him.

Yeah, I think just after THE PLAYERS and just sort of struggling through that Florida Swing



with my swing and with some of the misses I was having with my irons, I just thought to myself I'm obviously missing something here and I just would love to go and get a second opinion and have him take a look, a second set of eyes.

The one thing with Butch is you go spend time with him and you're always going to feel better about yourself at the end of it whether you're hitting it better or not. He's sort of half golf coach, half psychologist in a way. It's fun to go out there, I went and spent probably four hours with him in Vegas.

He said a couple of things to me that resonated. It's the same stuff that I've been trying to do with my coach Michael, but he sort of just said it in a different way that maybe hit home with me a little bit more.

Yeah, it was a really worthwhile trip and I feel like I've done some good work after that. As I said, this is a good week to see where that work has gotten me.

Q. Speaking of psychologists, you had a great line, Poppy said to you that you don't have to go get a lesson, you already know how to play golf. Is there a fine line between overthinking this and just, you know, over-gripping everything and kind of letting your mind do what it can do and your body naturally do what it can do?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's also like the chicken or the egg, right? You can say all you want that let it go, let it flow, all that stuff, but if you don't have the technique to back it up, then it's sort of going to be hard to do that.

I just needed to clean a couple things up in the golf swing and then it makes it easier to then not overthink and to let it go and try to get in that really good mindset.

As I was walking out the door on my way to the airport to go see Butch in Vegas, those were Poppy's words of wisdom. It sort of hit home with me, like yeah, you're probably right.

Q. You just mentioned that you found out or you know that you play your best golf in runs. Did that kind of aid in the decision to change the schedule leading up to the Masters this year and how do you think that's fared for you thus far? How do you like that decision?

RORY McILROY: I think it's been good. The results haven't been what I would have liked, but I've learnt a lot about where my game is. If I hadn't had played as much over the past couple of months, I maybe wouldn't have started going down this path that I'm on and just sort of trying to clean up the technique a little bit. I'm working on a couple of slightly different things than I was working on before.

I think it's been good. It's been, yeah, there's been struggles in there too which aren't great, but I think looking at the bigger picture, if I can get through that and get my game to a really good spot where I can play great now from April through to August, I'll be happy.



Q. I think you said on the podcast last week if I'm not mistaken that you felt like the game needed a correction and where we're at right now is not sustainable. Can you elaborate on that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think I know this isn't a be-all, end-all, but if you look at the TV ratings of the PGA TOUR this year, they're down 20 percent across the board. That's a fifth, that's big.

I would say the numbers on LIV aren't great either in terms of the people tuning in. I just think with the fighting and everything that's went on over the past couple years, people are just getting really fatigued of it and it's turning people off men's professional golf, and that's not a good thing for anyone.

It's going to be really interesting to see how the four major championships do, or even the three because put Augusta aside, I think that sort of lives in its own world. It will be really interesting to see how the major championship numbers fare compared to the other bigger events because there's an argument to be made if the numbers are better and you've got all the best players in the world playing, then there's an argument to say OK, we need to get this thing back together. But on the flip side, if the numbers aren't as good, it's an argument to still say we need to put everyone back together because people are losing interest in the game even if they don't want to tune in to the four major championships. Like that to me is not -- that's where I said like things need a correction and things are unsustainable because I'm close with NBC and the people that really care about these things and the people that tune in to watch golf. You know, 20 percent's a pretty jarring number this year.

Q. Just a quick followup on the scouting trip up to Augusta, any thoughts on the second tee and has anything else stood out to you?

RORY McILROY: I thought it was going to be a different visual than it used to be, but it's -- I thought whenever someone said they moved it back and to the left, I thought the tee box was going to point you out towards that right bunker and you're going to have to hit more of a draw around the corner. I mean, if you didn't know, you would think you were on the same tee box, it doesn't look that much different. You can still see left of the bunker and I thought it was really going to force you to hit some sort of draw shot around the corner, but you can still, you can still hit a straight away shot and keep it left of the trap. It's not as drastic of a change as I thought it was going to be.

And yeah, there's new greens on 2, 4 and 6. Slightly -- there's like a back middle hole location on 2, there's a slightly bigger area in there where they can sort of move that around a little bit. On 4 they've sort of made the back right section a little bit bigger for an extra pin position there. And then 6 is different, like the top right plateau is definitely bigger and then they've flattened out a section in the back left to maybe have an extra hole location there, too. Those are the three changes.



Q. Rory, I know you've gotten a lot of advice from friends, family, you know, players, whoever on Augusta and conquering Augusta. Is there one or two things that's resonated with you on how to play Augusta?

RORY McILROY: Discipline, not being tempted to do too much, sticking to your game plan. Ben Crenshaw said a good thing to me a few years ago, he just said high lines, just keep it high, just high lines, read more into putts than you think.

But yeah, I think it's more, you know, if you think about it, if someone said you go to Augusta and I want you to shoot even par for four days, you would think that's pretty easy to do, and as you're trying to shoot even par you're probably going to back into a couple scores in the 60s and you're actually going to do well.

But if someone says I want you to go out and shoot 67 at Augusta, it's very easy to shoot 75 or 76 because you start to chase pins, you start to miss it in the wrong spots, you start to not be patient and play the disciplined golf that you need to.

Good golf at Augusta feels like boring golf and I think that's something that I've always struggled with because that's not my game. To me it's the biggest test of discipline and the biggest test of patience of the year for me.

Q. You mentioned the two different swing thoughts and everything. Are you further along the line with that now after a few weeks?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it feels like they're sort of meshing back into one a little bit. And again, just a couple of things that resonated with me from the trip to Vegas to see Butch. But yeah, it's feeling a little more cohesive I guess is probably the right word.

Q. Rory, there's a really strong field in San Antonio this week.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's great.

Q. You being here is a big part of that. I know you're not on the Tour board anymore, but I'm wondering if Valero CEO Joe Gorder influenced your decision or if any of the other top players that are here this week, if you've spoken to any of them and Joe's presence on the board influenced their decision to play?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I've played with Joe in the pro-am here the last couple of times I've played. Personally for me that wasn't -- that didn't influence my decision to play. I think it's a great week to not just get ready, but it's a great golf course as well. It's a course that I think fits my game pretty well. I've had a little bit of success here in the past.

But it's a good date in the schedule. I think more and more guys are, you know, are realizing that they like to play the week before going into a major championship. This being the week before the Masters I think is a great date for this tournament and for Valero.



Q. Thank you and good luck.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

Q. Saw a new TaylorMade prototype 4-iron in the bag today. Curious your thoughts on that performance-wise versus your old 4-iron and will we see it go in the bag for competition this week?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so after I went to Vegas I went out to the Kingdom for two days. I needed to get into a fresh set of irons, my irons were like two years old maybe, so they were getting a little worn.

Yeah, I went out, spent a couple of days with the TaylorMade guys at the Kingdom. Yeah, they just produced these couple of proto, I guess like are they the MC replacements maybe I think? I'm not sure what they're actually going to be called. Yeah, I have no idea.

They performed really well. It's just as fast as the 760 that I was using. Launch is a little higher actually, which was surprising, and it's just sometimes I felt like when I hit my 5-iron in the blade and then the 4-iron in the 760 it was such a different feel. To go from a 5-iron now to that 4-iron, it feels a little closer to what I feel in the 5-iron. So just a little bit more responsive, but didn't lose any performance from it, which is great. Yeah, it will be in the bag this week.

DOUG MILNE: All right, Rory, we appreciate your time. Best of luck.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

