

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW: RORY McILROY
May 4, 2016



DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome two-time winner of the Wells Fargo Championship and birthday boy, Rory McIlroy. Rory, happy birthday.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

DOUG MILNE: Glad to have you here. You've obviously had tremendous success here, got your first PGA TOUR win here at the Wells Fargo Championship 2010, you're back as defending champion and you had a second-place finish and a couple of other top-10s, so obviously a place near and dear to your heart. So with that said, just a couple comments on being back here at the Wells Fargo Championship and Quail Hollow.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, obviously very excited to be back. Anytime you get to defend a title is exciting. Quail Hollow and Charlotte has been a really good place for me on my PGA TOUR career starting with the win in 2010 and having obviously won last year, but then I was in a playoff in '12 with Rickie and DA Points and a couple of other good performances as well. I've always been very comfortable on this golf course. I think with being so comfortable and with the great memories that I have here, it all sort of adds up to obviously a really enjoyable week, but a week where I feel like I can play really well and very strongly and have a chance to contend again.

DOUG MILNE: On the way over you talked about your schedule. You're getting ready to really hit the ground running and you've enjoyed a little bit of a downtime heading up to this week. Just some comments how you're feeling heading into the week as far as your game goes.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I took a little time off after Augusta just to recharge the batteries a little bit. It was a pretty busy stretch up to Augusta. Took a couple of weeks off and started to work hard again last week and try to get the game back in shape. There's a couple of things at Augusta I wasn't really happy with my swing so I've been working on my swing quite a lot. I'm working quite a lot on a couple of technical things coming into this week so hopefully I can continue to bed them in and get some competitive play as well. Literally, the seven holes that I played yesterday, I think I've played, you know, 18 holes in total since Augusta. So I'm looking forward to playing another 18 today and then getting at it tomorrow. Working on the swing quite hard and feels like it's getting more comfortable in what I'm trying to do and it's just a work in progress, but excited to get back on the course and into competition tomorrow.

Q. Rory, there's probably a tournament on the schedule every week between now and the U.S. Open that you could play and you have played. What are you going to do, how are you going to approach this busy time?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, the reason that I took three weeks off after Augusta is I'm not going to have more than a week off until after the Ryder Cup. So through October it's going to be -- until October it's going to be very busy. So I'm playing here, next week at THE PLAYERS, the Irish Open, and then I'll take a week off. Then it's basically week on, week off from there. Memorial, week off, U.S. Open, week off, French Open, week off, Open, week off, PGA, week off, Olympics, week off, FedExCup, Ryder Cup. So there's a lot of sort of week on, week off and there's a lot of travel in there as well, so it's a busy stretch coming up.

You can't play every week. You want to feel as fresh as you can for every tournament that you play, so I feel like it's the best way for me to approach it. And it's a busy summer, but I'm looking forward to all the opportunities I have to get some wins and play well.

Q. Rory, today you're playing with Bobby Long, who's the president at Eagle Point where this tournament goes next year. He told me he's going to sell to you politely today. What do you know about that course, if anything at all, and for courses that you haven't seen before, how do you prepare for those?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I really don't know much about Eagle Point at all. I know that it's on the coast and I know that it's very nice there, but apart from that, I really don't know much. So interested to hear what Bobby has to say this afternoon.

For courses that we don't know, you know, probably get there an extra day in advance if it's not a major just to prepare and play an extra 18 holes. I think the luxury of coming to places that you have played before, I got in yesterday, Tuesday midday, and that's actually pretty early for me to get into a regular PGA TOUR event that I've played a number of times before. So for example, next week at THE PLAYERS, I won't get there until Wednesday midday. I'll probably play nine holes Wednesday afternoon, just go play the tournament. The course doesn't really change much year to year. So yeah, I mean for courses that we haven't played, we'll take a little bit extra time.

I'm really not sure what my schedule's going to be next year, but this, Wells Fargo and Quail Hollow especially, has been a great place for me. We'll see.

Q. You played a pro-am with a young lady for The First Tee and she selected you first pick last night. Can you talk about it about what that's like in your experience?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, last year here in the pro-am I had a great time with Grace. She was a really great player but a really nice young woman and very polite and well mannered, and her story was pretty incredible as well. So I'm looking forward to playing again today in a similar scenario. It's nice to think that a young girl with the first pick to play with anyone in the pro-am, she chose me. So hopefully I can show her a good time right there and make her feel as comfortable as possible. It's quite intimidating going out as a 13-year-old playing in a pro-am in front of a lot of people and a lot of people watching you. So just try to make her as comfortable as possible and try to make her enjoy it as much as she can, because

ultimately that's what I'm here to do and she's here to enjoy herself and have a good time.

Q. Rory, with the schedule so condensed and so many big events from here to the Ryder Cup, is it a bigger challenge physically or mentally?

RORY McILROY: I always say mentally. Golf is such a mental game and it can go both ways. If you get on a run where you're not playing so well, mentally just trying to stay positive and keep going, where if you get on a run and you've got momentum on your side, it's quite easy just to go with it and to sort of ride on the crest of that wave.

So physically it won't be -- there might be a little bit going from Europe to the States and then going to Brazil and back up again, but that's why I've given myself a week to sort of recover from each of those tournaments, just to feel like I'm prepared going into the next week.

So yeah, more mentally just keeping yourself going. There's so many big events in such a short space of time and trying to be able to get yourself up for them and get yourself as sharp mentally as you possibly can and try to let yourself go back down again and relax for a couple of days and having to build yourself back up again, I think that's going to be the hardest part about this summer.

Q. Rory, there's a lot of good young golfers out there right now. You're kind of the elder of the young group if I can say that. Tell me about how important you think being a role model is, and also being a model not just as a golfer but as a person off the course to these guys.

RORY McILROY: I think it's very important. I think golf is in a great place that we have such a great group of young guys that are setting an example not only on the golf course but off the golf course as well. The likes of Jordan and Rickie and Justin Thomas and Smylie and all these guys, myself included, and even a little of the international players. Hideki handles himself very well. There's so many great players out here but they're great guys as well.

I think you can see a transition in this generation where we all get along together, we all are friendly. We're obviously competitive on the golf course, but once we're off the golf course, you're out here long enough, so it's hard enough out here if you don't have any friends. We're all close and we all get along well. I think that's important. I think that's a good example to set for the younger generation that are coming up behind us but even the kids that are watching us that are 10, 11, 12 years of age and maybe want to try and emulate us one day so I think golf's in a really good place.

Q. You handle yourself so well. Tell me about your father's influence on your life early in your life in terms of how you handle yourself on and off the course.

RORY McILROY: My dad, he's always been a people person, that was his job working in

bars and restaurants. He had to be personable and that's the way he was, and I feel like I've got a lot of that from him. My mother's a little bit more reserved so I try to keep a balance of being reserved at some points but trying to be outgoing and personable like my dad. They both set a very good example for me. They're good people. They've kept me incredibly grounded over the last few years the more success that I've had, and it's a reason that they are so close to me is because I'm the only child but I know what a great example they've set for me. As I've matured and being older, I've started to realize that. And I think as well you look at some of the other guys out here and their parents as well, it's the same thing. You look at Jordan or Rickie or these guys, they have great family structures, great parents and they're an example of their upbringing.

Q. Why does this course set up so well for you and do you feel like this is your best chance to get that first win of the year on the Tour?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I do feel as if this is my best chance to get that first win. I think the golf course sets up well for me. It's a very fair test. You hit good shots, you get rewarded. You don't hit good shots, you're going to struggle for par.

And I think just the positive vibes and the memories that I've had here, that really helped remembering the great shots that I've hit on some holes, the great putts that I've holed when I've needed to. All those things combined, it's just one of those places that I feel very comfortable on. Yeah, when I go out on that course, I feel like I have to play pretty badly not to shoot a decent score, I guess. I feel like I just know my way around it and I'm comfortable and hopefully that will be the same case this week.

Q. Do you look back at 21 under, are you still amazed at that?

RORY McILROY: I guess when you shoot 11 in one round, you have to be 10 under for the other three, so that definitely helped. It was nice to get that Saturday, give me the cushion last year to go out and I wouldn't say just stress-free but I could go out and try to birdie the par 5s and stick to my game plan and be conservative when I needed to and ended up getting the job done.

Q. Rory, with the condensed schedule, does that cut into your opportunity to do recon trips to the three upcoming majors, and if so, how does that change your (inaudible)?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've a week off in between the Memorial and the U.S. Open so I'm going to go up to Oakmont for a couple of days that week. I've got a week off in between the French Open and The Open, and it's only like a 20-minute helicopter flight from my house in North Ireland to Troon. So I'm going to go back and forth that week a couple of times as well so I can stay at home but still play the golf course. So I'll get a couple of chances to look at that.

And then I've never really went up early to the site of the PGA Championship. I'll probably

get to Baltusrol on the Sunday before. I've actually got a wedding here in Charlotte the previous day that I'm going to go to and then fly up from there. So yeah, I mean, I'll still have a good chance to look at the courses. And I haven't played any of those three, but we used to play at Firestone before the PGA, so we never really had a chance to go up and look at it. So I've never done that anyway, so I don't feel like it's hurting my preparation at all this year.

Q. Rory, when you lost the playoff to Rickie here, it's been four years now, were you surprised at all that it took him so long to follow that up? I don't think he won again on Tour until THE PLAYERS last year. At that time it was such a big win for him. What do you think was missing?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. Anytime I've looked at Rickie or thought about him under pressure, he's always hit the shot when he needed to. Or you look at the playoff here in '12, you look at the playoff and the way he finished THE PLAYERS, look at how he finished off the Scottish Open last year, how he finished off in Abu Dhabi this year. He's always been able to close. Sometimes it just takes guys a little longer than others to develop and learn the necessary skills or mental attitude. I think if anything, he's just got a little bit more of a ruthless streak in him. He's such a nice guy and sometimes maybe that was reflected on how he was on the course instead of being a little more single-minded. He's a great player and I think that PLAYERS victory definitely opened the door for him to kick on and win more, which he's done. So I guess I can't put it down to anything more than just some guys take a little bit longer than others.

Q. Happy 27th.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

Q. Of all the things that have happened in Rio recently that would give you reasons to dissuade you from going to the Olympics, Zika, the politics, the infrastructure, whatever, why do you remain all-in on the Olympics?

RORY McILROY: Honestly, the one reason, because of how -- two reasons. Because of how it's being approached in golf circles. It's obviously being played in Rio this year and it's being played in Tokyo in 2020. I'm not sure if we're going to have another opportunity to win a gold medal after that depending on what happens. You know, the second thing, Paul McGinley is the Irish team captain and he is so into it. He's more into it than I am, quite honestly, but because he's so into it, I would feel like I'm not only letting him down, I'd let the country down as well. But Paul's a very close friend of mine and I feel like if I didn't play, I would let him down big time. So that's why I want to go down and give it my best shot.

It's a week. You know, I'm going to get all my shots next week. The doctor's on site at THE PLAYERS, get my shots for Zika, and get my shots for everything else that I need to. You know, go play four rounds really competitively and try and win a gold medal. And if you do, I don't know how that will stack up against the other things that I've done in my career now, but maybe I might look back in 20 years time and a gold medal might be one of my crowning

achievements in the game, you never know. So it's an opportunity to do something that you've never done before.

I get that a lot of players aren't playing because of family matters and other things, but while I don't have those issues of a family or anything else, that's a good opportunity to go down and do something that you've never done before. So if nothing else, it will be a great experience.

Q. Rory, this is a course obviously that you won on twice, but I can't remember if you played this course when it's been this wet. How physically demanding is this golf course just to get around on when the grounds are so wet and obviously it plays much longer and makes the game a little bit tougher?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, the ground is heavy. I couldn't believe it when I went out and played a few holes yesterday. If it doesn't get any firmer -- the greens are firm, they've got sub-air so the greens are firm, they're in perfect shape. But the fairways, if it doesn't get any firmer, they're going to have to play lift, clean and place. I mean I was getting mud balls basically every tee shot that I hit. It makes it difficult. Physically I don't think it will -- the ground's a little heavier and you might feel a little bit tired at the end of the day but I don't think that should matter too much. But it will make the course play a lot longer, and if anything, that plays into my hands a little bit.

DOUG MILNE: Can we just get a quick picture with the cake? And guys, don't leave me hanging, we can't let him go without singing happy birthday.