



MODERATOR: Give us your thoughts about being here first and foremost, Rory. Obviously WGC Mexico for the first time.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, since it was announced that this tournament was coming to Mexico City, I was excited about it. I've been quite vocal in the fact that I think we've got the name "World Golf Championships" in there and it's great to be able to take them around the world. Obviously here it's great to have one in South America in Mexico here. Yeah, I've been looking forward to this event for a while. It's good to see a little bit of the golf course today. I didn't expect the ball to go as far as it was going. It's obviously quite an altitude here, but it's cool. It's a different golf course than what we normally play week in and week out. It's a little -- it's very strategic, you've got to think about where you're positioning your ball off the tee. The greens are very small, quite undulating. It's a really old-school sort of test and I think the guys will like that this week.

MODERATOR: And lastly from me, has the injury cleared up, all good to go?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, good to go. I'm still strapping it up and I'm still being a little bit not protective but careful. I'm making sure that I'm really warmed up before we went out to play. A little bit of kinesio tape there just to help support it. Been working through the bike for the last sort of seven to 10 days and it feels really good, yeah, ready to go.

Q. Can you just walk us through maybe how much golf you've played in the weeks leading up to this, how much practice, if you played golf with anybody in particular?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so I probably, when was it, like six -- it was Monday of Abu Dhabi, so what's that, seven weeks ago? So I would say for the first 10 days of injury I didn't do anything, I just sort of, I sat there trying to be in a good posture and not really move too much. And then after that I've basically been on the putting green from then on. I've done a lot of short game. There's no excuse for my short game not to be sharp this week, I spent a lot of time around the short game area.

Yeah, I started to play I guess it was about nine days ago or whatever. But then I really, I didn't -- I guess my first real full round of golf was last Thursday. Played Thursday, Friday, Saturday, took the day off on Sunday, played yesterday at Seminole and then down here today. So I've played four full rounds where I felt like I could go at it and not really protect it at all.

Played with DJ on Saturday, we had a good little game at The Bear's Club. Obviously played Seminole pro-member. Played with my dad yesterday which was cool. Played with another couple of people that I think everyone sort of knows what went on there.

So yeah, it's been good. It's been frustrating because I felt like I started the year so well with playing well in South Africa and then I felt it on the Friday afternoon there. I didn't want to let some people down down there in South Africa, so I played through it when maybe in other circumstances I would have pulled out, but playing through it and then I obviously didn't realize the extent of the injury until I got scanned on that Monday and there was a hairline fracture in my ribs. So frustrating, to say the least, especially at the start of the season when I felt like I was playing well. But rehab is, it is what it is and you just try to get healthy and get back there and it only makes me more excited to be here this week and try to play well.

Q. Rory, with the injury, can you be as aggressive as you were when you were 100 percent health?

RORY McILROY: No, yeah, I am. All my swings -- I'm actually, if anything swinging it faster than what I was before the injury, yeah, because there was a little bit of tiredness. I think I tested a lot of clubs in the offseason and I made a lot of swings and I think everything just got a little bit tired, muscles stiffened up, didn't really want to work as hard anymore, the joints stiffened up, and then the rib had nothing to move it so that's what happened.

I feel like I'm probably stronger now than I was say in November, December last year. Hopefully it's a blessing in disguise. It's been tough to miss all these weeks especially with DJ winning, Jordan winning, Rickie winning, Hideki winning, Justin winning. It's been a really great group of guys that have won the last few weeks and it's been a little bit tough for me even though most of those guys are my friends, it's tough to be sitting at home watching those guys doing what they're doing whenever you can't get out there.

Q. I have a quick follow-up. What stage in your golf career did you realize, I don't have to be scared of what's going to happen, I can just hit this, take as aggressive a cut as I want because I'm not worried or scared about what will happen or how I'll recover?

RORY McILROY: It's always been there. I mean, I've sort of had lower back issues since I was a teenager and that limited the amount of drivers I could hit basically from when I was 19 to, what, 22, 23. But then I sort of started to look after myself a little bit better and going into the gym. There's been a few things throughout my career, but luckily I've been able to get past them and get through them okay with the lower back and then with the ankle in '15 and then with this this year. But I've always been able to come back and I think that's because of how diligent we are in the rehab and making sure I don't rush anything and I feel like I've got a great team around me to help me get back to the point of where I'm healthy.

Q. Rory, can you expound a little bit on your game with DJ and whether there was any match that you guys had going, and what does that do for you as you come out of this injury layoff to really kind of open your eyes about where your game is?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it was good. That day I played with DJ, I shot 65. He played well,

too. He played with Keetsa (sp?) Barber from TaylorMade and I played with Sean, my manager, and it actually ended up a halved match. Sean and I halved with them. But it was a good game. We were joking, it was quite a week for me, I got to the play with the president of the United States and the best golfer in the world.

But no, it was good to see where my game was at. I mean, I was hitting the ball really well. I snuck it by him a couple of times which was quite nice to see, just sort of told me that my speed was there. Yeah, I've played well. As I said, I played Bear's Club a couple times over the weekend, I played Seminole over the weekend, I played well. I feel like I'm ready to go, but at the same time I haven't played competitively for six or seven weeks, but the last time I did play competitively I played all right so hopefully I can just pick up where I left off.

Q. Rory, at the Honda Classic last week Adam Scott said that you were the best player out of the world's top-10 and certainly the most accomplished. What does that mean coming from a player of his caliber and experience, and can you comment on how 2017's going to be a shootout between you and the guys your age that are winning early?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean obviously that's a very nice compliment to get, especially for Adam to say that, who has won a lot on Tour and is a major champion and a former World No. 1, it's very nice for him to say that. But yeah, look, I've had a good run up until this point. I've done quite a lot in my golf career at quite a young age. I mean I'm still 27 and I've hopefully got another 15, 20 years left in me to try and accomplish a lot more. But it's been a good start, for sure, and hopefully I can continue on the path that I'm on.

But yeah, I think for golf it's been great to see this year. Even starting at the end of last year with Hideki playing so well and then Justin and then Justin carrying it onto Hawaii, and then you've got all those West Coast winners, it was a who's who in the world of golf right now. So it's good to see those guys do well and it can only help pique the interest of fans, of sponsors, of whatever else. So it's great for the game that the guys that are up there around the top of the world rankings or winning especially so early on. It just builds up the excitement hopefully for what's ahead for 2017.

Q. With what amounts to a false start for the season, I'm guessing you've played once in three months probably, right, going back to Dubai?

RORY McILROY: I think I've played like two events in 17 weeks.

Q. So you counted, okay.

RORY McILROY: No, I saw it was a stat on Twitter the other day.

Q. Is there any part of you that feels like you're behind as it relates to getting ready for Augusta?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. I mean, honestly I haven't thought much about Augusta. My biggest concern has just been getting healthy and being able to get back here. That's what I was thinking about. The routine was get up early in the morning, do my rehab stuff, try to get out and see what I could do on the golf course, get back, have some treatment, do a few more exercises. It was just basically that on repeat for the last three or four weeks so that's all I've really been concentrating on. I would say my focus was on just trying to get ready for this event and play here. I think it's nice I get to play four rounds, see where my game is, take the week off next week, reassess, how's my body feel, how's my game feel and then from there I can start to think about the Masters and think about what I really need to do to get ready for Augusta.

Q. When you see, and you've mentioned it and it is kind of a little bit peculiar to see so many in a row of Dustin and Jordan and Hideki and what have you, frustrating to watch. Does it make you feel farther behind than you actually might be just sitting watching it?

RORY McILROY: No, I don't think so. Again, I'm happy for most of -- I'm happy for all of those guys. I was really happy for Rickie last week. Justin's played great, DJ. There's so many guys right now and the top of the world rankings are so bunched. I don't feel that far behind. I come in here this week with a chance to get back to No. 1 in the world.

But in terms of maybe preparation and just rounds played or reps as someone in the golf world usually says, yeah, I haven't had the reps and the rounds and the competitive, you know, I haven't had that. So hopefully over these next three competitive weeks that I'm playing here, Bay Hill and the Match Play, I can get that and hopefully I feel like I've played enough to go into Augusta and feel ready and not feel underprepared because I was planning on playing a pretty heavy schedule up until Augusta. Obviously things changed.

Q. Missed three tournaments?

RORY McILROY: Four, missed four tournaments. Missed two in the Middle East, L.A. and Honda.

Q. First of all, welcome to Mexico.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

Q. What do you think about Mexico? Many people have said that maybe it's not ready for a tournament like this. What's your opinion about it?

RORY McILROY: I don't know about that. I mean, from what I've seen, we only landed last night, got to the hotel and but from what I've seen, I mean whether it be from accommodation or the golf course, the facilities, I mean it's ready to host. I think with this venue, I think it's a great number of 78 or whatever I think it is. I think if it was a full field it might be a little bit small for a venue, but I think for the number of players we have this week

it's perfect.

No, it's definitely ready, I don't see any reason why we shouldn't be here and shouldn't be playing, and as I said at the start, it's great that the World Golf Championships are starting throughout the world I think it's very important that we do that.

Q. Good day. Which is your biggest challenge in this course?

RORY McILROY: I think for a lot of guys it's -- well, I think there's two things. It's judging distances because that's going to be real tough. I was hitting 8-irons today 210 yards. It's so hard to get used to and trust in your mind that that club is going to hit the ball that far. It's tough, sometimes you need to trust that a little bit.

And then the greens, the greens are small but they're quite fast, they're undulating. I really think you need to be below the hole. If you're below hole and you can leave your approach shots below the hole, you'll have much better chance at holing putts and making birdies. So yeah, distance control and the greens this week are going to be very important.

Q. Hey, Rory.

RORY McILROY: Hi, **Bob.**

Q. Your response last Friday to the round of golf was quite clear. Two things. Were you a little taken aback by some of the push-back that you received, and secondly, does it compare to anything you've had to deal with at home in a political sense just kind of been caught in this vortex and really don't want to be?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I was a little taken aback. I mean obviously we know how the campaign went and how divisive it was. We knew all that, and we knew -- but I mean, I guess I just approached it, as I said in my statement, a round of golf, and more for putting all -- anyone's beliefs or politics or whatever, just put that to one side for a minute. Like to go there and see 30 Secret Service and 30 cops and snipers in the trees, it's just -- I mean, it was just a surreal experience for me to see something like that. That was part of the reason I wanted to go and play.

If it had been Obama, I would have went to play. I've played golf with President Clinton, I've spent time with President Bush. I've been around quite a few presidents before, and again, like putting beliefs and whatever to one side, I just wanted to have an experience that I mightn't ever get, like play golf with a sitting president.

You can respect the guy, not respect the guy, I don't care, but if someone has a chance to play in that scenario and just sort of experience the whole thing. It's not as if we were speaking foreign policy out there. We were talking about golf and the grass that he put on the greens and the grass that he's putting on the greens at Doral. We talked golf the entire day. I think that was -- I think he was happier to talk golf than anything else that he has to

do these days.

Q. Anything compare at all to what you've dealt with at home?

RORY McILROY: Not at all. That's the thing, I feel like my generation has moved past all of that. Obviously yes, where I'm from is a very divided place, but I feel over the past 20 years, more than that, the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process, people have become way closer together. Doesn't matter if you're Catholic or Protestant or whatever. People, they get along. You know, I was a Catholic and grew up in a predominantly Protestant area, but we never felt out of place or felt threatened or felt anything. I feel like Northern Ireland has moved past that, which is a great thing.

So yeah, going back to, it was a very long-winded way of saying yes, I was a little bit taken aback by the blow-back I received but I get why. I get the divisive rhetoric and everything that was said. It's a tough place to be in, it's a tough position. Maybe if I look back on it, I put myself in a position where I was going to get that from either side one way or the other. But again, I was just doing what I felt was respectful and the president of the United States phones you up and wants to play golf with you, you know, I wasn't going to say no, like I don't agree with everything that he says.

But I never -- it is what it is. I'm not an American, I can't change the way the political system is there. What's going to happen? I can't vote. As I said, I said this in Doral last year, even if I could vote I definitely -- I would have voted for an independent or someone else. But look, it is what it is and I actually enjoyed myself, I had a good time. I'm sorry if I sort of, I don't know, pissed people off, but I felt I was in a position where I couldn't really do anything but say yes, respect the office even if you don't respect the guy that's in it, go play and go from there.

Q. He did not call you directly, right?

RORY McILROY: No, no, yeah, it wasn't directly.

Q. What did you shoot that day?

RORY McILROY: I picked up a few times. We both did.

Q. I know it seems like a long time ago, but going back to the TOUR Championship last year, how did that change your season, and you've had some time to process it, what did it mean?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think that's the great thing about the FedExCup, that you can play throughout the season and have -- I felt like I had a good year last year but without obviously not winning on this side of the pond and being in contention but not -- yeah, like just not feeling like I was closing tournaments out the way I should. And then I got hot at the end of the year and won in Boston, won the TOUR Championship, and from out of nowhere I won

the FedExCup.

So I guess players can look at that and be like even if you're not having a great year, as long as you get yourself into the top 125, you still have a chance to win it all. But it definitely, it turned around my year, my season. I hit a hot streak. I started to play well, I started to putt much better. I took that form into the Ryder Cup where I played quite well also, and I think the end of 2016 definitely just gives me a little bit of momentum heading into this year. Obviously that momentum was stopped in South Africa, but I feel like I'm in a good place. As I said, there's no excuse for my short game not to be sharp this week. I've spent a lot of time around the short game area and I'm happy with where my game is, but you never really know until you get out there with a card in your hand but I'm excited to get back out there.

Q. Rory, the object is going to be a challenge for this tournament here in Mexico City and other things. We hope we saw a lot of young talents in the Tour. The golf can live without Tiger?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, is it going to be a challenge? It is, I think it is. I think anytime you come to a new golf course it's going to be a challenge. I think the guys have to learn it. As I said. They have to learn how far their ball's going to go with certain clubs, so it is, it's going to be a good challenge for most of the guys. Especially you've got to hit it in the fairway here and position your ball.

Golf, look, I've always said golf is way better with Tiger Woods playing and with Tiger Woods playing well, but unfortunately right now his body isn't allowing him to do that. Actually caught up with him, I had lunch with him last week and we had a great time. Just the two of us sat down. I think the good thing is mentally he's in a good place. He's got other things in his life that he's interested in and it's not as if it's just golf. He's got other things and that's great. He struggled with his body over the past couple years and it's unfortunate because it just won't allow him to do what he wants to do. It's tough, but I know that he's working hard to try and get back. Again, with your body and with injuries, it just takes time. However long it is that it takes him to be healthy enough to get out here and play, even if he plays eight to 10 times a year, that's a bonus for all of us. It's a bonus for him, it's a bonus for us, it's a bonus for golf in general just to have him involved, show up, play the majors, play some of the other events that he likes and that he feels that he can compete at and I think golf is obviously better, as I said, with him involved.

But yeah, there's going to be a point where we're going to have to move on and golf has to live without Tiger. I think with what you've seen over the past few weeks with all these younger guys winning, it's in a good place and hopefully we can continue to carry the game forward with or without Tiger being there.

Q. With so many players playing so well, the No. 1 ranking could be pretty volatile, it could be changing from week to week. You guys have so much to play for. Where is that No. 1 ranking, where does that stack up in importance? Do we dwell too much on it, does the public make too big of a deal of it, or how do you perceive it?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think -- I don't know. I don't think we make too big a deal of it because, I mean, whenever you're ranked No. 1 in the world at something, it's a pretty big deal. But I think for the guys out here, it's like for me it's an ego. I think for a lot of guys it's an ego thing. It's nice to be in that position. It's not like -- it's not as if I earn more money because I'm the World No. 1 or it's not as if -- but it's just nice to be able to say that you're the best in the world at what you do. So I think it's more that than anything else.

But yeah, again, I've always said the world rankings are a by-product of how you play week in, week out trying to win golf tournaments. Yeah, when you're up there and you've got that in your mind and you're trying to win golf tournaments at the same time, it's there somewhere. I know this week if I win and DJ doesn't finish in the top-2 or whatever, I get back there.

But as you said, it's a going to be quite volatile. There are a lot of guys up there near the No. 1 spot in the world and it would be nice to get on a run like I did in '14 and sort of separate myself from the rest of the guys, and I'm sure all the guys are thinking the same thing. But yeah, it's nice to have a chance, it's nice to be in the conversation at least, and I know if I play well the weeks that I play, that I'll have a chance to get back there.

Q. What's your definition of a great player these days? A guy's a professional for 10 years, what's his record have to look like that someone should call him great?

RORY McILROY: A great player? Is a great player the same as an elite player? I don't know. A great player, 10 years on Tour. It's hard because I would say win a major, but then you look at some of the guys that have been on Tour longer than that that haven't that you would deem as great players. It's a hard one.

MODERATOR: Thanks for this, Doug.

RORY McILROY: That's a loaded question, Doug. What is your definition?

Q. Well, I'm not playing.

RORY McILROY: Well, you're writing about it.

Q. What's my definition?

RORY McILROY: Of a great player, 10 years on Tour.

Q. At least 10 wins and a major.

RORY McILROY: Are you calling me a great player, Doug?

Q. How long have you been on Tour?

RORY McILROY: 10 years.

Q. I just did.

RORY McILROY: There you go. 10 wins and a major? Yeah, yeah. It's hard to --

MODERATOR: We're finished.

RORY McILROY: No, we're not, we're not.

MODERATOR: Come on.

RORY McILROY: It's easy for me to say because I've won majors, but I mean, you can't leave someone like a Lee Westwood or Sergio Garcia out that haven't won a major but they've won the Order of Merit in Europe and they've been in the top-10 in the world consistently for the past 10 years. Yeah, I'll go with your definition. I'd say 10 wins and a major obviously is a great player.

Q. I guess I was looking to see if the standard has to come down because of the number of players that are coming on.

RORY McILROY: No, I don't think so. I think there's good players, there's great players, but I think there's a step above, there's obviously a step above that as well. Someone like a Tiger Woods or, you know, you get into the guys that have won like seven, eight, nine majors up until whatever. That's another category altogether I would say.

You look at someone like Phil Mickelson with five majors and 40-whatever wins, I mean that will stack up as one of the best careers ever, at least top-10, top-15. Where does great start and finish, that's the thing. If I was 47 or whatever Phil is -- I don't know, maybe not. Maybe not actually. I don't know. Yeah, this is sort of --

MODERATOR: Can we end this?

RORY McILROY: No, you're staying here.

Yeah, 10 wins and a major, that's a great start to your career. If you're 10 years on Tour and you've done that, you're a pretty solid player.

MODERATOR: And thank you. Rory, good luck this week. Thank you for joining us.

RORY McILROY: Thank you. I'm glad I got through that. Thanks, Doug.