

ROUND 1 INTERVIEW
May 3, 2018



RORY McILROY (-3)

Q. Rory, thoughts on the round? You got off to a really good start, 3 under on this golf course is good any time. Your thoughts on how you played?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I would have taken 68 before I went out there. My game felt a little bit rusty in the pro-am yesterday and didn't play that well. Went to practice a little bit yesterday afternoon on the range and found of couple of feelings that I was able to take from the range straight onto the golf course today, so that was nice. Yeah, hit the ball much better today, drove it much better, and the course is a little easier than it was last August in the PGA. Even if you don't hit it quite so well, you can still get away with it most times.

Q. You made two six-footers and an eight-footer for par in the early going, besides the birdies, so the flat stick helped you out early?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it did. I felt really good with the putter the last few weeks, from Bay Hill and even through Augusta. I struggled a little bit on the last day, but I think I was still top-10 in the putting stats at Augusta, and then into here. Yeah, I've just freed myself up a little bit and sort of -- you know, it's really helped. I'm seeing the lines and putting decent strokes on it and at least giving the ball a chance to go in the hole.

Q. First day of the tournament, thoughts on the course and the setup that you have to play?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think it's set up really well. It's not as penal, as I said, if you miss fairways like it was back in August at the PGA, but the greens are still as firm. You have to really -- and then with this little bit of breeze, it's just enough to make it tricky. Yeah, I think with the way the greens are and there isn't forecast for too much rain, there might be a little bit over the weekend, but these greens are so firm that I would say that the scoring, 3 under's going to hold up pretty well today.

Q. Rory, you've set a lot of course records here, including a 21 under that's the overall. What do you think will win, what would you need to win this year?

RORY McILROY: It's hard to tell. I mean, those records were set on a par 72, four par 5s. There's only three. That 21 under was 267, that now would be 17 under or whatever it is.

I don't know, I would say you need to get to double digits under par this week to have a chance.

Q. Rory, is there a regular Tour stop that you feel as comfortable at as this one?

RORY McILROY: Memorial, Bay Hill. Those are three that I really like. But no, probably not as much as here. I mean, I love this place. I play well. I feel like I don't have to play that good and I can still get it around. So yeah, it's a very comfortable golf course for me.

Q. Beyond the changes, three par 5s now, what's the toughest thing about this compared to what you faced at the PGA?

RORY McILROY: I think the toughest thing about this week is the firmness of the greens. They react a little bit differently than most bermuda greens do, they're very firm. It doesn't matter if you pitch the ball into the green or down grain, it still gets a pretty big first hop. And that's the toughest bit I think this week is if you short-side yourself, you're going to have difficult chips because the greens are so firm, and if you're hitting longer clubs in, it's harder to control them.

Q. What's the easiest course you've played this year on the U.S. Tour? Is that a bad question?

RORY McILROY: Probably be the one I shot the highest score on, Monterey Peninsula.

Q. Is there something about the quality of the golf course as opposed to the (inaudible)?

RORY McILROY: I like trees. No, seriously. I like tree-lined golf courses. I like that it gives you definition, I like that it frames holes for you. I love that.

That's my sort of -- I mean, I loved Akron. This is going to be the last year we're there. That's my sort of if I had one golf course to play for the rest of my life, it would be a tree-lined, framed sort of golf course.

Q. Last year there?

RORY McILROY: Akron?

Q. Talking about Akron, yeah.

RORY McILROY: Unless I just let the cat out of the bag, I don't think so.

Q. Rory, yesterday when you were talking about the Masters, it seems like people took it out of context when you said you didn't care about the U.S. Open.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I didn't mean it like that at all. I meant like I sort of was trying to say like if you look at where the U.S. Open and The Open were compared to the Masters 50 years ago, they were bigger golf tournaments.

Now, I think after everything that's happened over the past 50 years and the improvements that Augusta makes year on year, I feel like the amount of time between the last major of the season, the first major of the season, the hype, the eyeballs, the everything, I think it's just a slight -- it's just a notch above the other ones. I don't know if that's because we return to the same venue every year and there's a nostalgic feeling for everyone because of that, but that's what I was trying to say.

I care deeply about those other ones. I'm a proud winner of both of those tournaments. I wasn't trying to be disrespectful at all. I was just trying to say that from where those tournaments were in stature in this game to where now the Masters is, I feel like the Masters has replaced those two tournaments. And that's not to take anything away from the PGA as well. I just think it stands alone in terms of the four majors and that's all I was trying to say.

Q. Birthday plans for you, Rory?

RORY McILROY: Hopefully, go out and shoot a 62 and we'll see what happens. But no, no plans. It's a golf tournament that I'm here to play, and if I happen to do well on Sunday and things go the right way, then I'll celebrate on Sunday night.

Q. Can you elaborate on what you found on the range yesterday?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I took the TrackMan out. It's funny, like I was hitting the ball left in the pro-am. I still hit a couple left today, but I thought it was because I was getting underneath it. I thought my swing plane and my path, I was getting inside out. But I wasn't at all, it was actually the other way, it was more clubface. So I just really -- the clubface was coming in just a touch left at impact, and then with the speed that I have, it just accentuates it. So really just trying to square the clubface at impact and trying to get that feeling of returning it to where it is at address instead of maybe releasing it too much. Almost feels like I'm trying to hold the clubface square for longer is almost what it was.

Q. How long did it take you to figure out?

RORY McILROY: Five swings.

Q. Is this a place you get a similar feel like you have at the Masters?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've just won here a couple times, that's about the difference.