

ROUND 1 INTERVIEW
February 21, 2019

RORY McILROY (-8)



Q. Rory, when you putt the way you putted today, how much does that free up the rest of your game?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it does. I mean, I think, yeah, when you're confident with the flatstick, you're not putting yourself under pressure to hit it closer to the hole or trying to take on shots that you don't feel you need to. I think it was nice going from Riviera last week, which is poa, straight to here, which is obviously poa again. I had three pretty good putting rounds at Riviera, the second, third and fourth rounds. So yeah, I got a little bit of confidence last week and it's nice to see that carry on to this week as well.

Q. As we look at the monitor here, we show you some tremendous highlights. You played awfully, awfully well. Let's start on No. 10, you got a par, and then you birdied the 11th.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, this was nice. It sort of wiggled right at the end. It looked like -- there's a lot of double breakers on this golf course, so it was nice to pull a putt like that early on.

Q. Fast toward to the 17th par 3.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it was just a little smooth wedge. Yeah, it was 148. My wedge is going almost 170 this week, so it was just a little smooth one in there. Nice kick-in birdie.

Q. So you make the turn, that big smile on your face. What did you see from the tee?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, just hit it at the left bunkers and try to cut a 2-iron into the hole there. It was pretty close. It's the perfect -- my 3-iron probably carries this week somewhere around 300 yards. It was playing around 295 to the front, so I knew I needed to take a little bit off it and just hit a lovely little cut down there. Nice to start the back nine like that.

Q. Cashed in with that eagle putt there. Let's go to the second. You tried to drive the green, a little bit short of the bunker. Nice play from the rough?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I didn't land the ball exactly where I wanted to. It landed on the fringe and trundled up there. I was trying to sort of land it maybe three or four feet on the green. But I got away with it. Yeah, it was nice to leave those putts for birdie.

Q. Now you're right in the middle of the fairway.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, hit a good tee shot here, only had 123 yards to the hole, a little half sand wedge in there. Again, when you're leaving yourself putts like that for birdie, it makes for a pretty stress-free day.

Q. Let's go all the way to the 8th, you had this birdie through the shadows.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, this was nice to see, especially after bogeying the par 5. I would say that hole was maybe playing the toughest hole on the golf course today so to make a 3 there and to get that shot back was nice.

Q. You didn't play here last year, you don't play a ton in altitude like this. How difficult is it for you to adjust from sea level at Pacific Palisades at Riviera last week to coming here, having a couple practice rounds and then getting after it on Thursday morning?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's literally like -- so I watched some of the highlights last week and I was hitting these little low cuts just trying to hit it in play, and they were still good ball speeds, like 180 ball speed, but it was carrying like 255. And this week you can carry a driver 370 if you hit it up in the air. So literally it's 100 yard difference between some shots. It's fun, it's fun. I'm glad we don't have to do it every week, but while we're here, we might as well make the most of it.

Q. Here alongside Rory McIlroy. Rory, 63, but 17 out of 18 greens. You holed a 25-footer on your 17th hole. Other than that your longest putt was 12 feet. It looked quite easy. Was it?

RORY McILROY: It felt pretty stress-free. I wouldn't say it was easy. I hit a lot of good golf shots, but yeah, I left myself a lot of tap-ins for birdies and had a nice eagle on the first hole as well, our 10th hole today. Yeah, I mean, they were -- as 63s go, I shot 63 at Riviera last week, but this felt probably a little more stress-free.

Q. It's not hard to believe this, you had a nice start to the season, three top-5s, I know you probably feel you should have wrapped that one up last week, but it's a nice start, you're keeping it going here. What is it that's really clicking for you, Rory?

RORY McILROY: I don't know. I'm managing my game well. I love where my attitude's at. My attitude on the golf course is fantastic and my putting is good. I've seen some really good signs with my putting over the last few weeks. I had three really good putting rounds at Riviera the last three days, carried it into here. So if I'm excited about anything with my game, it's my putting and my attitude have been probably the best they've been in a long time.

Q. Let's talk just a little bit about altitude as well, because watching how much you did over the winter working on your game, this is me speaking, I feel like there's a renewed hunger almost, an appetite for you to get back to being the best player in the

world. Does it feel like that to you?

RORY McILROY: A little bit, yeah. This time -- the last time I played here two years ago I was coming off the back of that lingering rib injury, so I'm finally healthy again, which I think I can hit as many balls as I want. I would say for the last 18 months I had to limit how many balls I hit and that's not a great place to be because you feel like you should be doing more and you can't. You're sort of just turning up at tournaments hoping that it's there.

So I saw some really good signs last year. I played myself into final groups and had some good chances to win, and I think this year is just building upon the good stuff that I was able to do last year.

Q. A near perfect round. What do you feel was better, your ball-striking or your putting, because they were both great today.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, they were good. I think for the most part my wedge play was pretty good. I was able to control my distance as well, control trajectories well. But my putting felt great all year, so that's -- if I'm excited about anything in my game, it's the way I've putted the last few weeks.

And also just my attitude. I'm not putting myself under any pressure, I've sort of got things in a really nice perspective. I think that's probably 80 percent of the reason why I'm playing this good golf over the first few weeks of the year.

Q. Does that help you, too, when you get a shot where you're a foot away from going in on the fly, you make an eagle, how much energy did you get from that and did you have to calm yourself down?

RORY McILROY: No, because as I said, perspective, it's only one golf shot. That one golf shot was the same as the golf shot I hit through the trees on 6 that hit a tree. It all levels out at the end of the day.

Yeah, I'm just, I'm in a good frame of mind, managing my game well, putting went good, and if you putt well, it takes pressure off the rest of your game and that's where it's at.

Q. Would you take that second shot back on 6?

RORY McILROY: No. I mean, it's really like hitting through this tree here, right? It looks pretty thin and you know you're going to miss this big limb on the bottom and you've got a nice window, and it just kind of hit that sort of medium size branch and it just hit it straight on. The one branch it could not hit, it hit. No, it was either chip out sideways and have 290 yards to the pin or try to do that and advance it, at least get my third shot to the green.

Q. I asked you last week about being (inaudible) top-5s in the last (inaudible) starts. Do you remember the last time you've done this before? When was the last time you

felt this good?

RORY McILROY: It's been a while. I would say probably at the end of the year of '16 when I won the FedExCup, I felt really good with my game then. Yeah, it's probably been 18 months since I've felt this good with it.

Q. You're confident if you go through the process you're going through and when it comes as a result of that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it's a by-product. I think winning is a by-product of doing all these things. I alluded to it last week. Practicing the right way, thinking well, training well, eating well, all this stuff that I try to do. Winning is a by-product of doing all the little things well and I feel like I'm on a really good journey of doing that. I think it's just a matter of time. I can't put pressure on myself, I can't push it. I'm off to a great start this week, but I literally have taken each and every day this year one day at a time and that's the way I'm going to treat it not just this week but going forward.

Q. Two years ago you had food poisoning, did you change your food here in Mexico? Are you a little more careful while you're here?

RORY McILROY: No, not really. I think I'm probably -- I've been prone to that before, so I take some supplements that it helped me maybe not get an upset stomach. So yeah, digestive enzymes, probiotics, just stuff that keeps your gut nice and healthy. Fingers crossed, so far, so good.

Q. Did you see that shot on 1?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I saw where it pitched. I didn't know how close it went to the hole, but it seemed pretty close.

Q. What was that on 1?

RORY McILROY: It was a 2-iron, cut 2-iron. It was playing around -- it was 300, but adjusted was like 289 to the front. I'm carrying my 2-iron this week 300 yards, 305, so I need to -- I needed to sort of cut it and take a little bit off. It was perfect. It was just headed at those last bunkers and had a nice cut into the pin.