

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW**  
**January 22, 2020**



**RORY McILROY**

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**SHARON SHIN:** I would like to welcome in the reigning FedExCup champion, Rory McIlroy, here into the interview room.

Rory, you're making your second start here at the Farmers Insurance Open, you're coming off a T-5 finish from last year. How does it feel to be back at Torrey Pines?

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, it feels good to be back. It's a beautiful place to start the year. Last year I started it in Hawaii, but I decided to spend Christmas and New Year back home in Ireland. It's already a big trip from the east coast to go to Hawaii, so even more so from Ireland. Gave me a couple of weeks to practice at home and prepare.

Yeah, good to be back. It's a golf tournament I've always enjoyed watching on TV. A lot of really cool things have happened here over the years and it was exciting to get to play it for the first time last year. One year in, I feel a little bit more comfortable with the golf courses and all that. Yeah, excited to start the new year.

**SHARON SHIN:** Perfect. We'll open it up right away.

**Q. Rory, you can get to No. 1 in the world this week. Where does that rank in things when you sit down during the offseason and decide the things you want to focus on? What does getting the World No. 1 rank?**

**RORY McILROY:** I mean, it didn't get on the list of goals at the start of the year if that's what you're sort of asking.

I guess my thing is when I set myself goals, I set myself goals like I want to be plus-one strokes gained approach play, I want to be -- it's all about the process, it's all about the game, it's all about trying to make improvements.

If I do that and I achieve those goals, then hopefully inevitably I get to that position. That's sort of the way I look at it. It is a by-product of playing consistently good golf and I feel like I've done that for quite a while now. So I don't want to say it feels like it's just a matter of time, but if I just keep doing what I'm doing, if it isn't this week, then hopefully it's a couple weeks down the line and I'll have my chances. So I'm not putting myself under any pressure this week to get it done.

**Q. Two more things on that topic. A, would you have thought leaving Portrush last summer that you would even have a chance at this point six months later?**

**RORY McILROY:** No, definitely not. I think -- I think at that point I might have been like four points behind Brooks, or even more so. But yeah, I've played consistently good golf since that point. I learnt a lot of things at Portrush that I've put into my game, into my preparation, into my thought process going into other tournaments. And yeah, I've had a pretty good run since then. But no, it was -- it wasn't even -- it wasn't on the radar when I was flying back from Northern Ireland in July.

**Q. Secondly, as it relates kind of to a priority, I think it was JT who said a couple years ago when he got to No. 1 it was cool but he never really appreciated it or desired it until he was no longer there and then it kind of irritated him that he wasn't. Can you follow that at all? You've been there a couple times here and there and it's been some time.**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah. I think it's always cool when you attain that ranking for whether it's the first time ever or the first time in a while. To be the No. 1 at whatever you do is a pretty -- it's a pretty cool feeling.

And it's a very imperfect system. You know, even that is up for debate, you know, whether the players that are at -- whatever their ranking are, whether that's a true reflection of how the players rank in the game right now. Everyone has different opinions on that.

But it doesn't -- I don't think it irks me or gets me annoyed if I'm not holding that position. I feel like I, you know, I go about my business and I try to do the right things all the time. If I play well enough for a sustained period of time, hopefully I get there.

**Q. I'm wondering what you take away from the major season last year given how well you played in the nonmajors. Is it just one of those things? Does it prompt you to reflect on your preparation? What are your takeaways?**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, preparation a little bit, mindset mostly. You know, when I look back at the majors that I've won and I've done well in, I've always started well. Three of the four majors last year I had slow starts. Pebble I started pretty good.

But yeah, I think it's -- there's a lot of buildup and a lot of hype going into those tournaments. I feel like I did a pretty good job of trying to shut myself away from all of that stuff, but there's still certain things that get in there. Sometimes you go out in the first draw and you're trying to sort of play your way in the golf tournament, make a few pars, play sort of protective golf a little bit and that's never really been my -- in my nature. I'm the other way, right? I start aggressively, and if I do and I play well, I usually keep myself up there in the tournament for the most part.

So it was just slow starts for the most part that held me back last year and that's something that I'm going to try to improve on this year.

**Q. You mentioned goals for the year and looking at some stats. What stats do you**

**value the most right now and why?**

**RORY McILROY:** Personally for me, the two stats that I have been proudest of over the past year were like around the green in putting, I made huge strides in those. I think those are the two -- I think those are the two stats that helped me play as consistently as I did last year. You know, making that key up-and-down for par to keep some momentum going or holing that six-footer when you need to just to -- you know, if things are getting a little bit squirrelly at certain points, those are the little things in the rounds of golf that add up over the course of a season and turn those 72s into 70s and just those few shots each and every tournament can make a huge difference.

So I finished inside the top-20 on Tour in short game, inside the top-25 on Tour in putting last year. So if I can keep those at a very high standard like I did last year, those are very important to me. I've always been a good driver of the golf ball. Sometimes breaking down yardage bands with irons is a big key for me, but from basically 100 yard out last year I was pretty good. If anything, I could sort of tighten up that 50 to 100 range, but I really don't leave myself that many numbers from there.

But yeah, for me going forward, I've always driven it well, I've always hit my irons pretty well, but if I can keep those two around the green and on the greens as strong as I did last year, I'll be pretty confident about the season.

**Q. Do you look at it much during the year?**

**RORY McILROY:** Quarterly, I sort of get a quarterly stats report and I sit down and look at them after every sort of four or five tournaments. It's a better set of data to look at instead of, you know, if you just look after every week, there's going to be anomalies in there -- easy for me to say -- that you won't really get if you take a four or five tournament look at things.

**Q. Rory, do you like starting the season on a golf course in a complex this difficult? Secondly, did you notice many of the or take note of many of the changes on the South Course?**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, I do, I do think it's a good thing that you're sort of thrown in the deep end right from the start. It's a tough golf course, you've got to hit fairways, you have to control your distances well around here. The greens themselves, not just the complexes around but the greens are small targets and you have a few different levels on each of them.

If anything, I think they've -- a few of the fairway lines have maybe adjusted slightly. I think they've rebuilt most of the fairway bunkers, if not all of them, and they honestly probably made them easier. They're quite flat. You're not going into the bunkers now thinking it's that much of a penalty. You'd rather hit it into the bunker than hit it in the rough.

And then around the greens there's obviously a few runoffs that run off the back of nine, left of 15, you've got that sort of apron that goes up four on that left side.

I think the changes are good. I think where they've positioned the bunkers is probably better for the modern game, but I think the penalty of hitting in the bunkers isn't much because they're very flat.

**Q. You said in Ponte Vedre you were maybe reluctant to look at your swing on camera when Michael came over. Did you?**

**RORY McILROY:** I looked at it once or twice and that was really it, yeah. I've been working on something, just trying to get my left arm a little bit higher at the top of the swing and just sort of trying to get it supported a little bit more with my right arm, but a very simple thing. But it's felt good. I felt pretty good with everything.

And when Michael came over last week, we hit some balls, but for the most part I went out and played and hit different shots and tried to shoot scores. But yeah, I think that's the key for me. Even last year I sort of figured out that sometimes I spend a little too much time on the range when I'm home, I don't get out and play enough. That's what -- I'm going to try to play a little bit more at home going forward.

**Q. Do you do any data capture with your swing, do you use force plates or 3D modeling at all to get benchmarks?**

**RORY McILROY:** I used to. I used to get biomechanically tested four times a year. I used to do this, you know, put sensors on to see muscle activity throughout the swing, but honestly, I haven't done that in a few years. It's never -- not that it's never really been me, but I just don't -- I appreciate science and I appreciate that it can help you as a golfer, but I think sometimes people can overcomplicate things.

I've always said that you play this game well when you break it down into its simplest form and that's basically what I'm trying to do these days.

**Q. Mate, your thinking and your voice in this game has really matured over the years, we've sort of all seen that as you've grown up. With that in mind, what do you see is your next big challenge ahead of you, maybe starting a family, where do you see your next big challenge?**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, I think if you look at when I first came out on Tour and started winning majors, you know, nearly a decade ago, eight years ago, I think there was only -- you could probably count the guys on one hand that played a similar game to the way I played. I think that, you know, was part of the reason why I did so well in that stretch.

Now, you know, the likes of a Matt Wolff or -- they grew up obviously watching Tiger a little bit, but watching guys like myself and Dustin and that's the type of player that's coming out on Tour now. So where I used to get to the golf course and think, okay, maybe five or 10 people have a chance, nowadays it's 40, 50, 60 guys that play that sort of game.

I think that's going to be the biggest challenge going forward over the next 10 years. There's always fresh blood coming through and new talent. It's trying to keep up with them, I think, that's the big challenge going forward.

**Q. Just to switch tact here, can you give us sort of a rundown or a story of the first time you played with Tiger Woods, how you felt before, during and after?**

**RORY McILROY:** First time I played with him in a competitive round?

**Q. Yeah.**

**RORY McILROY:** The one that sticks out to me is I played with him at his tournament at Sherwood back in -- yeah, I think I even remember he shot 66 and I shot 70, I think. I doubled the last. I'm pretty sure I doubled -- I hit it into one of those bunkers at 18 at Sherwood and did a bit of ping pong, I think. I don't remember much about it. I felt pretty nervous. Obviously it's a big deal, a little more of a relaxed event rather than a bigger event.

Yeah, I've always said this, the first time I played with Tiger, I've never said "good shot" as much as in my life playing with anyone. It was just "good shot, good shot, good shot." I think he was consistently hitting great shots the entire day, shot 6 under par.

Yeah, felt pretty nervous going out, pretty nervous for the first few holes, but then I settled in and sort of did my thing, was playing okay.

Then I think afterwards it's always -- you know, inevitably you compare yourself to him and what you've just seen, and definitely he's better than me there and I can definitely hang with him there and I need to do better with this.

For me, anytime I have the opportunity to play with him, it's a learning experience just seeing what he does and how he does it. Even we had a TaylorMade photo shoot in Florida a couple of months ago and he sort of was explaining to me how he plays these little low spinning chips that he plays. Just even those little nuggets, I'm there going, Oh, yeah, Tiger said he covered it with his right shoulder and I'm sort of there trying to do the same thing. So there's always stuff to pick up.

**Q. You said that you learned a lot since Royal Portrush because of the experience there. If you could, specifically what did you learn in the time since off that two-day experience?**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, I don't -- it doesn't serve me as a golfer to try to be careful, to try to play conservatively or the way maybe some other people play. I have my own style of play and most of the times it works, sometimes it doesn't, but sometimes I get into situations and I become a little too conservative and I become a little too careful.

I basically said to myself after Portrush, I'm 30 years old, I have basically achieved everything that I've wanted to achieve in the game, like why would I be careful? Why would I not go out there with the most carefree attitude and think everything beyond this is just gravy. That's something that I've learned, that's a mindset that I'm going to try to replicate each and every time that I tee it up.

And then one of the big things I learned was how important home is to me, having that support from back there and people that -- you know, I'm a million miles away from home right now on the west coast of the United States, but anytime I think about that experience at Portrush and I think about the people from back home and what I sort of mean to them, it was a big reminder of that week. If I'm ever struggling or if I'm ever feeling down about things, I can always think back to the support that I got that day, which is really cool.

**Q. Rory, the summer stretch after The Open as busy as it is, now you throw in the Olympics, even more so. Just wondering if it's making you look at things a little different this year or how it might impact your schedule or how you're going to approach that period.**

**RORY McILROY:** Yeah, I've pretty much got my schedule planned out. I'll play a good stretch. I'll go back to play the Irish Open the last week in May and then I'll play Memorial, Canada, U.S. Open, Travelers. So that will be five in a row, then I'll take a couple weeks off. Play The Open Championship, play the Olympics, play the FedExCup, play the Ryder Cup, and then we'll see from there. That's sort of -- I've sort of got it all planned out. That five-week stretch, that's the big one, and then sort of trying to give yourself a few weeks' break in that. Obviously The Open, the Olympics and the FedExCup.

**Q. Welcome to San Diego. I wanted to ask you what you like about San Diego, about Torrey Pines, and also you were the PGA TOUR Player of the Year last year, you said you kind of have done everything you want to do, that's why you take risks. I want to know what your 2020 goals are.**

**RORY McILROY:** Thank you. I love San Diego, I've got great memories of here. I first was here at Torrey Pines in 1999, I played Junior World here. Not here at this course, but I came here for the opening ceremony and stuff. So good memories from being a kid and stuff. Sort of got to know the area a little bit as I sort of moved through the age divisions and we played different places.

Yeah, it's a beautiful part of the world. I actually had dinner in Delmar a couple nights ago and it was the first time I really spent -- I've sort of driven through it and stuff but never actually parked my car, got out and walked around. It's beautiful there. That was a nice little find and something that if I come back again, I'd probably stay in Delmar. Seems like there's a little bit to do there. So yeah, it's nice to start the year here.

Yeah, my goals are pretty much the same as every year. I want to play the best golf that I possibly can. I want to win as much as I can. I set myself a goal of winning six times last

year and I won four, so I didn't quite achieve it but I still had a good year. Five is the most that I've ever won and I would like to top that at some point, so I think that six number is still something that I strive towards. But there's a lot of stuff that goes into winning those tournaments, so I've got to focus on my practice and what I need to do there, and if I do all that right, then hopefully getting to that six number and winning those tournaments is just a by-product of all the good stuff that I do away from the course.

**SHARON SHIN:** Thank you for your time and good luck this week.

**RORY McILROY:** Thank you.