

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
May 5, 2021

RORY McILROY



AMANDA HERRINGTON: We would like to welcome Rory McIlroy, a two-time champion of the Wells Fargo Championship, to our virtual interview room here.

Rory, I'm sure it's great to be back at Quail Hollow. Just some comments on returning to the site of two victories, one being your first PGA TOUR win.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, 11 years ago, hard to believe.

Yeah, it's always great to be back, come back to Quail Hollow. So many great memories here. As you said, first win on Tour and then winning again in '15, being a part of a pretty exciting playoff in '12, and basically celebrating every birthday here for the last 10 years, apart from last year because of the pandemic.

So it's been a great place. I've always liked coming back to Charlotte. I think the fans here always make the tournament what it is; very enthusiastic, very knowledgeable, support the tournament very, very well. Yeah, happy to be back, and obviously coming back to a place that I've played pretty well on before. Hopefully that gives me a little bit of good mojo going into the week.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Before we get into questions, this morning you had an opportunity to play with 18-year-old Raymond, who was the Wells Fargo Succeeding Together First Tee essay contest winner. What's that experience like for an 18-year-old kid to come out here and get a round with Rory McIlroy?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, it's really cool. It's not the first time I've done it here. I think it's a great initiative. I think that The First Tee is a wonderful program. Any involvement that I've had with The First Tee or anything that I've done with them, it's so impressive to see these kids come through that program and not just learn about golf, but learn about the values of life through the game of golf. So I've always been a huge advocate for The First Tee.

It was nice to meet Raymond today. He's an impressive young man. He's going to go to Yale in the fall. He said, "Have you got any advice for me?" I was like, I didn't go to college and you're going to Yale, which I would never be able to get into, so I think you're doing okay without my help. But yeah, it was cool to be out there and play nine holes with him.

Q. Rory, it's been a while since we've seen you and two kind of major developments since then, the first being the Player Impact Program. As the PAC chairman, I'm curious your thoughts on that. And then yesterday the news that the PGL or whatever

name it's going by these days says that they're making offers. Again, just curious your sense on sort of the state of that venture.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so look, the Player Impact Program, it's a way to -- it's a way to reward the top players for engaging with the PGA TOUR, but it's also a program designed to -- it's not as if it's just, okay, the top-10 players or, you know, the top-10 names in the game get this money and thank you for your loyalty. There's a bit more to it.

I think that Justin Rose made a good point, he said a rising tide lifts all ships. I think with the top players being more engaged in the Tour and the goings on, it will help the rest of the membership. I think that's how I feel about it.

I made the point, I think it's still a possibility or there's the potential for anyone to get into this top-10, right? I was making this point yesterday. Like a Will Zalatoris, he was on the Korn Ferry last year, he's had a wonderful rise. He's cool, he's got a really cool look, he's young. There's a possibility, if he keeps playing the way he's playing this year, he could be in that top-10. And to think about that, to think about this kid that's coming up that was on the Korn Ferry like a year ago and could make that top-10, I think that's pretty cool.

So it means that there's the potential there for anyone on Tour to get in there if they play well enough. And also, obviously if you play -- I don't want to say winning takes care of everything, but if you play well on this tour, you have amazing opportunities. I just picked Will out of that because of the run he's on at the minute and the potential that he has going forward.

I think it's a great initiative by the Tour. I think everyone knows it was a little bit designed to try to appease some of the people that had their heads turned by different leagues or SGL, PGL, Tour de Force, whatever you want to call it, but I think it's a very prudent move on the Tour's part.

And then with the SGL, yeah, look, they first contacted me back in 2014, so this is seven years down the line and nothing has really changed. Maybe the source of the money's changed or the people that are in charge have changed, but nothing has happened. No sponsorship deals, no media deals, no players have signed up, no manufacturers have signed up. There's been so many iterations at this point.

I think people -- you go back to what happened last week in Europe with the European Super League in football. People can see it for what it is, which is a money grab, which is fine if that's what you're playing golf for is to make as much money as possible. Totally fine, then go and do that if that's what makes you happy.

But I think the top players in the game, I'm just speaking my own personal beliefs, like I'm playing this game to try to cement my place in history and my legacy and to win major championships and to win the biggest tournaments in the world. That's why I'm playing this game. Golf has been very good to me obviously over the years by playing in Europe starting

off, coming over to the PGA TOUR and playing here. I honestly don't think there's a better structure in place in golf, and I don't think there will be. You have the strategic partnership as well between Europe and the PGA TOUR and that's only going to strengthen the structure of golf going forward as well in terms of scheduling and all sorts of other stuff and working together a little bit more.

Yeah, I mean, I don't think it was a coincidence that the news came out yesterday just as the PGA TOUR's having their annual player meeting and Jay's addressing the membership. Yeah, I think you all know my feelings on it and I'm very much against it. I don't see why anyone would be for it.

Q. Happy belated birthday.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.

Q. Just was wondering sort of the state of your game. Is it true you had four birdies on your own ball for nine this morning, and kind of where are you in terms of making those subtle changes that you've been making?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I made a couple birdies, played okay. They don't really count in pro-ams.

I feel better about my game than I did flying home from Augusta on Friday night, put it that way. I've worked a little bit on it, sort of just tried to understand what I do well. I guess trying to sort of focus on my strengths. I think I've neglected my strengths a little bit the past couple of months, and focusing more on those and focusing on what makes me a good golfer and how I swing the club and how I move the club. It's just sort of understanding my move a little bit more. So that's sort of what I've been trying to do the last couple weeks.

It feels good. It's all familiar feelings. It's all stuff that I've worked on before, but maybe just gotten away from a little bit by trying to focus on other things. I feel like I'm on a pretty good trajectory at the minute.

Q. Hey, Rory. Thanks for your time.

RORY McILROY: Hey, Bob.

Q. I wanted to follow up on how you're doing with your game at this time. Obviously bringing on Pete to take a look and help you, just curious a little bit about that. And also, is this a little bit more of an effort to get back on track than you would have thought, or do you think that you're close?

RORY McILROY: So, yeah, obviously bringing Pete into the equation is a change, but it's a familiar one. It's not as if it's the first time Pete and I have really worked together. I've known Pete for a long, long time. But again, it's just getting a slight different opinion. Maybe

sometimes when you're in something, you know, you're so in it that you sometimes can't take a step back and sort of see it from the outside. Just getting someone's opinion from the outside looking in can be a good thing. That's really what Pete has been.

We did some good work last week in Florida. Again, I keep using this word "understanding," but it really is just me trying to understand my swing better and understand what I do well and focusing on that. I think I've -- again, I've probably -- my body movement and how I turn through the ball is probably one of my biggest attributes and I probably neglected that a little bit by focusing on some other stuff. Just being able to turn my right side through it a little bit more and focusing on that has automatically got the club coming down in a better plane, better path, and then ultimately that leads to better shots.

I'll be talking about this a lot going forward, but just understanding everything a little bit better so that if it does go off, I know why and then I can adjust it on the fly and not have to rely on someone all the time.

Q. What's different about your game compared to Kiawah 2012 when you won the PGA there?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I'd say Kiawah I was very -- I've watched a couple of videos back over the last few weeks of that, just sort of trying to refamiliarize myself with the course a little bit. I chipped and putted so well that week. I mean, that's the one thing I remember. I got it up and down a lot and my chipping and putting was really good.

I was probably maybe a little more one dimensional, but it was a very consistent move. I hit this big swooping draw all the time, but it was consistent. I'm probably a little more versatile now, I probably have a few more shots in the locker, it's just a matter of choosing those shots correctly and hitting them at the right times.

Q. Rory, a couple questions for you, some of it as relates to the impact program. What in your mind creates popularity? What would be one of the singular things? You mentioned Zalatoris, that got me thinking about that.

RORY McILROY: I think you have to play well, that's first and foremost. I think being on TV and playing well and making birdies. I think showing a little bit of your personality, and whether that's through -- you can show your personality through your golf game. You don't have to be putting out 10 social media posts every day, but you can show your personality through your golf game if you want.

But I think it's that back and forth, right? As Arnold Palmer said it, every person you meet, look them dead in the eye, give them the time of day. Like if Arnold were still around, he would be No. 1 in that impact program for the next 50 years because of just how he was with people. So I think that's what makes -- that's what's popular. It's being engaging. I don't really see anything else.

You're a popular guy, Doug. What makes you so popular?

Q. My -- let's move on.

RORY McILROY: Your dry sense of humor?

Q. What do you do if you're a good player and you just don't have much personality? Are you kind of hosed in this?

RORY McILROY: I don't think so. I mean, it's not -- but say what's a good player? I mean, I can't -- I can't see -- yeah, it's not a -- I don't know. I mean, I still think there's certain ways that you can get in. Again, it's not a perfect system, but I think the number -- I mean, it's an objective model, so the numbers are there. You could be the seventh best player in the world, but this is how your numbers relate to someone that's maybe ranked 15th in the world or whatever it is. I don't think it's going to be perfect, but again, I think it was a prudent move on the Tour's part to try to appease some people that were getting their heads turned by other things, I guess.

Q. I'm going to stop there, work on my popularity. Thank you.

Q. Rory, I'm just curious, has the little one changed your practice habits and has Poppy seen and reacted to any shots you've hit?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I probably don't get out there as early as I used to. I used to like to go out at sort of 7:00 and sort of get it done. I sort of like spending those sort of first hour, first hour and a half in the mornings. But not really. Jeez, I probably practiced more since she was born than I used to because my game probably just hasn't been quite there. It's funny, whenever you don't play the way you want to, you think about it more, you practice more, you do everything more, and then when you're playing great, it seems like you don't have to think about it, you don't practice as much, you don't whatever. I've probably practiced more since she was born than before she was.

No, it hasn't really. It's time management. It's just a matter of us being really efficient with your time and I think that's the thing I've learned over the last few months.

Q. Has she seen you hit a shot and react?

RORY McILROY: No, no. She's seen me swing some clubs in the house, but that's about it.

Q. Just back on the SGL thing, Jay at the Players Meeting sort of suggested there would be immediate suspension and a ban on whoever joined, and the European Tour have come out strongly today. There's people who have said that they could be ineligible for the Ryder Cup. These are all threats. Do you think that's a good thing that the Tour has to do that and would you be --

RORY McILROY: I don't think --

Q. Would you be sad to see it come to that?

RORY McILROY: Well, no, because you have to protect your product, right? You have to protect what you have. It's a competitive threat. And Jay took us through it last night. It's in the bylaws that were written by the members. If you -- if you, you know, it's just, it's the same thing. It's like if you were to -- I'm trying to think of any other leagues or anything else. It's just I -- yeah, if I were in charge of the PGA TOUR, I would do the same thing.

Look, you saw what happened last week in the U.K. and in Europe with the European Super League. The top 12 clubs got together and said, "Let's keep more of the money for ourselves," and people didn't like that. It affects competition, it affects the integrity of competition. I just -- I just can't see how it works.

As I said at the start, I think the model that the PGA TOUR and the European Tour have, I don't think there's a better model for the game of golf because it gives everyone an opportunity to go out there and have a great week and change their lives. Even you go through the past winners here at Quail Hollow, like Derek Ernst back in 2013 or '14 won here and that's a life-changing week for him. He wouldn't have that opportunity if something like the SGL got off the ground.

Yeah, look, it's a complicated issue, but I just don't see at this point how it can get going. And the possibility that people, if they do go in that direction, can't play in the biggest tournaments in the game? The game of golf, whether it's a right thing or a wrong thing, is so about history and so about -- we still talk about Gene Sarazen and Walter Hagen and Ben Hogan and all those guys because that's what this game is. It's steeped in history and the legacies that those guys have. If you move further away from that, you're basically losing the essence of what competitive golf is.

Again, that's my stance on it and that's been my stance for a long time. I just can't see how it happens.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Rory, thank you so much for your time today. Best of luck this week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.