

US Open Championship 2016

Tuesday, June 14, 2016

Rory McIlroy

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome again to the 2016 U.S. Open Championship at Oakmont country club. It's my pleasure to introduce this afternoon 2011 U.S. Open Champion Rory McIlroy.

Rory, can you talk a little bit about your preparations coming into this week and arriving at Oakmont for the first time?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. I'm obviously excited to be here. I feel like my preparation leading up to this tournament has been pretty good. The last couple of competitive starts, I feel like I've played pretty well. I got a good look here at Oakmont last Monday and Tuesday and then played another couple of rounds yesterday and today. So I've had four really good looks at the place.

To be honest, the course hasn't changed too much since I played it last Monday. So with a little bit of rain expected, but the weather to be good on the weekend, I can't imagine the conditions being much different to what we faced already these two days and even last week.

I feel as prepared as I can be coming in here, and I feel like I've got a good game plan for the course. It's just a matter of going out there and executing it.

THE MODERATOR: Before I turn it over for questions, maybe a few quick words, first impressions of Oakmont itself.

RORY McILROY: It's a great test of golf. Every shot you hit, you're under pressure to hit a great shot because you can't really miss it. You have to get the ball in play. You really need to put the ball on the fairway. That's a huge premium. And if you get your ball on the fairway, you've just got to make sure that you leave yourself below the hole on the greens. And even in some cases, that may mean missing the green.

For example, on the 1st hole, missing the green sort of long and left is never going to be a bad option. The 10th hole is sort of similar. So, yeah, two keys for, I think, everyone this week is get the ball on the fairway. And when you can do that, keep it below the hole with your approach shot.

Q. Rory, earlier today you said the word discipline,

that you need a lot of discipline on this course. Can you expand on that, give us certain examples? And how much of a challenge is it to be disciplined?

RORY McILROY: We were talking there on the back nine earlier. It's just you have to be so disciplined. Whether it be with the targets -- I think one of the real challenges about this golf course, especially after they've taken so many trees away, is it's a big, wide open space now, and you're hitting into these tight fairways, and there's not really a whole lot of definition out there. So you have to be so zoned in to where you want your targets to be.

It's probably a little easier for us this week than it is for the members because we have grandstands to hit at and TV towers and whatever, whereas members play this course day in and day out, and they don't have anywhere to hit at out there. It's really hard to hit your targets off the tees and into the greens.

We were talking on 16. For me, no matter where that pin is on that green, if you hit it at those two TV towers, try to land it seven or eight paces on the green, you're going to leave yourself a decent leave to whatever pin that is.

So I think you just have to be really disciplined and trust the numbers and trust that -- you could go a whole round here without hitting it at any pin. And just trust that where you're hitting it into the spots is the best leave and giving yourself the best -- I'd much rather have a 30-foot putt up the hill on these greens than even an 8-footer down the hill.

You just have to be so disciplined and know that -- I'm an aggressive player as well. So there's just going to be times where I'm going to have to rein is back a little bit.

Q. Rory, Jason Day said earlier that he's never felt more stressed in his life now that he's world No. 1. Is that how you felt when you were world No. 1, or do you feel more stress now that you're not world No. 1?

RORY McILROY: Honestly, I don't really get stressed too much about anything. It's a great position to be in, world No. 1, but I never thought about trying to keep it. It never really enters -- it's a nice position to be. But at

the same time, keeping that No. 1 position is all about playing well in golf tournaments and winning, you know, winning trophies. So that objective should be no different whether you're No. 1 in the world, No. 3 in the world, No. 20 in the world. You want to try to win golf tournaments every time you tee it up.

So it's a great position to be in. I never felt stressed in trying to hold on to that position. I just knew that, if I played good golf, then more than likely that was what the outcome was going to be.

Q. What is your favorite father-son moment with your dad from Congressional, the Sunday Father's Day?

RORY McILROY: I don't know whether it was just walking down 18 and seeing him on the left side. I caught a glimpse of him just as I was walking up to the 18th green. And then just that night, being able to celebrate with him a little bit. At least I didn't have to worry about a Father's Day present that year, just give him that. That was easy enough. Didn't have to go and get a card or anything.

But, yeah, it was very special to have him there. I think he's been at every U.S. Open since then. I haven't quite been able to deliver that present to him again. Hopefully, I can do it again this week.

Q. Rory, when you glanced and saw him along the rope line, did you have to like refocus? Is it easy to kind of lose your composure and get emotional?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, definitely. I kept telling myself I had -- I was very fortunate, I had a big lead on that back nine, but I kept telling myself, it's not over until the last putt goes in. It's not over. It's not over. But I probably allowed myself a little bit of a lapse in concentration down the last hole, seeing that I needed seven or eight putts to win.

Yeah, as much as I would have liked to have maybe enjoyed the moment a little bit more, I knew that I just needed to be 100 percent concentrated out there. It was very nice to see him there and to celebrate with him that first Major and everything that he's done and he's sacrificed over the years to help me get to that position. It was a cool moment.

Q. Rory, the Majors that you've won have been at courses that have been amenable to par. That's probably not going to be the case this week. Do you sort of relish the challenge of grinding one out?

And to follow up on Steve's question, when you say discipline is the key here, do you view yourself as a more disciplined golfer than you were even a couple of years ago?

RORY McILROY: I'd like to. I'd be very proud if I won on a golf course like this. As you said, the Majors that I have won have been soft and under par and more suits my style of game. But to be able to win on a course like this with the conditions the way they are, it would probably be my, I don't know, maybe my biggest accomplishment in the game. But definitely would make me feel like a more complete player, I guess.

Yeah, I think with experience, you learn what a good score is on that particular day or, if you're not playing so well, how to just grind it out and make pars and try to get it in the clubhouse at a respectable score. And I feel like just over the years I've learned how to do that a little bit better. That just comes with playing tournaments and being experienced and knowing what the conditions are like.

But I definitely feel like I'm a more disciplined and more experienced player than I was a couple years ago. I can see nothing but a benefit of that this week.

Q. Hi, Rory. This is a question from the Japanese TV station. You win your first Major at U.S. Open at such a young age. Can you talk about the difficulty of winning your first Major compared to the other Major tournaments? Also, what does Hideki Matsuyama need to do in order to win his first Major?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think winning your first Major definitely -- I mean, I'd won on the PGA Tour before, and I'd won on the European Tour before, but winning your first Major definitely elevates you to the next level, a different level.

I felt like, even though I was in the top ten in the world even for a couple years before winning that first Major, I felt like that was the first time I belonged in that elite level of professional golf.

It's the pinnacle of our sport, and what we're judged upon. And until you break through and win one, I don't feel you're ever comfortable being mentioned in the top players in the game unless you've won a Major. So I definitely feel like it puts you on that next step towards where you want to be.

And Hideki, he just needs to keep doing what he's doing. He's played great so far this year, had a great win in Phoenix, obviously, and he's a great young player. He's been close to Majors before, and it's just about putting yourself in position each and every time. And sooner or later, things will fall your way, and you'll take advantage of that opportunity. So I think it's only a matter of time.

Q. Rory, was Memorial the first time since you recovered from the ankle injury that you really felt confident enough to give it a rip off the tee?

RORY McILROY: Where was that?

Q. Memorial.

RORY McILROY: No.

Q. Sorry, your last tournament where you had the driving stats.

RORY McILROY: No, I was very comfortable hitting it as hard as I could at the PGA when I came back last August.

Q. And the other thing I wanted to ask as well, this course, is it going to take driver out of your hands on a lot of occasions or not?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I don't think there's going to be many drivers out there this week. Maybe the two par 5s you'll hit driver. 7th hole. I think, if the 2nd hole is downwind, you can hit driver there and try to hit it up on the green. But, yeah, I don't think there's going to be many drivers this week, to be fair. I'll hit 2 iron off the tee much more than I'll hit driver.

Q. Rory, in the past you've talked about, in order to kind of play well, you felt you needed to play pretty golf. I'm just wondering if that's still the case. And if so, how do you sort of manage that against a place like Oakmont and a U.S. Open?

RORY McILROY: You still have to hit good shots. You can't slap it around here and expect to -- you have to hit good shots. You have to flight your iron shots. You have to still hit high quality golf shots to give yourself a chance. So I don't think that changes at all. But it's just the fact you maybe just need to be aggressive or you need to hit good shots to your certain targets that maybe aren't straight at the pin. You just have to be so disciplined and just plot your way around the golf course.

Mentally, that's what's going to win it for you this week is how people can keep their calm and keep their composure. And when you feel like you've hit a good shot and it runs off the green but you get it up and down and you keep the momentum going, I think that, you know, if you can just string a lot of pars together and maybe pick up a birdie or two here and there and try to limit the mistakes, but I still feel like you need to hit very, very good golf shots to be able to do that. So I don't think it changes it that much.

Q. Rory, two parts. Is there such a thing as a gettable stretch here or gettable holes? And, two, would you go with the irons more because it's firm and fast or to stay away from the bunkers?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, just hit whatever club you can

that you know is going to get it on the fairway. That's really what it is. I'd much rather be on the fairway. There's a few holes -- I think the great thing about this golf course is it does give you options. You'll see some guys hit iron off a tee, where some other guys will hit driver. Some other guys will hit a fairway wood. It really just depends how comfortable you are on that tee box individually because there's so many different ways to play this golf course.

But, yeah, you just keep it out of the rough, keep it out of the bunkers. There's some holes where fairway bunkers aren't too bad, but then there's others where you can't really advance it too far.

It's funny. Again, I think this course is so visual. Like off the 1st tee today, it was slightly back into the wind. It was the first day I've played it like that. I actually felt like, when I got up on the tee, I had more room with driver than with a 2 iron. Even though when you get down there, you're hitting into the widest part of the fairway with a 2 iron, for some reason visually the driver just felt a little bit more comfortable for me.

There's so many different ways to play this course, and I feel like I've got a good game plan to know when to be aggressive, when not to. Hopefully, I can just stick to that, and it works out.

Q. Rory, you played a few U.S. Opens now. If you had to pick one hole, looking back at a U.S. Open, which has been the most challenging, which one would you pick, and why would you go there?

RORY McILROY: One hole. Probably the 5th hole at Olympic Club. Sort of dogleg left to right, fairway is right to left. I mean, it's just so hard to hit that fairway. And then if you don't hit the fairway, you basically can't hit the green. I found pretty much every hole at Olympic Club hard that week, but that one was especially hard.

Q. And overall here, how are you feeling generally going into this?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I feel good. You're coming off a decent stretch of golf. Got my first win of the season in Ireland, which was nice. I played pretty well at the Memorial. I putted well, which was a big boost for me. My recent play has been pretty good. So I feel confident coming in here. I feel like I know what I need to do to give myself a chance to win. I feel like I've prepared well, and that's all you can really ask for.

Q. I know that the win in Ireland was very special to you and your fans there. Can you just paint a picture for us, just how special was it to win that particular tournament for you?

RORY McILROY: I mean, it's very special, especially

for it being the first win of the year. It felt like I've been knocking on the door a little bit and haven't been able to close it out. And to close it out in the fashion that I did, that's probably what made me the most proud. I mean, it was great to win at home and win in front of all my friends and family and everyone that was there to support me, but to hit those shots down the stretch like I needed to, it gave me a lot of confidence going forward.

Hopefully, experience like that and memories from that, I'm able to draw on if I ever find myself in a similar position in a tournament.

Q. Rory, you said earlier on about how, if you were to win this week, you would feel like a more complete player in these conditions. When you look back at the previous winners on this golf course as well, it has proven to be a place where the cream has always risen to the top; Hogan, Nicklaus, et cetera. Is that in your thinking as well, if you were to win at a venue like this, it would make your reputation in history?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think so. You look at the list of winners here at Oakmont, and even Cabrera last time in '07, at that point in his career, when he got on, he was one of the best in the world.

I would expect that the more established players in the game and the players that are up near the top of the world rankings to do well this week because it is a golf course that can separate the players that are playing well from the players that are just slightly off their games.

I think that's one of the things this week you'll see. If guys are playing well and they're confident, you'll maybe get it around in under par. But the guys that are struggling, it will really magnify that weakness, and you'll see a lot of high scores as well. So I feel like it will stretch the field out a bit between the guys that are playing very well and are very comfortable and the guys that are struggling a little bit.

Q. Rory, last year at Chambers, I think I remember you saying from tee to green that you hit it better over those four days than you ever hit it in a Major. Putts kind of go in for the first three days. But the last day, what did it feel like when you kind of went on a run there, and all of a sudden, it looks like you're in the mix. Place is going nuts. 63 is in it play. What was that like for you?

RORY McILROY: That was really cool. I didn't go out that day with the expectation of contending or being close to the lead. I wanted to go out and at least finish the tournament off on a good, positive note and play well and play a good round of golf. But all of a sudden,

I find myself two back, standing on the 14th tee.

So it was nice to feel that again, and it looked for a while that I had a chance. I had a good chance for birdie on 14 that I missed. And then I killed a little bit of momentum, and I bogeyed 15. But it was nice to at least give it a run. I gave it a run, and what really cost me that week was I lost my confidence on the greens. I lost confidence in the greens, which led to losing confidence in my stroke. And, yeah, I was very tentative on the greens and didn't hole anything.

So that won't be the case this week. The golf course is in fantastic shape, and I don't think anyone can have any -- that they can't be annoyed with the shape of this golf course. It's absolutely perfect. So if you hit a good putt, more times than not, it should go in.

Q. Rory, what club do you hit on a 300-yard par 3? And what do you think about the concept of a 300-yard par 3?

RORY McILROY: Over the four times I've played it from last Monday, Tuesday to the last couple of days, I've hit anything from a 3 wood to a 4 iron. It was a little soft on last Tuesday after a thunderstorm. So I hit a 3 wood and carried it on to the middle of the green. And then yesterday, it was downwind. I hit a 4 iron to the back sort of portion of the green as well. So it really depends.

I hit 2 iron today. I hit 4 iron and 2 iron. 4 iron probably would have got there. I just missed it a little left. 2 iron ended up in the back right corner of the green. I think one of the things about this golf course is what the yardage says on the tee, it doesn't play anything like that.

The 9th hole, for example, is straight uphill, and it's 477 yards, but I'm hitting a 2 iron off the tee, and today I hit a 7 iron into the green. So it doesn't quite play what the scorecard suggests. It plays quite a bit shorter than that, whether it be with the elevation changes or the run on the ball or the way the greens are releasing.

So apart from the rain that we're going to get tomorrow and Thursday, I feel like it should still run out a little bit, and the course won't play the 7,200 yards or whatever it is. It will play quite a bit shorter than that.

Q. Rory, just switching gears for a minute here. Looking back to Rio in a couple months, what's the chatter out amongst the guys? What's the talk like heading into it?

RORY McILROY: I mean, it's still a good bit away. We've got three Majors to play coming up. There's a lot of golf to play before. I think everyone's really concentrating on the Majors coming up. That's our big

focus.

Obviously, looking beyond that, Rio is part of our schedule now and something that we should get excited about. You know, golf in the Olympics, it's great for the game. I feel like it should hopefully grow the game in different parts of the world that haven't been exposed to golf.

The chatter has been somewhat quiet so far. I mean, mostly everyone's just been talking about Zika and everything else. But I think once we get these Majors out of the way, there's a lot of trophies and things to play for before that. But once we get that out of the way, our attention will turn to that, and I think everyone will start to get a bit more excited about it.

Q. Rory, if the prevailing emotion going into, say, the Masters is excitement, what is the prevailing emotion for players going into this championship and why?

RORY McILROY: Trepidation, I guess. Yeah, excitement is a good way to describe Augusta, but it really depends the venue that you play a U.S. Open at as well. But, yeah, this week it's definitely -- it's not excitement. I mean, it's definitely not that. I don't know.

Yeah, trepidation. You know you're going to be put under a lot of pressure on basically every single golf shot you hit out there. So you have to be prepared for that. You have to be prepared for how mentally demanding it's going to be, how much concentration you're going to need out there.

I think that for the guys who have to go play -- well, don't have to, but for the guys that are going to play Congressional next week, they're going to need a couple days off in between this and going there. It's going to be quite the mental grind. You expect that coming into a U.S. Open. It's the toughest test in golf, and you know that, and you have to do everything you can to prepare for that and try to do your best.

THE MODERATOR: Rory, thank you so much for joining us this afternoon. We appreciate it. We wish you well throughout the week here at Oakmont.