

2015 US Open Championship

Tuesday, June 16
Press Conference

Rory McIlroy

An Interview With:
RORY McILROY

BETH MAJOR: Good morning. Welcome to the 2015 U.S. Open Championship here at Chambers Bay in the Pacific Northwest. We are very pleased to have with us this morning the world's top ranked player, Rory McIlroy. Rory is the 2011 U.S. Open Champion. He's at Chambers Bay for the first time this week. Rory, can you give us some impressions, your first impressions about Chambers Bay.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, as I think with a lot of people, I really didn't know what to expect when I got here. I got to the course on Saturday morning, and I mean it's a pure links golf course. Every part of this golf course is fescue. You get fescue in the United States just on sort of the surrounding areas of the golf course, but here fairways, greens, aprons, everything, everything is fescue. It's really like playing an Open Championship in the United States. That's what it's going to be like this week, apart from the fact that it's about 20 degrees warmer. I really like the golf course. I think it sets up well for my game. You've got to be aggressive off the tee. You've got to hit driver. I think it's a course where you're going to see a lot of guys hit fairways and hit greens. But when you hit greens, you can still be 50, 60 feet away from the pin. So if you can drive the ball well and your pace putting and long putting is sharp, I think they're going to be two really key things this week to be successful.

Q. LeBron James just talked about being the No. 1 player in the world, basketball player, and I don't know if that's super confidence or arrogance or perhaps a psychological ploy as he goes for the NBA championship. As the No. 1 player in the world, can you relate to that somehow? And as the No. 1 player, can that be a psychological ploy for you?

RORY McILROY: I mean, I think when LeBron talks about that, that's not confidence, that's a fact, I guess, when you look at how he's carried his team in these Finals. So if you look at the numbers, you can really see he is the best player in the world. And I guess for me I feel the same way, when I look at the World



Rankings and I see my name up at the top. If you look back at the last four or five years, I guess I've won more majors than anyone else in that time period. So do I feel like the best player in the world? Yes. And obviously I want to go out every week and try to back that up and show that.

Q. Was there anything specifically you had to work on mechanically from a few weeks ago at the end of that five-week stretch or is that simply your body had had enough golf?

RORY McILROY: I think it was my mind had enough golf rather than my body. No, I mean, honestly I didn't -- I sort of had to get back, especially after playing at County Down, just to get back to playing my normal game, hitting shots the way I like to see them, swinging the way I want to swing. Not really trying to play these little half shots or trying to play the ball along the ground. Even this week I was expecting to have to play the ball along the ground more. But looking at all these elevated greens and looking at the way this course sets up, you really -- and especially with the way that the weather conditions are going to be, you're not going to have to do that too much because the greens are so firm. Anyone that can get elevation on their iron shots and get a little spin on the ball that's the way you're going to get it close to these pins. All I tried to do last week was just get back to playing my normal game, and I think that's the way I'm going to do well this week.

Q. What are your thoughts on the uniqueness of having two holes that can go between a par-4 and par-5 during the course of the week and how that might change your mindset going into a round?

RORY McILROY: It definitely can really change how the round starts or finishes, obviously. If the first hole plays as a par-5, it's actually quite a gentle start to the round. But then if it plays as a par-4, it's quite a tough start. And again, with 18, it might be reachable in 2. It might be with the way the conditions are and the fairways are getting so firm. I think most likely they're going to move the tee up on 16 one or two days. So if you get 16 up and you get 18 as a par 5, then there's a couple of chances coming in that you could be able to make birdie. But then at the same time, if they play both those tee boxes back or play 18 as a par-4 and play 16 back then, it's a really tough finish with 17 sandwiched in between them. So it's interesting. I like that they're going to flip it each day so that it remains a par 9 for

the two holes. It's not like we're going to have different pars for different rounds of golf. It's not going to be like a par 71 or a par 69 one day, it's going to be a par-70 every day, which is fair.

Q. What was it like yesterday on the range looking across at a 15-year-old kid. Can you remember that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean -- I got to play my first Major Championship at 18 years of age at Carnoustie. It's a great experience being able to play these sort of golf courses and hit balls beside some of the best players in the world. And if I had any advice for Cole, it would just be to take it all in and enjoy it and try to get as much out of it as he can. With the way he was hitting it on the range yesterday, I don't think he's got much to worry about.

Q. 15 or 12?

RORY McILROY: Looks 12, but he's probably the height of a 16-, 17-year-old. I think he might be taller than me.

Q. Going back to 2002, the Europeans have won six of the last seven Ryder Cups. And after a long drought now, Europeans have won four of the last five U.S. Opens. Is there a connection there or is that just coincidental?

RORY McILROY: Honestly I think there's a direct correlation between Europeans winning Ryder Cups and Europeans winning major championships. I think it's given Europeans the confidence to come over here and compete, three of the four major championships are in this country. And most likely you're competing against players that you compete against at the Ryder Cup. So I think having that success in the Ryder Cup has translated into major victories for European players.

Q. You addressed a little bit with the approach shots coming into the greens, but Jason Day was in here yesterday talking about how he really feels like a long ball hitter, a big hitter is going to win this thing here, because there's an advantage if you can get over the bunkers off the tee. Do you agree that or can you address that a little bit?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I completely agree with that. It's a very long golf course. You're wanting to hit shorter irons into these greens. Some of these greens, where I'm hitting maybe a 6- or a 7-iron in, a lot of the field are going to be going in with 5- and 4-irons. It's tough enough going in there with the clubs I'm going in with. Yeah, I mean, I completely agree with Jason. Guys that hit the ball a long way -- I think if you can carry the ball like 295, 300 in the air this week, you're going to have a big advantage.

Q. You grew up around a lot of links courses, but at this point in your life do you feel like you really have a links extra special talent or experience with that or are you more of a regular American type player?

RORY McILROY: I mean, I'd like to say that I can adapt my game to all different types of courses and conditions. I feel like I've won enough in different conditions that my game is adaptable to wherever you go. When I said at the start that I feel like this course suits my game, I was talking about having that length off the tee, as I just spoke about, and having the height on the iron shots that I can get. But you have to adapt your game to suit the golf course. You shouldn't hope that the golf course suits your game. I feel like I've got a good game plan this week to get into contention and have some success.

Q. Does this course really play like a links course?

RORY McILROY: Oh, yeah, yeah, it plays more like a links course than some links courses. I mean, it's so fast, so firm. It reminds me of 2013 at Muirfield at the Open. Was it '06 at Hoylake when Tiger won there? It reminds me like that. The course is getting burned out, it's getting dry. It's a pure links test this week.

Q. Even though the forecast largely calls for calm and warm, how important is it to see the course with a little wind, a little overcast today? And what do you gain or what are some of the things you might learn today about it?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I teed off pretty early on Saturday and Sunday. So I saw the course when it wasn't playing quite at its firmest or fieriest, but I've been able to play the course in a couple of different wind conditions which I think is important. I think the north wind is going to come back for a couple of days over the tournament. So to be able to play the course in that wind was -- it was good for preparation. And then today I'm actually going to go out a little later on just to try to get the course as fiery as it possibly can, just to see what it's like. I'm hoping I'm off pretty late at the weekend. I want to see how the course plays at that point.

Q. Speaking of No. 1 earlier, your accomplishments already approach Tiger's at the same age and you've experienced some ups and downs off the course, as well, and seen how it affects your game. As you look at it, what do you think it takes, what would be the key to maintain No. 1 as long as Tiger did? Can you approach that?

RORY McILROY: I think the biggest thing is motivation. It's setting your goals all the time and trying to achieve those. In a golf perspective, it's just trying to get better, trying to achieve more things and set goals for yourself and try and accomplish that. And then off the course,

you have to be stable, be happy, keep it simple. I think that's the big thing. If you want your longevity in golf, you look at the likes of -- you're going back to the day of Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, they all had very stable personal lives and kept life fairly simple. And I think that's a big key to having a long and successful career.

Q. Talking about going off late on the weekend, when you have a 54-hole lead and you're not teeing off until late in the afternoon, how difficult is it to control your excitement and your nerves?

RORY McILROY: It is. I've been lucky enough to experience it a few times. You just have to go about your day like you normally would. I'd get up at -- sunrise is about 4:30 at this time of the year, so it's hard to sleep in past 7:00. You have breakfast, you go to the gym. You relax. You might take a nap. You try and get your mind off it any way you can. And then really try and turn your attention towards the round and what you're trying to do, I guess, once you get to the golf course or closer to the round. But it's something I definitely struggled with at the start, 54-hole lead, trying to -- for me the best way that I approach it is really just trying to turn my attention to something else, whether there's some sort of sports thing on or you watch a movie or go to the gym or something like that, just so I can take my mind off it for a couple of hours.

Q. The first time or two did you find that you were even eating faster, doing everything faster because of the nerves?

RORY McILROY: Probably eating less. The first time I felt like I had a lot of time on my hands at Augusta whenever I had a 54-hole lead. And then I approached it slightly differently at Congressional. Got up, had breakfast, went back to the room, watched a movie, sort of just got my mind away from it in that way, so that definitely helped.

Q. What did you do since you left Royal County Down and how important was that to get a break?

RORY McILROY: I had commitments with Nike on the Monday after. I did some biomechanical testing on the Tuesday. I didn't do much -- my trainer, Steve, was over on Wednesday, so we did a couple of sessions. And then I went to London on Thursday for a few days. I was a tourist for three days, did a lot of walking, which I didn't know was a great preparation for this place. I think I walked about ten miles a day, so that helped. That got me in the right frame of mind. And then I flew to Florida on the Sunday, practiced there for four days at home. Whistling Straits last Friday and then got here Friday night. So that's basically the last sort of two weeks.

Q. You talked about being the No. 1 golfer and seeing yourself as the No. 1 golfer. When a course

is set up like this, do you worry that it can level the field out?

RORY McILROY: No, I think a place like this can separate the field a lot. This is the sort of golf course that if you're just slightly off, it'll magnify that. But it'll really reward people that are hitting good shots and are confident and their short games are sharp. I definitely think this is the sort of golf course that you could see the guys that are really playing well and are confident with the setup and how they approach it, they could really separate themselves from the rest of the field.

Q. How do you compare and contrast coming into this major, as opposed to the Masters, when there's so much noise around you, so much attention?

RORY McILROY: It's much quieter.

Q. What are the benefits of that?

RORY McILROY: Just being able to go about my business. And obviously not fly under the radar, but there's not as much attention or much hype. I can get here and just do my thing without much worry. And I guess, as well, there's not as much on my mind about what I can achieve. It's hugely important, a chance to win a second U.S. Open and the fifth major, and that's all important, but there was just so much hype and so much attention around Augusta, this one feels very different.

Q. Ryan Moore also compared this place to Muirfield in 2013. Given your performance at Muirfield that year, are there any concerns or are you just in an entirely different place now than you were then?

RORY McILROY: I'm a completely different player. I'm in a completely different place. No, I had no control of my golf game at that point in time, and I feel like I'm pretty much in full control of it at the minute. I can tell you, no, a repeat of that is definitely not going to happen.

Q. We are very happy at your success. Sorry for this request. I want to ask about Hideki Matsuyama, he's getting close to winning a tournament. What do you think about what he needs to have experience at a major tournament?

RORY McILROY: I think that's the thing that Hideki needs is just more experience and positions where he has chances to win tournaments, and especially majors. I was very impressed, I played with Hideki the first two rounds at Muirfield in '13 and was really impressed with how he played. And obviously, since then, he's won on the PGA Tour at the Memorial last year. He's a very, very solid player. And he's still very young. So just more experience and getting himself in positions to contend in the bigger tournaments. I think

that's all he needs to do.

Q. As you say, it's a pure links challenge. How much of an advantage is it to you to having in the locker the fact that you come in here as The Open champion?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, it is. In a way it's not too dissimilar to Hoylake. And I felt like at Hoylake I didn't need to change my game that much or adapt my game that much to how I played it in relatively benign conditions last year in Liverpool. We had a lot of rain overnight which made the course a little bit softer, which isn't really what this is going to be like this week. But coming in as The Open champion, I know that I've had success on links golf before, and I've grown up playing it, so there's no reason why I shouldn't be able to use that to my advantage in some way.

Q. You mentioned kind of piggybacking off the difficulty you had in 2013, obviously different than here. But do you like it this firm and this fast? And secondly, what's the challenge for you coming in off a break, one that you didn't play so great at Royal County Down and having to sort of get that momentum back that you had prior to that?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I do like it this firm and fast because, as I said, I feel with some of the elevated approach shots you play around here, you need to be able to hit the ball up in the air with quite a lot of spin, which fortunately I'm able to do. Even though the conditions are going to be similar to Muirfield, it's not going to be -- you're not going to have to play the same style of golf. There's a lot of greens here that it's not like you can run the ball in. You might have to go to one side of the green or the other to sort of bank them in. There are a lot of greens that are like bowls. But you're still going to have to play shots up in the air and try and get a little bit of spin on them to control it somewhat on these greens. And honestly, I don't feel like I need to pick up any sort of momentum after the last couple of weeks -- the last couple of weeks I've had off. I played well for, I guess, my last three tournaments in the States, and then I went over to Europe and obviously wasn't quite as good as it was for the weeks previous to that. But as I said, my game feels in really good shape and I'm hitting the ball well and I'm confident, so I think it really is just about getting the right game plan and being -- as I said at the start, if you're sharp with the driver and sharp with the putter from basically 30 yards and in, that's going to be a big key this week.

Q. Your first major title was the 2011 U.S. Open. What did that win mean to you?

RORY McILROY: It meant an awful lot. It meant an awful lot after what happened at Augusta a couple of months previous to that. But really just to be able to

call yourself a major champion, to get that major tally up and running pretty early, I think is very important. If you look at the history of golf and some of the most successful careers, people have been able to get their major tally up and running pretty early. So I was happy to do that and get one under my belt at such an early stage and it gave me a lot of confidence to go on and win more, being able to draw on those memories and know that you're a major champion, know that you've done it once. If you were ever to get in that position again, you know that you've been able to do it before and you've got the experience to do it again.

Q. A couple of things, first of all, the two missed cuts. I wonder whether you can put those down to sort of exceptional circumstances and be happy at the fact that perhaps you have major highs and lows, rather than being a flat liner. Can you tell us what the highlight was during your tourist stint in London?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I didn't obviously want to miss those two cuts in Europe. But I think that's just the way I'm going to be. I'd rather in a six-tournament period have three wins and three missed cuts than six top-10s. It's just volatility in golf is actually a good thing. If your good weeks are really good, it far outweighs the bad weeks. Golf is so top heavy like that. The best thing about London? London Eye, went down to London Eye for the first time. I was a tourist for a couple of days.

BETH MAJOR: Thanks so much for joining us today. We wish you well throughout the week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.