

RBC Canadian Open

Press Conference

Sunday, June 9, 2019

Rory McIlroy



THE MODERATOR: Go ahead and get started here with our champion of the 2019 RBC Canadian Open, Rory McIlroy.

Rory earns his 16th PGA TOUR victory today. Moves to No. 2 in the FedExCup. Rory, if we could just get an opening comment on the victory.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, delighted to be sitting up here. You know, it started off as a good week. I really was very glad to add this tournament to the schedule, especially after missing the cut last week at Memorial.

I did a little bit of extra practice over the weekend; felt like my game was a little better coming in here; then awesome really good signs over the first couple days.

Played nicely, got myself into position or thereabouts. I think I was five off the lead going into the weekend.

Then yesterday I just felt really comfortable with my game and I played aggressively. Was sort of swinging very freely. Shot that 64 to get myself tied for the lead today. I think what I'm proudest of is still playing with that freedom today going out being tied for the lead. Just putting my foot down and really making this tournament mine.

I think by the time I got to the 14th tee I wasn't really thinking of winning the tournament. I was thinking of trying to shoot 59. I had to reassess my goals a little bit in the middle of that back nine. This is what I feel I can do. I've been able to do it before. It was nice to get back to that feeling. It's been a while since I won by a few shots. I think it's going back to Quail Hollow in Charlotte in 2015. Won by seven there.

I've been able to do this before. I feel if I just get myself in the right place I'll hopefully be able to do it more often and produce the sort of golf I produced over the weekend.

THE MODERATOR: For all the talk entering the week about this being a preparation for the U.S. Open next week, you were one that said, This is not just about preparation for next week; I want to add my name to this historic trophy. You became the sixth to do that, U.S. Open and the Open Championship. As a fan of golf's history, what does that mean to you?

RORY McILROY: I mean, it means -- I mean, even just looking at some of the names on this side of the trophy. Sam Snead, Bobby Locke, Arnold Palmer, Tiger Woods, Nick Price. I mean, some of the greats of the game have won this trophy, for me to put my name on it is something I'm very proud of.

Yeah, I think if you're playing in a tournament you're coming here trying to win, coming here to play as well as you can. Sometimes guys play better than you and you don't win. I think the objective any time you come to play a tournament should be to try and lift the trophy at the end of the week. That was my objective all week.

I feel like I play my best when I play in stretches of golf. This is the second week in a row and I'm playing next week, which will be a third in a row.

Part of the reason for playing here was I wanted my game to be in good shape for Pebble Beach, but doesn't mean this tournament doesn't mean anything. I mean, it's a big event and I think it will only get bigger again because the date on the calendar.

I think a lot of guys will start to play. Four of the top 6 in the world here this week. The field here is going to go from strength to strength. That's exciting for the people of Canada for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. About this triple crown, Rory, among all your victories in your career, where do you rank this one?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, I guess someone mentioned to me on the 18th green there that I'm only the sixth player to win the Open, the U.S. Open, and the Canadian Open. That's a pretty nice little club to be a part of, I guess.

So, yeah, it's up there. I mean, I've been playing well basically all year. Been giving myself loads of chances to win. The criticism might have been that I haven't won enough, but hopefully today with not just winning, but the way I won, that gives me a lot of confidence going forward for sure.

Q. This is your greatest round all year, too.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, yeah, 61. Yeah, had a chance to shoot 59. Sorry for being disappointed up here, but I had a chance. Yeah, I mean, I played 17 wonderful holes; 10-under through 17 holes. Shot 4-under on the back nine with two bogeys, so that was pretty good too, I guess.

But, yeah, I'm playing well. I find a little groove and want to just keep it going.

Q. Rory, will you be back next year to defend your title or content to have a perfect record in Canada?

RORY McILROY: No, I'm ready to put that record up for grabs and try to go two-for-two. Yeah, I'll definitely be back. As I said, obviously looking ahead and where the date is in the schedule, I really want to play stretches of golf around the majors. I think I'm already looking forward to coming back and defending the title.

Q. It seems a huge gap to miss a cut one week and then to win by seven the next week. In your mind, does it feel like a huge gap?

RORY McILROY: No, no. That's golf. I think that's the thing that people don't quite understand with golf at this level. The margins are just so fine and so small. It could have been -- even like last week at Memorial. If I made a couple extra birdies on the back nine on Friday I would've made the cut and could have produced a weekend like this and won the tournament. You never know. The margins are so small.

So, yeah, that's why I always say I never try to get too carried away when I'm playing good and I never get too carried away when I'm playing badly. Both of those instances are not far away from each other. I think something like this is always around the corner and something like what happened last week, a missed cut, is always around the corner, too.

I feel like my consistency this year has been great. I've played in 12 or 13 events. This is obviously a win, but it's another top 10, and basically been in the top 10 most weeks that I've played. I've been consistent. Obviously last week to this week is a bit of an outlier. I think in golf it's just never that far away.

Q. Looked like on the first tee a fan was trying to give a Loonie. Looked like you pulled a Loonie out of your pocket already.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, been marking my ball with a loonie all week.

Q. Do you know the backstory about the Lucky Loonie?

RORY McILROY: So actually I played an RBC day on Tuesday over in Mississauga. One of the guys gave me a Lucky Loonie to mark my ball with this week.

Said, sure. Why not? Every little bit helps, right?

Yeah, I've been marking with my ball with that all week. It might have to cross the border and come with me to the States next week.

Q. You said at THE PLAYERS that the win was an affirmation of everything you had been working on. Heading into the third major of the season was it another time for an affirmation and is this one?

RORY McILROY: I think so. I think this time it's more of an affirmation of what I can do when I play with complete freedom like did I today or over the weekend.

Even like the PLAYERS Championship I sort of had to grind it out. Conditions were tough. You're sort of just hanging on, playing into the right spots, and I felt like this week it was just -- I was free. I trusted myself 100% and I hit the shots when I needed to.

Honestly, this victory probably gives me more confidence than the one at THE PLAYERS because I played the way I did and I was so free out there, especially given the position I was in.

Q. How do you keep that freedom going into the next week and do you wish the U.S. Open started tomorrow?

RORY McILROY: No, because I'll be hung over probably. (Laughter.) Need a couple days to recover.

No, I mean, like I think when you get to the U.S. Open setup it can make you play careful, a little tentative and try to guide it down the fairways.

But if I've learned anything this week it's my game is good enough and swing is good enough that I can play with freedom. Yeah, look I'm not going to go and hit driver on every hole, but when I pull a club out of the bag I'll make a really good, committed swing and know for most part it should work out for me.

Q. Rory, your first time here in Canada. I saw on your social media you went to the Raptors game. Bunch of passionate fans and here a bunch of fans rooting for you out on the course. What can you say about the passion of Canadian sports fans in golf and basketball?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I've been really impressed. Went to the game nearly a week ago now. Just the atmosphere in there. Obviously the first NBA finals for the Raptors and that's a huge deal, but the noise. I had never heard noise like that in a basketball arena before or at a basketball game. Obviously wasn't the result that everyone was hoping for, but it was still a great experience.

Then here this week, I said yesterday I've never played at Phoenix so I don't know what that's like, but -- that was nice. (Laughter.)

That atmosphere on the 13th tee this week, recreating The Rink, was really cool. Everyone is in great spirits. Looks like your basketball team is hopefully about to win an NBA championship, which is awesome. That only added to the atmosphere out here on the golf course this week.

Q. Can you just describe how the course this week will help you prepare for Pebble Beach, particularly in the sloped greens?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I think the poa greens for sure, that's definitely -- to putt on those two weeks in a row is going to be quite good. Then I think just variety of the tee shots around here. Obviously hitting driver on some holes, but then there is a lot of 3-woods and 5-woods and irons off tees.

Pebble next week I'm pretty sure will have quite a bit of that. To be comfortable hitting different clubs off different tees, hitting different shapes, you need to do that. And the rough was pretty penal, right? It was pretty thick. I'm guessing the rough next week may be a little longer, but you needed to hit fairways this week to give yourself a chance to shoot a low score.

I did that, and I think that's the reason that I played so well, was the fact that I put myself in the fairway for the most part. I'm going to need to do the same again next week.

Q. Just a quick follow-up on how proud you are of Graeme McDowell for qualifying for the Open Championship at Portrush.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I was looking at the leaderboard all day. Mostly for that rather than anything else, making sure that G-Mac was -- just would've been such a shame if the Open comes to Portrush and the hometown boy couldn't play.

Proud, excited for him. I know it's something he's wanted for a while. Obviously it'll be great to have him in the field at Portrush. Very happy about that.

Q. I realize the course setup has changed a bit, but there is a local legend in Portrush. You shot 61.

RORY McILROY: Yeah.

Q. Is there any comparison to the way you played today and all the -- I know it's many years ago, but...

RORY McILROY: 14 years ago, so...

Q. Best golf you've played in your life?

RORY McILROY: I think when you play you get into stretches like this you do get into some sort of flow, that flow state or in the zone or whatever anyone wants to call it.

I definitely got into that a little bit today at the start of the back nine. It was the same that day at Portrush all those years ago. First time I had ever experienced it. I was a 16 year old and I was whatever I was, 6-under par through 13 and birdied the last 5 to shoot 11.

It's just one of those -- it's almost like you're out of your own body and looking at yourself play. For some times today that's how it felt.

So if I could bottle that feeling and take it with me week to week I would. Sort of comes and goes. Just a matter of being confident with your game and everything sort of falling into place. Fell into place today for me, and hopefully I can keep that going for the rest of the year.

Q. Circling back on the Raptors, I wanted to make sure that you don't have a Kyle Lowry autographed jersey like you got on the 18th green there. Didn't have one from before?

RORY McILROY: Not from before. I know Kyle is a big golf fan. I went into the locker room after the game last week and had a chat with him. I didn't realize he followed us around in L.A. at the start of the year. I played with Tiger and JT the first two rounds and he followed us around. He said the summertime when he's got some time off he basically plays 36 holes a day. I was pretty impressed with that.

Yeah, got his number. We messaged back and forth a little bit this week. It was awesome to see them do what they did over on the west coast. If I didn't have a big tournament next week I would be sticking around for that Game 5. I'm sure it'll be awesome. Yeah, good to meet him and chat with him and learn that he's a big golfer as well.

Q. Just the vibe out there today, you and Harry rocking around, the vibe you got from the fans you mentioned to yesterday, just overall this week.

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean, similar. I think I've been very fortunate to get a great reception all week. I think one of the cool things as well, like I was saying about that 13th hole this week and The Rink, is people are rowdy and shouting and chanting, but like they know as soon as you go in to hit your golf shot it's deadly silent. They get it.

Some events on the PGA TOUR they don't get it. I think that was the thing I really appreciated this week. They were having fun, being loud, but they still

respected the traditions and the values of the game.

It was a perfect blend of rowdy but still golf at the end of the day. It was awesome.

Q. Do golfers talk to each other about tour events? If so, what would you tell them about this one now that you've played in it?

RORY McILROY: I'll tell them it's wonderful. Yeah, I think my thing is, you know, as I said, you're going to get such a better field going forward because of the date. The date for the last few years just killed this event. Crossing five time zones after a major championship, it's just tough to get guys to come and play. I know I like to take the week off after a major championship.

So, look, this date change is going to work wonders for this event. I would tell anyone that I met that I had a wonderful time and great experience here. Obviously next year it's not in Hamilton. It's at St. George's. From what I've heard, that's a wonderful golf course as well.

Maybe spend some time in the city, so I'm excited for that.

Q. When was the last time you had a chance to shoot 59 and was it kind of fun, because you kind of had the tournament wrapped up on 14. It's like new fun nerves or...

RORY McILROY: It was a little bit. I was a little nervous over the 6-iron going into the last. Last time I had a putt for 59 was at the Bear's Club where I play in Florida about -- I think it was the week before the Masters in maybe 2016. I left it short.

It came into my head when I was hitting the bunker shot, I'm definitely not leaving this short. So I wish it had been a putt for 59 instead of a bunker shot, but I gave it a go, I was aggressive, and at least got it to the hole.

Q. There was a handful of times last year and early into this year where you were in the final group but didn't leave with the trophy. I know any golf tournament is hard to win, but really no signs at all of that today. How did today sort of compare with those previous times when you didn't go home the winner?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, so, again, I think just -- I just played with a little more freedom and that was it. I played with a little more freedom; I was a little more aggressive. That was really it. That confidence just came from my range sessions last weekend going into this week and the shots I was hitting on the course. My confidence just sort of grew all week. That freedom

just to swing away and be committed to what I was doing, that's really the difference between being in a final group and walking away with the trophy or not.

THE MODERATOR: We appreciate the time. Congratulations on the victory and best of luck next week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you.