



An Interview With:

RORY McILROY

MICHAEL GIBBONS: Rory, welcome back.
RORY McILROY: Thank you.

Q. How are you?

RORY McILROY: I'm very well.

MICHAEL GIBBONS: Good. Thoughts on the week. Omega Dubai Desert Classic, obviously a second home for you around here, isn't it?

RORY McILROY: It is, yeah. I've spent a good bit of time here in the past, and after playing Abu Dhabi, spent the week here practicing, working on my game and looking forward to this week.

This is my seventh Dubai Desert Classic, which is I've played every year since '07, I think. '06?

MICHAEL GIBBONS: '06.

RORY McILROY: There you go. But yeah, looking forward to it. I've obviously got good memories from here, winning in '09 and being in contention the last couple of years, and feel like it's a golf course that I play well on, and hopefully I can play well on it again.

MICHAEL GIBBONS: Any questions?

Q. Rory, are you surprised that after the way you ended the season you were not feeling well, and the kind of schedule you kept, that you came out so hot on the blocks at Abu Dhabi. And how does this golf course make you feel when you come into a tournament like this?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. No, I mean I wasn't surprised. I mean I'd worked -- I mean I took a bit of time off after the Dubai World Championship just to sort of recharge the batteries and get

back to 100 percent health. And I worked really hard on my game when I came out here at the start of the year. And I didn't feel like I played all that well in Abu Dhabi. I scored very well and was able to get myself into contention, which was great. I felt like I needed to work on a couple of things last week, which I did, and I feel like they're getting better.

So yeah, it's always nice to start off the season like that. I feel like I had a chance to win and did quite good. But hopefully it would be great to get a win under my belt pretty early this season, try and win here, a place that I've won at before, and of course, I really enjoy the play.

Q. You were saying this was your seventh. Can you tell us about what you remember from the first time, how old you were and what impressions you had here?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. It was '06, and I remember what I shot. I shot two 72s and missed the cut by one, I think. I remember I think I played on Thursday morning, and then on Thursday afternoon Tiger was playing, and I'm sure a few of you know this story, but came out in the afternoon and took one of the photographer's cameras off of him and was able to follow inside the ropes, which was pretty cool.

But yeah, that was my first real test of Dubai, and I've been coming back every year since.

Q. How old were you then?

RORY McILROY: '06, was 17. 16, 17.

Q. You're getting old.

RORY McILROY: Yeah.

Q. The two-stroke penalty in Abu Dhabi

made all the difference. Do you reflect back on that? Do you think about that?

RORY McILROY: Not really. I mean I thought about it a little bit on the Sunday night afterwards, just thinking about if I hadn't have done it, I obviously would have been two shots better and would have been one shot better than Rocky, but these things happen. You learn from it and you move on. So I'll definitely not do it this week or any other week.

But it's fine. I mean I don't feel like I played well enough -- I don't feel like the golf that I played in Abu Dhabi deserved to win. I got away with a few tee shots and got lucky here and there. And Rocky played well and he deserved to win.

Q. Where does this rank among tournaments outside the majors?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. I mean it is, it's definitely one of my favorite ones to come back to. Just the whole, the atmosphere. Knowing the golf course so well, the memories obviously. It's definitely up there. You know, be in the top -- outside of the majors, it would definitely be in the top three or four.

Q. What are the others?

RORY McILROY: Everyone knows I love Hong Kong. It's great. I love the Memorial in the U. S. It's a great tournament. Quail Hollow is another one, fantastic golf course. Akron. I love Akron as well, Firestone is a fantastic golf course. Just I like coming back to places where you've played well and also just courses you enjoy to play.

Q. With you and Tiger now new best friends, is it a shame not to have him here this week, and I guess you'll be looking at what he gets up to in Pebble?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. I mean we played together three out of the four rounds in Abu Dhabi, and it was good fun. I felt like -- I'd spent a little bit of time with

him before that, but not as much as I did then. And yeah, it was great. It was nice to play with him, and felt pretty relaxed out there in his company, and we chatted the whole way around and stuff.

Yeah, I think any time the golf on the other side of the pond is on, you're always keeping an eye on seeing what's happening. So yeah.

Q. What kind of performance would you expect of Tiger this week in America?

RORY McILROY: I'm not sure. I mean I think Pebble at this time of the year can be a bit of a lottery, you know, with the weather and stuff, and you've got the three courses. So you don't really know what to expect. And it's a three-round format as well, so you don't really know how guys handle that. But he's got a great record at Pebble, obviously won the U. S. Open there by 15, and had that unbelievable finish in 2000, I think, when he beat Matt Gogel, was it, down the stretch? So he's played well there before. And what I've seen of him in Abu Dhabi, it looks like he's well on his way to returning to some great form.

Q. That first round in Abu Dhabi, the 67, that sort of facility that you had for kind of missing a lot of fairways and yet still shooting a 67, is that something that's quite new, do you think, in your game, and do you feel like this year you're able to kind of not play perhaps your very best golf and still win tournaments?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, definitely. I think that's been one of the things I've tried to do.

I felt like I did it at Hong Kong at the end of last year. I didn't play my best. I played terrible golf on the Saturday and was able to get a round in the seventh, which was huge. And then I go out Sunday and played a bit better and win.

Yeah, I feel like the weeks that I've won, you know, I've basically four days have been pretty much flawless, but

you're not going to play like that every week. You have to learn how to score well when you're not playing your best. Hopefully I don't have to get used to it where I don't play well and have to score. But the sometimes where you don't hit it as well as you'd like, that's the most important weeks or the most important days where you need to manage yourself around the golf course and get the most out of your game.

Q. Rory, you're at the start of what could be another moment us year for you with maybe another second major putting Luke under more pressure for the world No. 1 spot. I just wondered, have you set any clear expectations in what would perhaps be a minimum requirement in your eyes for your return on this year?

RORY McILROY: Not really. I've always approached the start of a new year with -- I've always just tried to get better. If I can improve on every year or improve some part of my game, you know, I'm very big into just focusing on the process of trying to become a better golfer. I've never really been one to set out goals where, okay, I want to win a major this year or I want to win five tournaments or I want to be world No. 1. I'd love to do all those things, but there's no point in really thinking about it, because the only way you're going to get better is by putting in the hard work and putting in time on the range and playing good golf. So I mean that's all I'm really trying to do.

Q. You tweeted the other day that you were striping it on the range?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I mean this week I've actually practiced pretty hard, and I've had a couple of sessions where I've hit it really, really well on the range. And I was just more happy with the things I was working on after Abu Dhabi, you know, sort of falling into place.

I mean it's hard to take all of it from the range on to the golf course

straightaway, but I feel like I'm pretty close to playing some really good golf.

Q. You said you've been working on your game. I gather it was the driving, some of it. Can you a bit more specific? What was it?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I was working on my driver a bit, my fairway woods as well, basically my longer clubs. Worked on a few swing changes before -- not swing changes. More just tweaks, before Abu Dhabi.

Again, you know, you can get pretty comfortable with those changes on the range, but then when you have a card in your hand and --

Q. Could you be more specific what you were working on?

RORY McILROY: Yeah. I mean -- I don't want to bore you with too much detail, but a little more width with my driver on the way back. A little more -- because what I've been working on the angle of attack's changed a little bit on the way down, so a little bit less release from my hands. Just a few little bits and pieces, but yeah, it's coming together quite nicely.

Q. Rory, about a year ago, it may even have been in this very room or thousands of miles away you said you wanted to develop more maturity in your golf game or perhaps not be as adventurous when you're up against it or going around the 18 holes. How do you feel that transition has gone over the year?

RORY McILROY: It's been good at parts. Sometimes, looking back at last year there's been a couple of times where I took on a shot where I shouldn't have, like third hole at the PGA, where I hit the tree root.

But yeah, I feel like I've definitely matured a lot this past year as a golfer and probably just as a person as well. And yeah, I think if you mature as a person, it shows in your golf game as well, and I feel like I can play more controlled

golf when I need to. Especially when you're not playing as well, you need to know your limitations and know that, okay, maybe when you're 100 percent, you can take on shots but whenever your aim is slightly off, you need to just reel it back in a little bit and play the percentages a bit more.

Q. On that subject, as a professional sports man, there's a responsibility to entertain. Is there a showman in you, like when you take on that sort of shot when you did at the PGA?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, of course. A little bit, but it's more in your mind. You know, you're looking at a shot, and you know, it's almost like you're trying to visualize the shot that -- I mean, and maybe it'll come off one side of 20 times and you're sort of thinking about what would Savvy do. (Laughs). But yeah, maybe if you really need to make a par or birdie to win, you know, you don't really need to be doing it on the third hole of the tournament.

Q. Rory, there have been quite a bit of players that have appraised the golf course, the condition of the golf course. You played it today in the morning. Can you just give us your thoughts on it?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, the golf course is in fantastic condition. I think every year we come back here it's in superb shape. It's still -- I mean it was in the morning time, so the fairways and the greens were still pretty soft, but I think they'll probably try and firm them up as the week goes on.

I mean the rough is a pretty sticky height. You can get -- I had a couple of pretty nasty lies out there this morning, especially when the rough's wet. It's hard to get the club through it. And the greens are perfect. You know, they're really, really nice surfaces.

A little more grain this year than in previous years, so that's something that

you have to sort of adjust for. You know, maybe look at putts from different angles or from the side just to really make sure what way the green is coming from, but the course is in fantastic condition like it always is. And I think that's why a lot of guys love coming back here is the course is great. The facilities are fantastic. And we get treated really well.

Q. Rory, this course has obviously been a constant for you throughout your career. You've always come back here. So when you arrive here every year, do you sort of take stock of what's happened to you since the last time you came here, especially in the last 12 months, what you've achieved?

RORY McILROY: Yeah, I always think back to the first time I played here. This is the seventh time playing a tournament as a 22-year-old. It's pretty funny. But yeah, this is one of the places that I've always played and I've always enjoyed coming back. And yeah, I mean I suppose sometimes you do reflect back this time last year, what was I doing, and you know, I couldn't have imagined everything that was going to happen leading on from this time last year. But yeah, no, it's been great. I love coming back here, and 12 months from this time last year to now it's been pretty good.

MICHAEL GIBBONS: Rory, thanks for joining us. Good luck this week.

RORY McILROY: Thank you. Cheers.

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