

Golf

McIlroy able to play, wanting to win as FedEx Cup starts

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press



McIlroy

Ten days ago, Rory McIlroy wasn't sure if he was going to play the rest of the year.

A week off made him feel good enough that a nagging rib injury can be managed well enough for him to compete in the FedEx Cup playoffs. And with just over a month before he shuts it down for the year, McIlroy wants to do more than just play.

"I think the real thing for me was I want to win," McIlroy said Wednesday. "I want to win at least once before the end of the year. I haven't not won a tournament since the 2008 season, which was my real rookie season on the European Tour."

Even in 2013, when he struggled with an equipment change, McIlroy won the Australian Open by one shot over Adam Scott and headed into the offseason feeling better about his game. He wound up winning two majors the following year.

"I'd like to have that feeling again before taking that time off at the end of this year and getting myself right for 2018," he said.

The majors are over, though McIlroy faces a field that in some respects is tougher than the PGA Championship.

The Northern Trust, which starts Thursday at Glen Oaks on Long Island, features the top 120 players available based on their performance this season on the toughest circuit in golf. There are no aging champions, amateur qualifiers or club professionals.

There is no Masters champion, either, as Sergio Garcia again is taking off the first playoff event.

Hideki Matsuyama enters the FedEx Cup playoffs as the fifth player in the last five years to be the No. 1 seed. The points count four

times as much for the next three playoff events until the reset for the Tour Championship at East Lake.

The objective is to be among the top five seeds going into the finale, where those players only have to win the Tour Championship to capture the \$10 million bonus.

There remains plenty on the line beyond the cash for players who haven't won majors this year — Matsuyama and Dustin Johnson — and even those who have.

PGA champion Justin Thomas and British Open winner Jordan Spieth are regarded the front-runners to be voted PGA Tour player of the year. Thomas has one more victory and some impressive rounds (his 59 at the Sony Open), while Spieth has been more consistent.

"You're the MVP of the league," Spieth said, who won the award in 2015 when he won five times, including two majors and the FedEx Cup. "When you put it that way, it's something that you want really badly and you want to be considered the best player. ... So it's a fight, and it's something that

is keeping me going and grinding at the end of a really good season."

Spieth looked to be a shoo-in for the award in 2015 when he came as close as anyone to the calendar Grand Slam. Jason Day began to emerge late in the year and looked like a viable candidate until Spieth won the Tour Championship.

Thomas is still coming to grasp with his victory in the PGA Championship for his first major. He hasn't much time to celebrate, mainly because he had The Northern Trust after one week off. Thomas said he went to practice on Thursday in steamy conditions and wasn't into it, so he headed to the gym.

He headed for Long Island on Friday and played Shinnecock Hills (U.S. Open site next year) and Liberty National (Presidents Cup next month) to get back into it.

The FedEx Cup is important because it's the next big trophy he can claim, and that would lead to player of the year.

"If you ask someone, 'Would you rather win a major or a FedEx Cup,' they are both life-changers,"

he said. "They are both something that a lot of people won't do in their career — a lot of great players won't do. Now that I've done one, I hope to do the other at least once in my career."

Three of the top six players in the world — Spieth, McIlroy and Henrik Stenson — have won the FedEx Cup. Stenson had a chance to be the first to go back-to-back until he ran into Spieth and his propensity to hole putts across the green.

McIlroy now has that opportunity, even though he starts the playoffs at No. 44 because of the stop-and-start nature of his season. Then again, he is one of only two players in the 10-year history of the FedEx Cup to win after starting the playoffs out of the top 20. He was No. 36 last year.

"I think we've seen what can happen in these playoffs, and how quickly you can shoot up the rankings with a good week or a win," he said. "I'm here, and I know I've done it before, and hopefully I can give myself a chance to do it again."

FALK: May have been Ivy League-bound if not for Leach's hiring in Pullman

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Mannion (13,600 yards passing) and USC's Matt Barkley (116 TD passes).

While the cast around him has improved throughout his career, Falk is a major reason No. 24 Washington State has morphed into a contender.

Not bad for a former walk-on.

"To be perfectly honest, I think he kind of assumed he was going to be the starter a little before I did," Leach said. "I'd figured it was a battle, and we had a kid that we recruited ahead of him. But I was definitely going to allow it to be and make it a battle. Then he ends up beating the guy out, and off we go, you know?"

Falk has brought Washington State to a place of relevance that's been elusive for the program. The Cougars have gone to two

straight bowl games and getting to a third in Falk's senior season would be just the second time Washington State has gone to three straight bowl games. A year ago, they played in a de facto Pac-12 North championship game, the result of eight straight wins, before losing to rival Washington.

He's the next in a long line of great quarterbacks to make their way through Pullman, a list that includes the names of Thompson, Rypien, Bledsoe, Leaf and Gesser. Yet none of them were asked to run a system as intricate as Leach's, which is why the coach regularly lauds his quarterback for his smarts and comprehension.

"I think he watches more film than anybody else I've ever dealt with," Leach said. "He watches a ton of film. Sometimes, I think, too much. He's about the only quarterback I've considered



This Dec. 27, 2016, file photo shows Washington State quarterback Luke Falk (4) passing during the first half of the Holiday Bowl in San Diego.

shutting off the film."

Leach raves about how steady Falk is on the field, believing teammates respond to that. Yet, the quarterback has his quirks. He revamped his diet about a year ago, even if it means

eating foods he despises like kale.

During the early stages of his college career, it was Falk's musical sisters — Alexa and Natalee — who were more well-known than their pass-slinging younger

brother. "They've got the most talent in the family," Falk said.

And there is his odd timing for jokes, which also speaks to his personality. Last year, the Cougars trailed 24-6 at Oregon State before rallying for a 35-31 win. Down by more than two scores, Falk was cracking jokes on the sideline, trying to keep his teammates from feeling stressed.

"He was kind of relaxed and poised and I wouldn't call that weird, but it's one of those things you're in a high pressure situation against a Pac-12 team that we're losing to and he's out there making jokes and having fun," teammate Cody O'Connell said. "It was kind of interesting."

Now remember that Falk has accomplished all this because he was willing to take a risk. There was no guarantee of a scholarship

or even an opportunity when he arrived at Washington State. At one point in his high school career, Falk seemed destined for Florida State, only to have that opportunity dissolve. In the end, his choices appeared to be Cornell, maybe Idaho and maybe Wyoming.

If not for Leach's arrival in Pullman, Falk likely would have headed for the Ivy League and received limited football exposure. As it stands, Falk is considered one of the top NFL quarterback prospects for the 2018 draft after passing on a chance to leave after his junior season.

"It felt right to come back. Felt like I had some things, growing up to do in life, not football," Falk said. "I felt football-wise, I could. But there's still a lot to learn this year and I really want to finish off with the guys I came in with."

BEAVERS: Collins, Kell, Unutoa-Whitson all ruled out for season opener

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positions and they use them the right way and they're a very solid team elsewhere.

Andersen said the Rams want to push around their opponents and get the ground game going.

The teams had three common opponents last year with the Rams losing to Colorado 44-7, Minnesota 31-24 and Boise State 28-23. The Beavers lost 47-6 to Colorado, 38-24 to Boise State and 30-23 to Minnesota.

"And if you matched us up last year team to team, who they played, we played common opponents, we're in

for a big-boy football game," Andersen said. "They want to be a physical team that has the power to make big time plays on the offensive side of the ball."

That the Rams will be opening a new stadium with a sellout crowd could make it tougher for OSU, but Andersen said the Beavers are excited about the opportunity.

Andersen knows the Colorado State fan base well, having coached and played in Fort Collins.

"It's a hard place to play and they have good fans," he said.

WINNING ON THE ROAD: A win at Colorado

State would mean a good start to the season for the Beavers.

It would also be OSU's first road win since the Beavers defeated Colorado in 2014.

"That's a big one and it's been a long time," Andersen said.

Andersen said he doesn't think winning at home is much easier than on the road because the noise factor is just coming at different times.

The big difference, he said, is the offense has to be able to execute with a loud crowd cheering for the defense.

"There's comfort zone of

having your own fans there, there's no doubt," he said. "And there's an intimidating factor that we have here at Reser at home games that I think is substantial."

"So the key is when you go on the road is you understand is you have to be on the other side of that and you have to focus in on the little things. So the fine details in critical moments are key if you're going to win close games on the road because the fans are going to be a factor."

HEADING TO HIGH GROUND: The elevation of Fort Collins is 5,003 feet, quite a bit higher than Corvallis, which stands just

235 feet above sea level.

The elevation can be rough for teams not used to playing in the thin air.

The Beavers did spend a week of camp in Bend, which is at 3,623 feet.

"I don't know how much Bend will help now since we've been out of Bend for so long," Andersen said. "But it's something that's there, it's something you have to deal with and if you're in (the Pac-12) you have to play at Colorado, so that's the way it goes. You have to play at Utah. You're going to be in those situations and settings and we're going to walk into it one more time.

"Is it a factor? I've lived

here going on three years and I go home and jog in Utah, it's a little different but does it stop me from making my normal run? No, it doesn't. So we'll be prepared, the docs (and) the trainers will put the kids in the position, we'll be prepared to sub them and get them where they need to be."

INJURY REPORT: Receiver Seth Collins, safety Drew Kell and linebacker Shemiah Unutoa-Whitson have all been ruled out for the game.

Receiver Timmy Hernandez, offensive lineman Nous Keobounnam and tight end Quinn Smith are all probable.

MARINERS: Road trip continues Friday in New York against Yankees

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approached second base following his second double in the third inning. He walked off the field, accompanied by a trainer. There was no immediate word on the severity of the injury.

Losing Cano for a significant period of time could be a blow to the postseason hopes for Seattle, which began the day two games out of an AL wild card. Cano is hitting .277 with 19 homers and 78 RBIs.

The Mariners had at least one extra-base hit in each of the first five innings as R.A. Dickey gave up four runs and 11 hits in six innings.

Even Seattle right-hander Erasmo Ramirez, who had no hits in his first eight career at-bats, had success against Dickey. Ramirez had a run-scoring single in the second for his first career hit. He added another single to right field in the fifth to become only the fourth Seattle pitcher with two hits in a game. No Seattle pitcher has had three hits.

Ramirez gave up three runs in six innings. Ender Inciarte had four hits for Atlanta. Freddie Freeman drove in two runs with two hits, including a run-scoring single off Nick Vincent in the eighth.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Mariners: CF Guillermo Heredia left the game in the eighth after being hit on his right arm by a pitch from Jason Motte in the seventh.

ROSTER MOVES

Seattle OF Leonys Martin was designated for assignment to clear a spot for Phelps (right elbow impingement).

UP NEXT

Mariners: Following an off day on Thursday, the team's 12-game road trip continues Friday when LHP Ariel Miranda (8-6, 4.78) makes his second start against the New York Yankees.

SCOREBOARD

Local slate

VOLLEYBALL

Today	
Condon/Wheeler at Echo, 10 a.m.	Heppner vs. Condon/Wheeler (at Echo), 11:30 a.m.
Heppner at Echo, 2 p.m.	Umatilla at Helix, 2:30 p.m.
Ione at Helix, 4 p.m.	Imler at Weston-McEwen, 4 p.m.
Ione vs. Umatilla (at Ione), 5:30 p.m.	Waitsburg (WA) at Riverside, 6 p.m.
Dufur at Weston-McEwen, 7 p.m.	
Friday	
Ione at Country Christian (1A Preview), 8 a.m.	Ione vs. Trinity Lutheran (1A Preview), 11 a.m.
Umatilla at Irrigon, 1 p.m.	Ione vs. North Douglas (1A Preview), 2 p.m.
Condon/Wheeler vs. Umatilla (at Irrigon), 2:30 p.m.	Condon/Wheeler at Irrigon, 4 p.m.
Saturday	
Hermiston at La Grande, 8 a.m.	Pendleton at Lewiston (ID) Tournament, 8 a.m.
Weston-McEwen at Grant Union Tournament, 8 a.m.	Irrigon at Stanfield, 10 a.m.
Echo vs. Enterprise (at Stanfield), 10 a.m.	Ione vs. Hosanna Christian (1A Preview), 10 a.m.
Ione vs. Willamette Valley Christian (1A Preview), 5 p.m.	

BOYS SOCCER

Umatilla at Hermiston, 6 p.m.

GIRLS SOCCER

Umatilla at Hermiston, 4 p.m.

Baseball

AMERICAN LEAGUE

East Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	73	53	.579	—
New York	68	57	.544	4½
Baltimore	62	65	.488	11½
Tampa Bay	62	66	.484	12
Toronto	60	66	.476	13
Central Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	69	56	.552	—
Minnesota	65	61	.516	4½
Kansas City	64	61	.512	5½
Detroit	54	71	.432	15
Chicago	49	76	.392	20
West Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	77	49	.611	—
Los Angeles	65	61	.516	12
Seattle	65	63	.508	13

NATIONAL LEAGUE

East Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
Washington	75	49	.605	—
Miami	62	63	.496	13½
Atlanta	56	69	.448	19½
New York	55	70	.440	20½
Philadelphia	46	79	.368	29½
Central Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	68	57	.544	—
Milwaukee	66	62	.516	3½
St. Louis	64	62	.508	4½
Pittsburgh	61	66	.480	8
Cincinnati	53	74	.417	16
West Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	89	36	.712	—
Arizona	69	58	.543	21
Colorado	68	58	.540	21½
San Diego	56	70	.444	33½
San Francisco	52	77	.403	39

West Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
Washington	75	49	.605	—
Miami	62	63	.496	13½
Atlanta	56	69	.448	19½
New York	55	70	.440	20½
Philadelphia	46	79	.368	29½
Central Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	68	57	.544	—
Milwaukee	66	62	.516	3½
St. Louis	64	62	.508	4½
Pittsburgh	61	66	.480	8
Cincinnati	53	74	.417	16
West Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	89	36	.712	—
Arizona	69	58	.543	21
Colorado	68	58	.540	21½
San Diego	56	70	.444	33½
San Francisco	52	77	.403	39

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES

San Francisco 4, Milwaukee 2	Philadelphia 8, Miami 0
Pittsburgh 1, L.A. Dodgers 0, 10 innings	Chicago Cubs 9, Cincinnati 3
N.Y. Mets 4, Arizona 2	Seattle 9, Atlanta 6
Houston 6, Washington 1	St. Louis 6, San Diego 2
Kansas City 6, Colorado 4	Arizona (Ray 9-5) at N.Y. Mets (Montero 2-8), 9:10 a.m.
Miami (Worley 2-3) at Philadelphia (Thompson 1-1), 10:05 a.m.	Colorado (Marquez 10-5) at Kansas City (Junis 5-2), 11:15 a.m.
L.A. Dodgers (Ryu 4-6) at Pittsburgh (Kuhl	

6-8, 1:05 p.m.

Chicago Cubs (Arrieta 13-8) at Cincinnati (Romano 3-5), 4:10 p.m.
San Diego (Pardome 6-8) at St. Louis (Martinez 10-9), 4:15 p.m.
Washington (Strasburg 10-4) at Houston (Keuchel 11-2), 5:10 p.m.

Wild Card Standings

American League

W	L	Pct	GB	
New York	68	57	.544	+3
Minnesota	65	61	.516	—
Los Angeles	65	61	.516	—
Kansas City	64	61	.512	½
Seattle	65	63	.508	1
Texas	62	63	.496	2½
Baltimore	62	65	.488	3½
Tampa Bay	62	66	.484	4
Toronto	60	66	.476	5

National League

W	L	Pct	GB	
Arizona	69	58	.543	+½
Colorado	68	58	.540	—
Milwaukee	66	62	.516	3
St. Louis	64	62	.508	4
Miami	62	63	.496	5½

NORTHWEST LEAGUE

North Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
Tri-City	16	12	.571	—
xVancouver	16	12	.571	—
Spokane	15	13	.538	1
Everett	14	14	.500	2
South Division	W	L	Pct	GB
xHillsboro	14	14	.500	—
Boise	13	1		