

McIlroy wins Masters to complete Grand Slam

BY DOUG FERGUSON
AP GOLF WRITER

AUGUSTA, Ga. — The closer Rory McIlroy came to fulfilling his lifetime dream — winning the Masters — the more it kept slipping away. Sunday at Augusta National felt like his last 11 years in the majors, blunders mixed in with sheer brilliance.

A two-shot lead gone in two holes. A four-shot lead gone in three holes with a shocker of a mistake. A 5-foot putt on the final hole to win narrowly missed.

And then McIlroy turned what could have been another major collapse into his grandest moment of all when he hit wedge to 3 feet for birdie in a sudden-death playoff against Justin Rose to become — finally — a Masters champion and take his place in golf history as the sixth player with the career Grand Slam.

“There were points in my career where I didn’t know if I would have this nice garment over my shoulders,” McIlroy said, that Masters green jacket looking like a perfect fit. “But I didn’t make it easy today. I certainly didn’t make it easy. I was nervous.

“It was one of the toughest days I’ve ever had on the golf course.”

The reward was greater than he imagined, and it showed. He rapped in that final putt, raised both arms in the air and let the putter fall behind him. He covered his head, dropped to his knees, and before long his forehead was on the green as his chest heaved with emotion.

That was 11 years of pent-up emotion from his last major, when he began to carry the burden of getting the final



Ashley Landis/AP photo

Rory McIlroy, of Northern Ireland, reacts after winning in a playoff against Justin Rose after the final round at the Masters golf tournament on Sunday in Augusta, Ga.

leg of the Grand Slam. It was 14 years of remembering the time he wasted a four-shot lead with an 80 on the final day as a 21-year-old.

“I started to wonder if it would ever be my time,” he said.

The thought could have easily crossed his mind during the final round.

What could have been a coronation for McIlroy along the back nine turned into a heart-racing, lead-changing, jaw-dropping finish at golf’s greatest theater that ended with McIlroy sobbing with joy and disbelief.

It ended with more heartache for Rose, who lost to Sergio Garcia in a playoff in 2017 and forced this one with a clutch 20-foot birdie on the 18th hole for a 6-under 66. He wound up joining Ben Hogan as the only players to lose twice in playoffs at Augusta National.

“It’s the kind of putt you dream about as a kid, and to have it and hole it, it was a special feeling,” Rose said. “And unfortu-

nately, the playoff, they always end so quickly. If you’re not the guy to hit the great shot or hole the great putt, it’s over. But not really anything I could have done more today.”

The joy on McIlroy’s face never left him from the time that putt dropped — on the green, in Butler Cabin when defending champion Scottie Scheffler first helped him into the green jacket, and during the trophy presentation on the 18th green.

“My dreams have been made today,” McIlroy said.

Moments later, speaking to 4-year-old daughter Poppy, he told her: “Never give up on your dreams. Never, ever give up on your dreams.”

This was shaping up as another horror show for McIlroy, who in 2011 lost a four-shot lead on the final day with a 43 on the back nine, a highlight reel that now can start collecting dust.

“I didn’t make it easy today,” McIlroy said. Right when it looked as

though he would throw away another major, McIlroy delivered two majestic shots when nothing less would do, two birdies that sent him to the 18th hole with a one-shot lead.

That still wasn’t enough. He hit a wedge into the bunker and wound up missing a 5-foot par putt for a 1-over 73 and the first Masters playoff in eight years.

Faced with more failure, McIlroy responded with another booming drive, and this wedge bounced onto the slope of the top shelf with enough spin to trickle down toward the hole, closer and closer, until it stopped 3 feet away.

And when Rose missed from 15 feet, McIlroy finally sealed it.


“I just think all week how I responded to setbacks, that’s what I’ll take from this week,” McIlroy said, though he could have been speaking for the last decade. “Couldn’t be more proud I myself for that and being able to back bounce when I needed to.”

McIlroy went 11 long years without any major, knowing the Masters green jacket was all that kept him from joining Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player, Ben Hogan and Gene Sarazen as the only winners of golf’s four professional majors.

Nicklaus and Player spoke on Thursday how they thought this was his time. Woods was among those to congratulate McIlroy and welcome him to the club.


So wild was this Sunday at Augusta National that McIlroy set a Masters record as the first champion to make four double bogeys — two in the first round that put him seven shots behind, two in the final round that turned this into a thriller.

U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau, who beat McIlroy at Pinehurst No. 2 last June, had the lead after two holes when McIlroy opened with a double bogey.



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Hearing No. 2025-PC-08
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