

# Arnold Palmer Invitational

Tuesday, March 1, 2022

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

## Joie Chitwood

### Press Conference



JOIE CHITWOOD: Good morning, everyone. Excited to chat with you really on the start of the Arnold Palmer Invitational, presented by MasterCard.

First and foremost, our well wishes to Bryson DeChambeau. Health is very important from a professional athlete's perspective. We want him to get well, and we look forward to seeing him in our fields in the future.

We're standing right now on a brand new structure. This is our White Claw Fan Deck. This is actually our initial premium opportunity for a general customer. This used to be the TV compound. We had some great opportunities to start really changing the way that our fans are entertained here.

It's really important when you think about what a golf tournament does for its community. You're entertaining corporate customers, Fortune 500 companies. You can see all the logos on the players' hats and their shirts, but there's also a normal grounds admission, and then you have everything in between. Individual premium opportunities, the Palmer Terrace is actually behind us now off of the 15th green, brand new structure, brand new venue. We've got new decks on 15, 18, and 6 that's associated to our club N1AP, an ultra premium opportunity.

But right here, this is where we want to see our fans express some energy and enthusiasm because on Sunday you're probably going to see somebody do something on 15 or 16 or 17 so that they can survive 18 and win the tournament, and we want to make sure the fans on this White Claw Fan Deck are letting our players know how much we support and appreciate what they do.

I am very excited. When you think about 2020, the tournament was the last full tournament on the PGA TOUR. 2021, we were, in essence, the one to bring it back with some new restrictions. And now here we are, no restrictions, full boat, new structure, changed the property, new main entrance, 50 new companies with us this year that were not with us before.

So excited as we continue to really be part of Mr. Palmer's legacy, Orlando's signature event, that we are playing boldly to win. And we're going to continue to drive this business and get more fans, more corporate clients, more venues, you name it, and make sure that we have a fantastic field to entertain all of our great customers who will see probably some phenomenal golf. And who knows who's going to win? But if they can survive 16, 17, and 18, they'll have earned it.

**Q. Can you expand more on the 50 companies? You don't have to like specify them, or you can bring some up if you want. But what does that say about the health of the tournament, and how did you guys elicit so much business?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: For me, I would say I think the Orlando market is fantastic. There's so many companies, so many businesses, there's so many great things here. So this tournament is in a perfect place. But it could be just calling folks and letting them know we have opportunities. We've created new venues that maybe they were unaware of. And maybe they didn't want to entertain 40 people, but our new cabanas on 14, we can entertain 14 people. Or if you'd like to buy twos or fours, you can buy something in the Palmer Terrace.

The key is having the right product mix for whatever the company's budget is. What are their desires? Is it to entertain new customers, prospects, or maybe it's just their own C-level group, their executives? So the key is really understanding that you have options. So for us, it was really going through our product mix, figuring out skyboxes on 17 or 18, Club 8 venue that's a table of ten that you can purchase, an outdoor cabana on 14, brand new that we've never done before.

So making sure that we have all of those opportunities versus, well, we only have skyboxes. This is your choice. You can entertain 40 folks. So I think that was really important for us. Then at the end of the day, it's rolling up your sleeve, and you call folks, and you get out there and talk about the tournament, and you talk about what it does for the community.



I think one of the things we've had a great opportunity to talk about is this tournament supports the Arnold & Winnie Palmer Foundation. So for us, everything that we generate here goes back into the community in one way or another, whether it's those great names on the hospitals. Mr. Palmer's name has been on that hospital for over 30 years. Winnie's name has been on the other hospital for over 15 years. Or the revitalization of Lake Lorna Doone on the west side and our commitment to help that neighborhood have some opportunity, whether it's the Winnie Palmer Nature Walk or the Arnold Palmer Putting Experience.

For us, it's about giving back, and that's what this tournament allows us to do. So when you talk to companies about participating and entertaining in sports, I think it's a really good message when their support of your event ends up turning around into community support, and hopefully for us, affecting the lives of people in our community in a positive way.

**Q. One of the big story lines last year was Bryson trying to drive the water. Obviously, he's not going to be here this year. How much of a blow is it to not have Bryson back here and bring all the attention he was bringing to this tournament?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: Bryson is such a unique athlete and changing the game really as it relates to his length and how he goes about it. I would tell you that was an excellent opportunity to expose golf maybe to fans who normally wouldn't follow it. I think we're all attracted to those that are game changers, those that push the envelope. So we appreciate that.

I will tell you, for me, more so worried that our defending champ. Yes, what he did on 6 was great, but unfortunately with him being injured, not having our defending champ is something that for us I think we were disappointed.

At the end of the day, though, we want him to be able to perform at his highest level, and we would never want him to be in a situation where he can't do that.

I think our fans will see some phenomenal golf. Jon Rahm, world No. 1, never been with us before, Rory McIlroy. We have a number of major winners in the field. It is a fantastic field. I will tell you this, it will be a true test. I've already heard from some of the players that the rough is not fun, and that's how it's supposed to be.

So we will provide a great challenge, and whoever does win on Sunday when we do give them that red cardigan and that trophy, I guarantee you they will have earned it every stroke of the way.

**Q. So Jon Rahm's presence, what's that bring to the tournament? He's obviously the clear No. 1 right now and has not played. Did you guys speak to him about his reasoning and wanting to support this event?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: There's been a change to the PGA TOUR calendar the last couple years. So now we're in a traditional Florida swing. Before us used to be the Mexico event, a World Golf event, that's no longer on the calendar. So from California, all the players come back for the Honda, we have our event, and then there's two other Florida tournaments after us.

I think there's so many things that go into a player's schedule, whether it's sponsor commitments, the way they train, the way they get to the highest level to perform. So for us, I think most players want to play at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by MasterCard. There are a number of elevated events on the TOUR. We have a \$12 million purse. The winner's check is significant, I believe it's \$2 million plus.

And probably more than anything, to win an event that has Mr. Palmer's name on it, a gentleman that really created sports marketing back in the day, in terms of being an ambassador for brands and being a special tournament. I think that's what really attracts them, and then it's all about fitting their schedule together and figuring out how they can perform at the highest level at the right time.

**Q. Talk about what this means for you personally. Obviously, you're transitioning from the world of racing into golf. What does this mean for you in terms of the charitable part of it just for you personally?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: I really appreciate that question. You go through life with great opportunities to hopefully make a difference, and so proud of where I've come from to follow in my family's footsteps on the racing side. Whether it was a stop in Indianapolis or a stop in Daytona, but to be there and help them with certain things. In Indy it was the 100th anniversary of the property and creating the centennial era program. In Daytona, I had the pleasure of managing a \$400 million reinvestment and really recreating the Daytona International Speedway.

So you cherish those opportunities you get to make a difference. So for me, it was where could I go next and have the same opportunity and be part of something special. I really enjoy the fact that this tournament supports the foundation, and then we make those charitable donations and opportunities available for other folks. It gives you something a little bit extra that makes you feel good about some of the tougher days when you're

worried about things like supply chain affecting the ability to build structure, whether it's getting that last hospitality ticket sold, but for us, I think that is one of those elements.

And at the end of the day, you think about what Mr. Palmer did in his career. You think, goodness, seven majors, world record flight around the world. He was the golfer of presidents. He knew every president. He was such the stature to be in this sport. What he did, and now we get to be part of his legacy, I would argue that most folks in sports would jump at the opportunity to be part of something this special here in Orlando.

I count myself very lucky that I get to continue to do some great things in sport and be part of special companies.

**Q. You look at all the different types of people that come out this event from the hard-core golf fans to somebody that just wants to have a good time and celebrate and party. What does this deck that we're standing on, what's the purpose? What kind of fan is going to enjoy this area the most?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: So I want to be clear. We will run a great event, and we'll be respectful of all of our players. We do not throw things on greens. We do not throw things out on the course when people do phenomenal things. But we will cheer, and we will be enthusiastic, and we will have energy. I hope and I expect that the fans in this location are going to show everybody that they enjoy golf and they enjoy Mr. Palmer, and they're going to root like heck for all these players out there.

That's what we expect. I think that's what this is going to do, and we're going to do it the right way. We're going to be good fans. And we can be loud fans when we see great things, but we're going to be good fans. And this is the perfect place to do it and to do it with the tournament on the line on Sunday.

So for me, this is that place. This long walk behind me down to 16 and then that tee shot and that long walk back, I can't imagine our fans aren't going to be rooting them on to hit it far and to hit it straight and go win that tournament.

**Q. Any changes in direction because of what happened in Phoenix for this week? Did you tell your volunteers or marshals anything different to back up what you just said?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: We did not need to. The way our venues are set up, we never had that situation. And as it related to public grandstands and some other things, we don't have the same conditions. We have great volunteers who do a great job of managing our customers. So we're

prepared, but we did not have to do anything extra or special because we know our fans are going to be respectful and do things the right way.

**Q. You don't have to remind them about Phoenix and say, hey, let's not have that?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: For us, we've got customer protocols that we remind every year, in terms of what's allowed on property, prohibited items, how we behave, when we need to be quiet. So I think we're just following our standard protocol and procedure, and these are things that we've done every year.

**Q. In the past, the word loud and golf don't normally go hand in hand, but it seems to be kind of the way golf and spectators are going. It seems like you're ahead of the times. You're going with it. You want them to be loud and enthusiastic. Why is that so important for this next generation of golf fans?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: I beg to differ a little bit. I watched videos, and I've seen a lot of Tiger Woods' eight wins here. All the putts he would sink on 18, man, the crowd was pretty loud. I think for all of us, we want to celebrate athletic accomplishment and the things we know we can't do. We want to enjoy that.

Now, we can't disrupt play, and we don't want to affect competition. But when they do something special, we should celebrate that and enjoy it. I just think that's the way the world works. We will never be basketball trying to get someone to miss a free-throw or things like that, but I think when we do see special activities on the course, we should cheer and appreciate that. That's what sports is all about.

**Q. You mentioned volunteers, Joie. They're important at every event, but it seems there's some real staying power with this event. I don't know the landscape of all the volunteers at all tournaments, but do you feel like there is something to be said for that here at this one?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: Great question. We'll have anywhere from 1,400 to 1,500 volunteers that will support us. We just had our volunteer breakfast this past Saturday. We actually brought up and announced our 20-year, our 25-year, our 30-year, and our 35-year service pins. That's astounding to me. We have volunteers that have been working with us and supporting us for that long.

What's interesting, we had our former chairman with us as well as our current volunteer leadership council. I introduced about eight individuals, totalled up the years of

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

service they provided us, and it was on average 32 years of service to Mr. Palmer and the tournament.

For us, the volunteers are essential to what we do, and we appreciate that they come to support this event because it is special and they're part of Mr. Palmer's legacy. Right now in the world of sports, world of business, world of everything, staffing, supplies, it's a challenge. I'm happy to tell you from a volunteer perspective, we didn't miss a beat. We are as well prepared now as we were in 2020 and years before. I think our volunteers -- I think they enjoy getting to be a part of this special event.

**Q. Joie, last year with the competition, it really came down to the very end right there on 18. Do you think it's going to be the same way this year?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: You know, based on the quality of the field and from what you see on the TOUR, now that anyone can win on any weekend, you just don't know. And we've also seen that a four or five-shot lead doesn't mean you're going to win it on Sunday.

So I truly can't tell you who's the favorite, who isn't the favorite. I do know this. This course will bring out the best in these players. So this weekend we will see somebody rise to the top, and they will have earned it. No one will give it to them. Whether it's the speed of the greens, whether it's the length of the rough, they will earn it. And I'm sure when we do hand them that trophy, it will be a sense of relief because of how hard it was to capture it in the first place.

**Q. What's the biggest similarity, if there is one, between running a big golf tournament and running a major auto race?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: There are so many more similarities than people realize. Just think about the schedule itself. There is no home team. They go everywhere across the country, so you don't have a home team versus an away team like a traditional sports would do. I would also look at creating hospitality, corporate customers being a part of it. You're selling a lot of the same products. So there's a lot of similarities.

The athletes themselves, in essence, kind of independent contractors, doing their own thing within a team concept. So lots of similarities.

For me what was probably more helpful is that I had lived here in Lake Mary for 10 1/2 years and would drive to Daytona. I have a son that went to high school here in Winter Park. I was very well aware of this event, knew all about it. I also knew our local politicians, our local

organizations and groups, and probably even back a little bit further that I have my original ticket stub to the 1992 event here.

So I have been a fan of Mr. Palmer's for a long time, excited I get to be here as part of it. I think my experiences, I think they fit well. Based on all these new venues and things that we're doing, we're getting a lot of great support to take our next step with the tournament.

**Q. You got one memory that stands out from being here as a fan here in '92?**

**Q. Were you 4 years old?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: Thank you. You're a nice guy. Thank you a lot. I appreciate that. I can only hope.

You know what I remember, I remember -- and I'm not sure if I can remember the player's name, but I was standing on the 2nd tee box, long par-3, and I would only come on Thursdays. I would skip school. So I went to the Jesuit high school. I would play hooky that day and drive over.

I remember somebody hitting their tee shot on the front green. I was in high school. And I just remember that golfer expressed himself, and I kind of smirked and laughed like, oh, they say things too that you're not supposed to. I just remember that because he hit it in the bunker that day.

So that's probably the memory that pops out the most.

**Q. It wasn't Arnie, right?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: It was not Arnie. No, it was not.

**Q. You mentioned how it's anybody's tournament to win. You have three sponsors exemptions. Just a few weeks back, Sahith Theegala, who is speaking later, almost won Phoenix as a sponsors exemption. What kind of opportunity do you think you're giving guys?**

JOIE CHITWOOD: With our exemption process, we go through a fairly detailed review of what I call data. How is the player performing? Have they played at the API before? What is their best finish? What has been their last number of performances here in the springtime? Are they local? Have they won majors before?

We try and provide a balance. We'll have some veterans that participate, maybe former major winners. We'll have some younger, maybe up and comers. We have three young men who have participated in the Arnold Palmer Cup event, which is a collegiate event. Two of these

young men are actually on the Korn Ferry tour, John Pak and Davis Thompson. And then Sam Bennett, a young man who's still is in college, No. 1 in PGA TOUR university rankings.

So for us, it's a balance. We want to create relationships with some of the younger players that we know, but we also want to respect and invite back those veterans who had played here and have done quite well, Charles Howell being one of them this year. 21 straight years he's played with us. So we made sure that he was in the field again as an exemption.

So I think for us it's just trying to find balance in every segment of the PGA TOUR world.

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