

# Arnold Palmer Invitational

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

## Max Homa

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Max Homa to the interview room here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard: Welcome, Max. You just played in the pro-am. You've had three trips around this tournament already. Top 25 in each. Just thoughts on the golf course and I'm curious to know, with three good finishes, what your thoughts are on Bay Hill.

MAX HOMA: Yeah, it's a lovely layout. It requires really good ball striking. I think you look at people who have had great success here, Tiger, Rory, obviously tremendous ball strikers, great iron players especially.

You need to be in the fairway this week. The rough isn't quite as long as it was the last couple years, but it's all cut and grown into the grain. So there's not much you can do from these lies.

But when you are in the fairway I feel like if you're on and if you're pretty precise with your irons I feel you can almost sleep walk your way to a good round.

But there's danger lurking everywhere. The unique thing that this golf course has is how firm and fast the greens get as the week goes on. They're already pretty spicy out there. I like that. I think it tests quality of strike, it tests patience. I always think about a year's long TOUR as we are, it needs environment. I think some soft golf courses are okay and then we have some medium and then this one, which is a bit more extreme on the firm side. So I like that this fits in the schedule, it's a elevated event now or designated event now. So I think that it's good that we have an event like this. I think it tests -- as much as it tests your physical skills it tests your mental skills as well.

THE MODERATOR: You're No. 2 in the FedExCup after a couple of wins this season already and you're coming in here off a runner-up finish at The Genesis. How nice was it for you to have a refreshing, relaxing week last week and get prepared for this week?

MAX HOMA: It was nice. I was pretty spent. I had never been up at the top of a leaderboard for that long before. All

four days played the final two rounds in the last group. So it was quite exhausting.

So it was nice to get home, get refreshed, spend some time with my family, work on my game and get back out here. So it's nice to be back working again. I do always miss competition when I'm home, but every once in a while you do need a little bit of kind of a reality check, get back to changing diapers and getting to hang out with my wife and just go back to normalcy. So it was a nice refreshing break.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll take some questions.

**Q. Congrats on your good play and your excellent diaper changing. You may have overheard Scottie talking a little bit about the new schedule: Cutting the elevated events to 70, 78 players. No cuts. He was talking about there's avenues, more avenues for players to get out here. But it seems like those avenues are smaller than ever. How do you feel about this proposal and is it different than maybe how you would have felt about it five or six years ago when you were maybe, you know, wouldn't have been in the top 50 or top 70?**

MAX HOMA: I love the new changes. I could rant on this for awhile, which I might. The reason I wanted to join the Player Advisory Council, which is what I'm on now, was on a bit last year, is because I think I do provide a unique perspective as, you know, in 2017, 2018 I guess I've just seen all kind of levels of professional golf between the Korn Ferry Tour and the PGA TOUR.

And I believed in this back then and I believe in this now. I didn't maybe see exactly what is being done. I'm not quite smart enough to have planned this one out.

But the product is important. I think it's easy to frame these changes as a way to put more money in the top players' pockets. But it has been made to make it easier and more fun for the fans. I know it's low-hanging fruit to jump on, Oh, this is just a money grab. This is to make it better for the fans.



It is a guarantee on who will be at events, more or less, and leaning more on the more there.

It is more opportunity for the top players to battle it out late on Sundays. Which, you look back at times of Phil and Tiger, the two best players growing up for me watching, and they had like maybe two real battles. So we're going to have more of that.

We just had Scottie and Jon battle it out in Phoenix and that was awesome. Two of the three best players in the world going at it. So I think that's great.

I understand the sentiment you brought up about maybe the avenues getting smaller, but the prize is much larger. So I'm not so sure I agree with the kind of negative connotation of that.

The non-designated events are the same purses with, I mean, on paper, weaker fields. So financially that doesn't change a whole lot. And there's a lot of room for growth throughout that. You can play your way into the designated events and go from playing an event for the exact same amount of money to playing it for significantly more amount of money with a two-week good golf stretch or a win or something like that.

Cutting the field sizes down I know is -- you know, I just finished my pro-am and went on my phone briefly before I came in here and I saw quite a bit of frustration, some from players, some from fans, that the fields are small. But I think the part that's frustrating and maybe the part that just simply might be misunderstood is that if we made these fields very large in these designated events it would ruin non-designated events that have been staples of the PGA TOUR, that go to cities that people love watching these events with their families. It would ruin them. No one would play in half of them because it would no longer fit your schedule by any means.

So I think that the TOUR's done a great job of looking into that and seeing that this would be a great number to cut to to make sure that we still have competitive events that are non-designated, while keeping the sponsors and the fans happy with the parity and some of the, you know, maybe not the top 50 big names, but big names. Guys everybody has watched play golf, win golf tournaments and excel at this game still in those fields. So I think that that is an important distinction to make before just jumping on something negative.

**Q. Just to follow-up, the things that you say would ruin some of these events is in fact is what built the TOUR to get to where it is now.**

MAX HOMA: I'm sorry?

**Q. The things that you mentioned that you say would ruin some of these events where everybody's not going to play 'em, that's what the TOUR was built on to get to this point where we're at now.**

MAX HOMA: Okay, although that's not a question, I will --

**Q. Well, I mean, I just wanted to -- could you expand on that. How do you think it would ruin the events? Because that's how it's been done in the past and --**

MAX HOMA: Because the bottom 30 guys are going to be people like, and I'm going to say it because he works for the TOUR, Jason Gore will be playing in PGA TOUR events. I say -- we always joke with him, like that's clearly not something we want.

There was an event last year, and I'm not going to use the name of the player, but it was a kind of a joke, a running joke that this guy's playing a golf tournament. He is a professional golfer, he's not a practicing professional golfer anymore. Those people will be in a ton of the events. Now the sponsors have to say, Well do we want the, you know, not quite a third of the field, but a chunk of the field is guys that won an event years and years ago that have jobs or have retired well before that.

I understand your point that that's what the TOUR was built on, but the TOUR had, in my opinion, a problem in the sense that 30 percent of the top-50 players on this TOUR were playing against each other week-in and week-out.

So they looked at something that was a negative, a deficiency, and said, Okay, we want more of the top guys playing against each other. Again, for the fans, for entertainment. That's not a good look that the only time you'll see the best players in the world teeing it up against each other is the PLAYERS and the majors.

You have to, it dilutes the other, what, 42 weeks that we play. I mean, that's a lot of weeks that you're watching -- you're hoping a lot. You're hoping a lot for a phenomenal leaderboard. And I don't mean phenomenal, I think everyone out here's a tremendous golfer, but we know that the fans have attached themselves to the Rory's, to the Jon's, to the Scottie's, to the Jordan's, to the Justin's. They're household names. Most of us are not a household name.

So, yes, that's what it was built on, but it had also gotten bigger and bigger and more weeks and more playing opportunities and that just thins it out throughout the year.

If we had 15 events it would be a sprint and people would play all 15 of those and you would see the same guys going at it week-in and week-out. And it would have shrunk, it would have made -- the field size might have been the same, but it would have shrunk who got into each event. We're keeping an idea that people will still get to play the same amount of events and a lot of the same events that they typically would, but there's just kind of brackets on it.

There's tons of room for growth for those guys. I almost think that some of these questions in the sense that, Oh, it's not letting as many people in, is doing them a disservice. They can play great and get in. And there's, it's only room for growth. They're not financially taking a back seat to what has already been in place.

So I see all of this as a positive. I understand gripes. At times I've had gripes too. Once you sit down with an executive of the TOUR; Jay, who has been great for me to kind of bounce complaints off of and then him come back to me with a well thought out and also measured answer as something he's researched I can be like, Oh, yeah, I am wrong. I thought maybe I wasn't settled on 70 people, that sounds like not enough. But when he said, Well, if you make it a hundred these other events are going to struggle and then potentially go away. Then we would be sitting here and it would somehow be his fault or our fault that an event that you found as a classic, you know, traditional tournament is no longer in existence.

And this is, I think this plan is holding up everything. With, like I said, a lot of room for growth for the 100th on the FedExCup at the end of this year.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Do you need a break before the next question?

MAX HOMA: No, I'm good. Sorry guys. I think a lot and you just heard my brain spill out.

**Q. You were clearly disappointed and a bit emotional after the loss at Riviera. And I'm wondering, you mentioned a few minutes ago about not having been in that position for four days. What were your takeaways mentally as you were reflecting on that Sunday and the whole week?**

MAX HOMA: Yeah, I was most proud of my week mentally. Any time you have the lead after Thursday it's just a really hard position to stay in. I thought I kept my wits about me for the whole week. I just didn't drive the ball well enough on the weekend, especially the back nine on Sunday, to give myself opportunities to catch Jon.

But overall obviously I was really excited and proud of how I played and how I thought. It's just a learning experience. It hurt at the time and it hurts a bit now, but you just have to put yourself in position as often as you possibly can and that's how you start to clip off wins at a higher rate. That was faster.

**Q. This isn't an access question, it's more about a player getting from point A to point B. So we got introduced to Eric Cole last week. I'm sure he would aspire to have a path like you've had where you get out on TOUR, you pay your dues, you struggled a little bit. Then you win and now you've broken through to be a top player in the world. As you look back at your own path what's the biggest thing that got you from that point A to where you stand today?**

MAX HOMA: I would say faith in a plan. I think it's easy to make a plan. I think it's hard to stick to a plan. I thought I made a plan and I was a well-thought-out plan, it wasn't just a half-ass plan, it was a well-thought-out plan. And I thought I made one and I was like, I'm going to stick to this and see where it gets me. I don't know the end date on this, but I'm going to put one foot in front of the other until I make it to where I want to be.

So I think that was a, that was a big, I guess, staple of mine of what I did to make sure that I got where I wanted to go.

**Q. Was it really detailed?**

MAX HOMA: No.

**Q. Kind of just general?**

MAX HOMA: It was very general. I think it actually gets more detailed as you get better or more successful in the game. I think when you're struggling or you're kind of making ends meet, it's easier to make it general and you'll see more success right away.

It's harder as you get closer to the top to find these tiny, incremental things you need to do to slowly climb up the -- because everybody else is doing that too, you know.

**Q. As a fellow player, do you enjoy seeing a story like that? A kid you may not have known.**

MAX HOMA: Yeah, of course. Every week with the Monday qualifying I think that's awesome. You see events -- I think that also brings the great story line -- not to harp back on what I ranted on, clearly, far too long. But we go from Riviera where you have a lot of the guys who might be more household names who are clearly not struggling

as much. Then you go to an event that would be considered -- even just the word undesignated makes it seem almost lesser -- and you have this unbelievable story of Chris Kirk, who is a tremendous golfer and has had a tremendous career, but he's gone through his struggles openly; battling against Eric Cole who has, you know, taken him awhile to make his presence known out here; and you have a Monday qualifier who is like, I think he cashed a huge check and now his life -- like that story line is awesome and getting to see that versus the paradox between that and the other. I think that's important for sport and it's an awesome opportunity that we, and I mean myself as a fan, gets to watch that.

So I love watching that. That's the beauty of this game. You're one week away from changing your life when you're a professional golfer.

**Q. First of all, never feel badly about coming in here and just talking, okay. We like that.**

MAX HOMA: Okay.

**Q. What happens with, over time, you have guys who have won majors and they get five-year exemptions for that. And with THE PLAYERS I guess it's three-year exemptions to some things, but five for TOUR events. Pretty soon that's 25 players who every year are probably going to be in a designated event situation. How do they play badly enough to not be in a designated event tournament?**

MAX HOMA: I'm not sure. You should probably -- I mean, Jay knows much more about this than I. I'm not in every nook and cranny of this or I don't know all of the details. But I would assume that you could still get bumped down to the non-designated events after a year if you don't remain in the top 50.

**Q. On points?**

MAX HOMA: Off points, I would assume. So I don't think that you're locked in for those five years, three years, whatever, in the designated events. But I mean just...

**Q. I realize that's going kind of in the weeds.**

MAX HOMA: Yeah, I don't want to speak on something I'm not a hundred percent sure on it, just in case. But that would be my guess.

**Q. We just had obviously Scottie in here a moment ago and he's had an amazing run in the last year plus. I'm curious, A, what your impression of where he's taken this in such a short period of time has been.**

**And as a follow-up, you've been on a fantastic run as well yourself and what is the secret, for lack of a better word, or the dynamic of trying to just keep that rolling, which Scottie has?**

MAX HOMA: Yeah, Scottie did some unprecedented things. Last year I think he went from his first win to No. 1 in the world faster than anybody had ever done it. So he's obviously on a pretty unprecedented tear and has kept it going.

Scottie was a great player before he won his first one and he's a more accomplished one now. I played with him at Sea Island last year at the RSM, before he had won his first one. And I had never gotten to see his game up close. I had heard he was tremendous. I think he was already a top 20 in the world player without winning yet. I walked away from that being like, Yup, this make sense. You can never guess someone's going to win, what has it been? Five times in the last pretty, maybe a year. And a major. Contends in mostly every major.

So I'm not going to say I could have sat here and said, Oh, that's definitely going to happen. But you could see it. These things aren't a flash in the pan when it comes to getting up that high.

So for me, I think resting on that, knowing that this isn't a flash in the pan. This takes more than a couple good weeks. This takes years of steadily improving and little wins here and there and then some big wins. So I think you just keep doing what you're doing. I think that's what he's been doing. I think he knew before he won one that he was a champion and now he obviously knows he's a champion.

**Q. Max, are you one of those guys that goes to Augusta early and have you ever gone and stayed on-site overnight, done the whole cabin thing and just enjoyed the experience? If not, are you hoping to do that at some point?**

MAX HOMA: I have never stayed there, no. But I did go last year with Talor Gooch. We went actually this, this, the weekend prior to Bay Hill. We went for two rounds. It was fun.

I'm not probably going to do that too often. We wanted to go kind of get the pre-Masters jitters out of the way more so.

It's funny, the course, at different times of year it doesn't play quite as fast. So I didn't really learn a lot about the course, but it was nice to get comfortable. I'd played there a couple times, but it's nice to get comfortable being there.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Always have memories, I got a memory of one of my best friends now getting to walk that place two days with not all the craziness, not the competition, just having some fun at the coolest golf course you could ever imagine. So I'm sure I'll go back and do it again, but this year I will not be.

**Q. How does your experience at Genesis, being in contention, with your family and friends in the crowd, prepare you for the U.S. Open coming up at L.A. Country Club? It being in your hometown, do you think it adds some extra motivation?**

MAX HOMA: Yeah, absolutely. I love playing in California, obviously. I love playing in front of my friends and family. I actually thought it was a good practice.

This was the first year I've gone there probably as a semi-favorite. So there was a lot more attention just on my phone from my, obviously my friends and family, but people who, you know, maybe a little bit more distant friends. So I realize that for the U.S. Open I'm going to kind of have my phone down a bit more and not be so worried about making sure everyone's getting there and getting tickets and doing all these things.

Obviously the U.S. Open and majors alike always bring a lot more of that, those responsibilities. I'll probably -- I learned I probably got to keep that a bit tighter for a major. Especially on a golf course that I don't, we don't play every year. So it's going to be a lot more work.

But, yeah, I just think having that support is always a positive. So I would love for everybody to be out there. I'm just going to make sure that my attention is on the golf and my very close circle, small circle.

**Q. We'll end this on a really bad hypothetical. But do you think there's a way to equate the stress someone feels trying to stay in that top 50 next year compared with previously trying to keep your card, stay in the 125?**

MAX HOMA: There's other -- great question. This is another thing that I think is going to be a fun thing to watch. It is going to be hard. We are now playing against the best players every week. It is a major in a way or a major field every single week.

So I was talking with a player last week that, you know, in this exact moment, is not in these designated events. He had mentioned how it was nice playing the Honda knowing that Jon Rahm is not there. That is a nice feeling right now. If Jon Rahm wasn't there in L.A. I would have clipped off my second one there and I would be a happy, happy man.

So you got to go beat these guys every week. So it's going to be hard. It's going to be stressful. It almost pre-stressful like in the off-season thinking, Dang, I got to get my stuff together. Because it's not like these other guys have very many bad weeks. You're competing against the elite every day.

Sure, you can say that the no cut, it takes some stress off of you because of, I guess, knowing you're going to get paid. But at the end of the day I don't think anybody has gotten to where they have gotten to, to be in these designated events because they focus on how much money they make. They do it because they have focused on winning and being great and excelling and making it to the top of their game.

So I think it will be a new and improved challenge. I think it's important that we all test each other against one another each week. If you don't, you will get pushed aside and have to work your way back up. So I think it will be a different kind of stress that we haven't had before, but I do think it will be stressful.

**Q. Lastly, is it fair to say we're not here today without LIV?**

MAX HOMA: Yeah, possibly. I would have hoped that we would have got here, we would have gotten here at some point. So I can't make, I don't know about that.

But, yeah, it does seem like, it does seem like the emergence of LIV forced us as players and the executives of the PGA TOUR to just look at their product. I think there are things that they have done -- they got to make something from scratch, which is a lot easier than us building something that has been around for so long that's been on the shoulders of someone like Arnold Palmer who has built a lot of what we do today.

They don't have to deal with tradition. So they got to just kind of set out a piece of paper and say, What should we do. And I think one of the things that they have that's great that this will provide now is a guaranteed product. You know who is going to be at each event.

I think that's important for fans. Especially the ones who come to the events, who are on-site. Because you know, hey, if I come to -- if I go to Mexico for Mayakoba, Dustin Johnson will be at that golf tournament. Dustin Johnson is my favorite golfer and I want to see Dustin Johnson in person. Whereas, some other events it's, how we've done it in the past, it's tricky.

I joke that my friend Steven is a humongous Rory McIlroy

fan and I got tired of listening to, Is Rory going to play in the event? I was thinking he should know if he's going to be in an event. Just like Rory said about Tom Brady, when he turns on a Buc's game he knows he's going to get to watch Tom Brady play football.

So I don't think we would be here this soon without LIV, but I would hope at some point we would have looked at this and said, Hey, there might be a better way to do it.

**Q. I've heard you talk quite a bit about the work you've done with Mark recently, physically and mentally some of the dividends that's paid. I'm wondering if you have a primary swing thought and if you do what is it?**

MAX HOMA: Rhythm to me has always been a pretty obvious focus, especially when I'm playing in a competition. It's hard to have a lot of swing thoughts that are super technical. That one is -- for me, when I get quick in my transition, a lot of things go wrong real fast. When I stay patient and stay kind of within my pacing of my swing I tend to improve the way my body moves and where the club goes. So we work on little things here and there, but that one seems to be the constant.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Max, we appreciate your time, thanks for an engaging press conference and good luck this week.

MAX HOMA: Thank you. Take care, everyone.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports