

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Will Zalatoris

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Will Zalatoris to the interview room here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Will, making your fourth start here at Bay Hill this week. Finished runner-up at the Genesis Invitational in your last start, which helped get you into this event through the Aon Next 10. Just a couple thoughts on being able to play your way in and getting your season off on a pretty good start here.

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I would say, so far, the body feels ahead of schedule. I'm slowly seeing speed come back. Riviera, that's a place that I absolutely love, so it was nice to get a good week under my belt, especially that early on in the season. Yeah, this event means a lot to me, obviously being on the Arnold Palmer Scholarship at Wake Forest. This is a pretty tough venue in general, and normally it's green on Thursday and brown by Sunday, and it only gets harder and harder as the week goes on. So I'm looking forward to the test.

THE MODERATOR: Having three years under your belt here, what is it about this golf course -- finished top 10 in 2021 -- what are some of the things that you're focused on while you're out there?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it's just hard and it just gets harder as the week goes on it's borderline, by Sunday it's major championship toughness. Just get out of there with pars and be happy. Even if you make a couple bogeys, they're not going to kill you, but doubles are going to kill you by the weekend.

THE MODERATOR: With that, we'll open it up for questions.

Q. You touched on it there, but I know you have a connection with Arnold Palmer, having been both been Wake Forest guys, and you getting that scholarship. What does that connection mean to you to be tied with him and then play in his tournament here?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I always tell people that when I got offered the Arnold Palmer Scholarship to go to Wake

Forest that my decision was kind of made for me at that point. I had a pretty fun dinner on Sunday with Amy Saunders and Peter Jacobsen and Jerry Pate, and it was just fun reminiscing and hearing some of the stories from those guys -- they're reminiscing, I, unfortunately, never got to meet him. I got a signed letter from him, once I accepted his scholarship. Just hearing some of the stories about how he carried himself, and obviously with everything that's gone on in the golf climate, there are a lot of discussions about that, and just, it's kind of a guy that I feel like I've heard stories about him since over the last 10 years since I've taken his scholarship, but there's still stories that I've never heard and we're still laughing.

Q. What does this tournament mean to you having that connection but being able to play in the King's tournament?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, it's a beast of a golf course, for one. We always joke about how the week gets harder and harder. We always, kind of by Sunday, everyone's always kind of joking about how Arnie's smiling from heaven watching the carnage. Yeah, it means a lot to me. Even though I never got to meet him, the guy's meant a lot to me personally and my career and led me to Wake Forest. And even though it's been a lot of -- the guy's meant a lot to my career -- I met my wife at Wake Forest. So it's just kind of a fun week to come here and spend some time with Amy and the family.

Q. When you said you were ahead of schedule with your, I guess, the physical aspect of your comeback, what does that look like? What's that mean?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I think in terms of how I'm able to practice and be able to recover faster, I came in with really no expectations this year, in terms of my body. Because I had never gone through an eight-month recovery, but I knew that I felt better. I just didn't want to jump the gun and say, Take the reins off, and get back to my old ways of practice. So my speed is slowly coming back. Kind of the analogy that I've used is that I keep thinking that my speed is back to a hundred percent, but then all of a sudden it keeps creeping up a little bit more and more and more. So, so far, so good.



The changes feel great. I haven't really had -- I haven't had any flare ups or anything like that, so I feel awesome.

Q. What do you do, say after a practice session or a round of golf, that you wouldn't have done in the past? What's different about recovery or exercise or whatever?

WILL ZALATORIS: Sure. Yeah, I think the post-round stuff, I've been working with the guys over at Kinetic Chain in Dallas, and they're pretty much sending, whether it's Landon or Spencer or Austin, they're coming every week. We're doing dry needling, which is a new thing for me, during the weeks. That's really helped a lot. I really think that that's part of the reason why I feel ahead of schedule. Constant ice baths, a lot of ELDOA, which is a stretching protocol that I've been doing.

So, I mean, in general I think it's kind of -- like, instead of sitting, after a day's over, and maybe having an ice bath and doing a few stretches, now it's actually more of, let's actually try to feel better for tomorrow.

Q. Want to talk some numbers with you. Nine PGA TOUR events this year. Of the nine winners, I'm going to take Nick Dunlap out, because he was outside the top 4,000 in the World Ranking, but of the other eight winners, the average World Ranking of that winner is 73. What does that say about where competition is at the PGA TOUR right now?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, the competition is obviously very stiff, there's no question about it. We've had quite a few first-time winners on TOUR this year. You've got some tenured guys that are contending week in, week out. The official World Golf Ranking is what it is right now.

I also think that the competition that we have is pretty stiff. It's really good to see guys like Nick especially come up, and it just shows you the golf climate that we're in, with kids in college coming up and playing that great. I think that when you look at over the last few years and seeing the first-time winners and playing as well as they have, I think that's something that I'm more excited about, because on any given week you can see someone just pop off a win.

Q. I want to follow-up on what you hinted at, in regards to the World Golf Ranking rankings. How viable is that measurement?

WILL ZALATORIS: You know, it kind of is what it is. You see what Joaquin's done this year, and he's 73rd in the world. I'm not a guy who is on the policy board or involved

with those rankings, but the guy's played some really good golf. I think, you know, having to get a special exemption from Augusta, you know, it's just, there's some really good players, and there's some guys that have gone around the world and played really good golf and I think that's something that, once we get to the majors, it will be really fun to have us all back together. But, I know that that's kind of the utopian goal for all of us right now is to have the best players in the world play week in, week out.

I love this week in general, because we got the best players on the PGA TOUR, and we've got guys that obviously really care about it, but I also think we'll see what happens going forward. I don't have the fix for it. I know some guys have voiced their opinions on it. I like staying out of that stuff. Right now, it's in an interesting position, I'll leave it at that.

Q. I know the signature events are still kind of new, but do they feel different to you at all?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, definitely. 70 guys in the field, it feels like, I mean, I came out yesterday to practice for a couple hours and it feels like no one's here. Just in terms of the, you're used to having the 120, 130, whatever it is, and, you know, so it's bizarre, actually, a little bit, on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. But then, once you get to Thursday, it's just so ultra competitive, and I love that feeling of it. Yeah, having 50 less guys, there's no question about it, that's a different feel, for sure. Especially when these events that I've played for the last three, four years, you're used to having a pretty large amount of players. But I've enjoyed it so far. I've only played in one, but it's kind of fun when you walk up and everybody you see is pretty much a top player.

Q. Does it feel bigger? I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but how would you characterize it, I guess?

WILL ZALATORIS: It doesn't feel bigger, I think it's just -- I wish I could give you a better answer than just different. You look at the 70 guys in the field, you probably could list off, off the top of your head, if you were to just take a regular golf fan, they could probably guess 65 out of the 70. And if you had the 120, they would still probably get 65 out of the 120. But that's just, it is what it is. So it's a different feel. Like, you know, I'm going to go play the back nine here in a little bit, and normally we're not allowed to play the back nine after 8:30, but there's only 70 guys this week, so, you know, that's good.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Will, thanks for the time, best of luck this week.

