

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Kurt Kitayama

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome the winner of the 2023 Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard, Kurt Kitayama, to the interview room. Welcome back. If we can get you to take us back to 2023 and your win here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational.

KURT KITAYAMA: Yeah, thank you for having me back. It's been a crazy year, and I'm happy to be back, for sure. A lot of good memories. Hopefully, be able to use those down the stretch again.

THE MODERATOR: What is it that you remember about that final round and winning here at Bay Hill?

KURT KITAYAMA: Just kind of, like, you know the course is playing really tough, and staying patient all the way through the round. Even when I made that triple, knowing that I still was playing good, and even though I made that triple, I ended up still having a chance to win at the end. That putt on 17 was really big. That's kind of one of my biggest memories, I think.

THE MODERATOR: You're coming in, this is your sixth start of the year. You had your best finish at the WM Phoenix Open. You finished tied for 8th there. Just talk a little bit about your season so far.

KURT KITAYAMA: Overall, I'm pretty happy with how I started. I feel like in the past couple years I have had kind of a slow start, it kind of takes me a little while to get going, so to have a top 10 early, pretty happy with that.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Doing a story on the volunteers here. Some of them come back for decades. Wondering what kind of interaction you've had with the volunteers, and how you see them help make this tournament special?

KURT KITAYAMA: Yeah, the volunteers help run this event really well. I think what's cool about this week is they kind of remember you. Because, every week, I think most

of the volunteers are, they have been there for years, and coming back this week it feels like everyone knows you, so it's really cool.

Q. You've made every cut this year. Seems like your results are more consistent. Curious what you worked on with Chris Como to maybe become more consistent?

KURT KITAYAMA: Yeah, that was the biggest goal changing coaches was to not have such an up-and-down year. That's why like even though those finishes I made the cut haven't been great, but at least making the cut and having some good rounds in there the first couple rounds, has been a really big positive. So, yeah, just trying to find some more consistency this year.

Q. What was it before you started working with him that sort of made you more volatile where you missed cuts, or when you contended you really contended and challenged some really big names?

KURT KITAYAMA: I think when my swing got off I wasn't really sure what I was doing, what I could do to get it back into form. When it was on, it was on, and I didn't have to really think about it. So, now it seems like when it gets off it's not as far off, and I'm starting to understand my swing a little more, a little better, to get it back to, you know, more, I guess, playability. Eliminate the big misses.

Q. What has the red cardigan meant to you this past year and how important is it to you to add another red cardigan to your wardrobe?

KURT KITAYAMA: Yeah, it means a lot, because my first PGA TOUR win and coming here is really special. One thing that was really cool is when my mom visited in Vegas, and I was like, Oh, yeah, here's the cardigan. And I, like, turned around, and the next thing you know she's wearing it, and she's all smiling. That was a really cool moment.

Q. How much did winning this tournament raise your visibility with the public and in the year since then what's the strangest place you've been recognized?



KURT KITAYAMA: Yeah, definitely shot me up a lot, winning this event. Especially being a signature event, being big, all the best players playing. I don't know, it's just random. Sometimes it's at an airport, or walking through, since I'm in Vegas, walking through the casino, going to dinner, just like randomly it's like, Oh, it's Kurt Kitayama, so that's pretty cool.

Q. Last week Min Woo talked about your guys' relationship living together. Curious how that came about, about you renting out a room for him.

KURT KITAYAMA: Yeah, I've known him since the European Tour, and we just kind of developed a really good relationship. We would have weeks off where, instead of going to Australia, he would come to Vegas. We had a lot of good times. He figured Vegas was going to be a good spot for him. Now that he has a TOUR card, he wanted to find a base, and I had a room open for him (laughing).

Q. We see Min Woo, what he's like on the course, we see what he's like on social media, but as a guy that's around him, not in those public settings, is that the persona he gives off at home or what's he like?

KURT KITAYAMA: Yeah, he's a goofball, like, on camera and off camera, he's the same guy. He's a lot of fun to be around.

Q. Anything in specific in the swing you can kind of delve into of what's different?

KURT KITAYAMA: I would say one of the biggest things is my back swing, trying to get it more depth, along with a more bowed wrist. That's kind of been the biggest thing.

Q. When a guy wins a tournament we tend to focus on that final round. Can you look back on the first three rounds last year, and can you possibly pick out a shot or a moment that maybe was instrumental in leading to what happened on Sunday?

KURT KITAYAMA: In the first three rounds?

Q. In the first three rounds, yeah.

KURT KITAYAMA: I think in the third round, I was kind of just hanging in there, I was 1-over, and to come down and birdie 18 to get it back to even, I think that was a big putt I made there.

Q. What's something Min Woo does that annoys you as a roommate?

KURT KITAYAMA: (Laughing). Well, we play video games quite a bit. He's probably one of the best out here at Call of Duty, so when we play with him, if we're not holding our own, he's yelling at us, because he thinks we're like supposed to be like the streamers he plays with in dominating a game. But that's probably one of the things.

Q. Do you play with any other TOUR players or just the two of you?

KURT KITAYAMA: A couple of 'em, yeah. I play with Collin and David Lipsky and Justin Suh a decent amount in Vegas. I think a lot of guys out here play more than you think.

THE MODERATOR: Well, Kurt, thank you for your time, best of luck this week.

KURT KITAYAMA: Thank you.

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