

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Sam Saunders

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Sam, thank you for joining us. Obviously it's a nice week for you, always coming back to this event, unfortunately not playing this week, but if you can tell us kind of your thoughts and feelings of how special this event is for you.

SAM SAUNDERS: It's incredible. It's so good to be back here every year. I don't live at Bay Hill anymore, I haven't lived here in 10 years, but every time I come back here it just feels like home. It's never going to change.

Despite all of the circumstances we're under right now, to be able to put together such a good field and have all these guys come and play this tournament, not only because it's a great golf course, it's a great event, but I feel like for a large number of them it's out of respect to what my granddad was able to do to provide them all with the careers we have been able to have today.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Can you talk about your injury a little bit.

SAM SAUNDERS: Yeah, I've answered this question about a hundred times this week so far. I see all -- it's great to come see all my friends and the first thing, Oh, my gosh, what did you do. Because I haven't really told a ton of people.

But I broke my tibia skiing seven weeks ago now. It was a -- if there's such a thing as a good break, it was a good break. It didn't tear any ligaments and I will be back to playing in probably about a month now. I think I'll be cleared to play golf on March 23rd.

So recovery's gone really well and as unlucky of an accident as it was, because I've been skiing my whole life, it was lucky in the sense that it wasn't a lot worse. So it's been a weird progression for me with a collar bone in 2019 and all the events of COVID and now this, but if I needed any more fuel to my fire to come back and really want to get back out on the PGA TOUR and play where I'm supposed to, it's all there for me now.

Q. Obviously disappointing not to be able to play this week?

SAM SAUNDERS: It is. It's extremely disappointing. But the last few years since I've kind of taken on this new role, since my grandfather passed, have been tough, trying to balance playing and fulfilling this media role and all the different commitments I have. It's nice in a way to be able to focus this week and really observe everything that's happening from a different perspective and talk to all the players, get their feedback and have a singular focus on trying to make sure this event is continuing to be the best that it can and look to the future of what we're doing.

Q. What does this tournament mean to you and your family?

SAM SAUNDERS: It means the world. My grandfather, he meant so much to so many people, but he set something up here that was really unique. The legacy, to carry it on is, you know, what my mother, Amy Saunders, has done, the amount of time and work and energy that she has put into it over the last 10, 15 years. People don't know and they don't understand the commitment that she's made. It's not that easy. There are a lot of moving parts here.

And there's just -- he left us such a wonderful thing and to be able to, for me personally to be able to see the amount of work that my mother's put into it and our family has been able to carry this thing on and keep it going and honestly I can tell you the future is really bright. I mean they have got -- a lot of things can change and I think people were wondering, will the tournament still be here, will Bay Hill be successful -- and the commitment has been there to really keep things going in the right direction and I'm incredibly excited for people to start finding out about kind of the future, master plan here at Bay Hill.

And while we want to keep things going in the right direction, the character and the integrity that Bay Hill has will always be the same.

Q. There's some unique things around this golf course. No hats in the clubhouse, things that your



grandfather lived his life by. How unique is it in his passing that everybody still honors the way he ran this tournament?

SAM SAUNDERS: I think it's incredibly unique especially in today's times. It's always a changing world but sometimes it's really good to reflect back on how people who have been around this world a lot longer than we have and how they did things and like I said character, integrity, manners, the idea that hard work is really the only way to get things done. He's a great example for all of us. His generation was a good example for all of us.

So I'm just proud to be able to be a part of it and to see all these young guys, all these players out here really pay attention and admire what he did and kind of take some notes from it.

Q. A lot of the young guys in this field never saw your grandfather play golf. What do you think his impact is on this current generation of golfers, even though it's so far removed from them?

SAM SAUNDERS: Well I would like to think that what my granddad did 50 plus years ago, in putting golf on television, it set up the career of my generation, maybe guys a little older than me, but really it set Tiger up to be able to do what he was able to do. And that's who these young guys are now looking to. They're looking to Tiger. You saw Collin's remarks last week after his win. And he obviously set the tone for this new young generation, but I think for them to remember that Arnold Palmer kind of started it -- and I'm not saying that as his grandson, I'm saying that is a professional golfer. I recognize that. We wouldn't be doing what we're doing right now were it not for his bringing the game to television and making it popular, making it a game for everyone.

So he started it, Tiger has continued it and so many great players along the way have added to that. So it's great to see the young guys still recognize what he did, even though -- and this tournament's a great reminder of that. The pictures on the walls, the stories in the locker room, all the things that these guys get to see, it helps them continue to remember that what happened a long time ago was really important for their success.

Q. Would you like to see more of the top-25 here?

SAM SAUNDERS: Yes, obviously. To be frank, pretty tough spot in the schedule, being between the WGC and THE PLAYERS Championship. So I look at guys like Rory being here, Bryson -- it's tough to play -- I've played on TOUR -- three events in a row is a lot. So to play a WGC and then API and then the PLAYERS, it's, a lot of guys

take a week off before a big event. And to see the commitment of those 12 guys that are here, it means the world to me. It means -- I think it's important that guys come and play out of respect, just to what my granddad did, and hopefully we can find ourselves in a better spot on the schedule next year, because it's tough. And I wouldn't criticize anyone for not being able to make it, I get it, it's tough to play all of the tournaments, there's so many important ones, there's so many big ones. But Mr. Nicklaus's event, our event here, I think they're right up there with any of them.

Q. This place looks phenomenal. Have you gotten feedback already from your fellow TOUR professionals?

SAM SAUNDERS: Yeah, that's the other thing. I mean, we have -- I think over the past five, six years, we have provided one of the most quality consistent golf courses on the PGA TOUR. I mean I really do believe that. Chris Flynn, our head superintendent, our entire staff here, we have so many good people and it's a well-oiled machine at this point. There are not a lot of hiccups throughout the year.

Not only do we have a great event, a great golf course for this week, quality, the best players are going to be rewarded here, the guys who execute the shots that they need to. But because of the practices and what we have been able to, the strides we have been able to make over the last few years, we have got a great product year round for our members, for lodge guests. And that's the cool thing about Bay Hill, anybody can come play here and it's not good just this one week of the year, it's good almost year round now. And that's something that I'm as proud of that as anything, because I love that people can come here and experience Bay Hill as the TOUR pros do.

Q. What's the winning score this week?

SAM SAUNDERS: Depends on the wind. If we get some of that rain and it softens up a little bit, they might be able to get after it a little bit more. But the rough is up, as always. I don't think we're going to have what we had last year, where we had just that crazy north wind, crazy firm, fast dry conditions and Tyrrell just out battled everyone that week. I think if it's soft we could see somebody go shoot 15, 16-under par. So I think that's probably a spot where I'm looking this week.

Q. What's it like growing up having your grandfather being an international icon in a sport and really transcend the sport of golf. What was it like growing up?



SAM SAUNDERS: He was awesome. I didn't see him that way or treat him that way or think of myself as being somebody special, still don't today, just a person like everyone else. Because that's how he was. He was just a guy living in the world, working hard, trying to be successful and treat people the right way.

So it's neat to see that he was this international icon and one of the most famous individuals arguably of all time in sports, in TV, any of it. But what's even cooler is just how normal of a person he was. They all are. That's the thing. At the end of the day they're all just people that want to be treated like everyone else.

Q. What do you feel you're hoping for as your role kind of as tournament host?

SAM SAUNDERS: Just sending the message to our sponsors, to our fans, to our players that we appreciate them being here, their support means the world, but we're really excited about the future and we're really working hard here -- and I say "we're", I just get to speak on behalf of all the people here who really put in the hard work. I'm so fortunate to have this role, I don't have much to do with it, we have got so many great people here making great decisions, time, money, commitment to making Bay Hill just one of the coolest experiences you can possibly go to.

And honestly, carrying on the legacy of Arnold Palmer, but making it accessible. I mean he had so many wonderful artifacts and memorabilia and that's something that is really going to be exciting for people to see in the future what we're going to do here. Because not only will they be able to come and play world-class golf course, stay in an incredible lodge here that has a homey feel, I mean it feels like you're staying at a bed and breakfast that's just really nice, but they will believe able to go see, touch and experience his life. Not just trophies, but golf clubs, shoes, custom lighters, all the things that he saved that show the real full story of Arnold Palmer, not just the wins and the trophies. And honestly, not, you know, the human side of him as well. So it's not just about him though, it's really, I look at it as a history of golf here that we're going to provide at some point.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

SAM SAUNDERS: All right. You bet.

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