

Arnold Palmer Invitational

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Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Jordan Spieth

Press Conference



JACK RYAN: We would like to welcome Jordan Spieth to the interview room here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Jordan is making his first start at the event and coming off three consecutive top-15s on the PGA TOUR.

So Jordan, if we could just get an opening comment from you on playing this week and what went into the decision to add this to your schedule this year.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I didn't, I was really close but didn't quite get in last week and wanted to kind of keep the momentum going, keep playing. And I've never played here and I haven't played Honda before and both courses, when I've watched over the years, I love Bermuda, I love windy conditions, difficult golf courses and they just, because of the West Coast Swing into the World Golf Championships and then into the Texas events, into the Masters, it's just, you got to take a week off here or there sometimes.

And this year, without being in last week, I thought this week would be a really good opportunity to play a difficult golf course. And honestly, I haven't had much success at THE PLAYERS Championship, so being able to get some reps and continue trying to work hard on the game leading into THE PLAYERS could really help next week as well.

So I saw it as kind of a win-win. It was nice to actually probably have a break after a four-week stretch on the West Coast and then work our way now into this spring stretch that leads into THE PLAYERS and then into Augusta.

JACK RYAN: And that momentum you mentioned, those three consecutive top-15, how do you feel about the state of your game at this point?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I feel good. I feel excited to go work on what I'm working on and continue to try and fine tune it and just get shots here that, try and have kind of every tool in the tool box. And I had kind of been working with less than full and starting to open up and really get a

lot of shots back that I can trust in tournament play and just feel a lot more comfortable on the golf course, settling into rounds, and getting more comfortable in contention, and ideally putting myself in position on Saturdays and Sundays.

So I'm looking to try and do the same thing here, just be patient on a very difficult golf course, try and learn it as best I can, yesterday, Monday, and then today in the pro-am. And it's a little tricky because it seems like a course where course knowledge can go a long way, given the difficulty of it and especially on and around the greens.

So I'll try and do a crash course and that hasn't been difficult for me. It's been a long time since I've played a new event, but it's been something I've really enjoyed trying to learn how to kind of make it like I've played it eight times before.

JACK RYAN: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. How much better did it feel starting work last week when you went back to the range and started to work again, as opposed to like four, five months ago?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, a lot better. I didn't feel rushed to try and get out and grind. I was able to really take a couple days of rest without itching like I had to go back and find something. Instead, I knew what I needed to do, knew what I needed to continue to work on, but I needed to go about the right process and rest and recovery, which is as or more important than anything else. So I just kind of gradually worked my way into the week and, which felt really nice. I felt like I got better recovery, felt like I got in my routine a little bit easier and didn't try and overwork in an off week.

Q. When you're playing a course this week where you're trying to learn things about the golf course, will that take some of your mind off of what you're trying to do as far as your swing? And you said that you thought about your swing too many times, does this help in any way to get through that?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think I'm in a pretty good balance right



now where I'm still trying to kind of hit the spots I need to try and hit and it's more difficult than I want it to be, but able to do it at a successful enough level to find fairway, find greens, and shoot some good scores.

So I think it's still a balancing act and on a new golf course it's, especially a course like this, with a lot of risk reward and a lot of different ways to play holes and such a premium on hitting the ball in the fairway to be able to hold greens, I think you have really no choice but to just pick a shot, trust what you're doing and if you pull it off you're going to be in business and if you don't, then that's an execution error and you move on. I think if I can kind of just go about it really patiently this week, I think I'll find that kind of blend that I still kind of need right now.

Q. I wasn't listening very clearly. Did you say, what did you say about Honda? Was the Honda reference picking this or the other or were you planning on it?

JORDAN SPIETH: No, I was just mentioning two tournaments, two of maybe the only tournaments on the PGA TOUR schedule that I haven't played before. So I was just, I was referencing the Florida swing, the similarities between this week and that week in scoring, in tournaments that I would like to play normally if the schedule weren't the way it was and I didn't play events in Texas leading up to the Masters and the West Coast and all that. So I was just referencing those.

And -- I'm not sure, I mean, I'm kind of out here definitely planning on this week and next week and then I've just got to pick a plan from there based on how I'm feeling and what I want the, obviously, the plan to be going into the Masters.

Q. Secondly, when you consider where we are right now in terms of where we were a year ago, pandemic-related, and the role that you play and the information you know, etcetera, what surprises you and what doesn't about where golf is right now?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think there's a lot more that surprises me than what doesn't. If we go back to PLAYERS, call it Friday, after it was cancelled --

Q. Black Friday.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah. I think, I mean there's a lot that surprises me. I know after being on those calls there was a lot of concern about whether we would be able to play golf in 2020 and beyond. And the plans that were set in place, the safety measures, they got the players but also the staff and the tournaments to feel comfortable coming out and taking what risk there was and is to bring golf back

was significant and certainly can't be overlooked by all the people involved in allowing it to happen and making it happen.

I think personally when I look back, I just, I give a lot of props to Jay Monahan for the work that he put in. And a lot of times it's a little, it's -- it's easier to see how good a leader is when you're in tough times than when you're in good times, and I thought that, when I look back, I mean, if I could have had anymore respect for Jay Monahan, I think I speak for most of the players in saying that this last year has proved that we have phenomenal leadership, and I think clearly everybody, there was a hesitation with a couple players as we came back to golf and then it seems like everybody has really embraced the roles now as we start to almost work our way back towards normal, towards normalcy at these events with allowing fans this week, next week. And certainly that will be kind of the next stage to see how that works.

But there's not much that -- I'm surprised with a lot of it, with how successful June of last year until now has been with the PGA TOUR.

Q. You've played in the Byron Nelson, you've played in Jack's event a lot, what do these events that are attached to legends to the game mean to you?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I mean, I would have loved to have played in this event every year, as I explained earlier, just unfortunately, and that's the same case with other people with the Byron Nelson or even Jack's event.

But I don't, it goes without explaining how important Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, Byron Nelson, Ben Hogan, now Tiger Woods hosting an event, are to where the game is now, where it's come from, and where it's going forward. I think -- all you want to do is just give a big thank you to these players. Obviously, with Arnie passing, but anytime you see Jack or Tiger, you just want to say thank you for continuing to boost this sport and at a professional level further and further and allowing us the opportunities that we have.

Being around here, I'm going to go look through Arnold's office for the first time after this, which will be really neat for me. I was very fortunate to be able to meet and spend a little bit of time with Arnold Palmer before he passed, and certainly was a role model and should be for all professional golfers in the way that, not only he kind of taught us how to be our own brand and be able to go out and seek -- he was the first one to really go out and seek endorsements and kind of look at himself as a brand, but also the way he treated people and the way that he was, he had Arnie's Army and the way that he was involved, and



he knew he was an entertainer and lived it to its fullest while still being a fierce competitor.

I mean, if you're speaking to Arnie specifically, that's what I think of. And it's phenomenal that we continue to have tournaments that honor these legends.

Q. What do you recall of the interactions? You hosted his last Champion's Dinner, I believe.

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I mean, prior to that, I remember my first Masters I went to a Wednesday little cocktail reception on the back of the clubhouse and I remember in a conversation with Jack and Arnie, and I was 20 years old at the time, and I just remember sitting there, like, trying to listen in, but also just being so taken back at the, at where I was and what was happening, not only location-wise where I was, but also who was there and what they were saying.

And then at the Champion's Dinner, he wasn't doing great and everybody going around telling Arnold Palmer stories was, it was an incredible room to be in. Obviously we would have loved another hundred years with him. But I thought that that was a really special moment for him at a place that he loved and I was just glad to be there.

Q. There's something about your golf game and your personality that gets people really engaged in what you're doing, caddies, fellow players, analysts on TV, reporters, everybody. I'm wondering, what do you do with all that chatter? Do you block it out? Do you let it come in? How do you handle that?

JORDAN SPIETH: I think I've done a little bit of everything. I've probably let it in at times more than I should. I think it's just part of kind of growing up out here and I feel confident at where I'm at now. I feel really good about plans going forward and I feel good about how to handle some of that extra noise that, you know, it's hard to kind of prepare at it 21, 22, 23 years old, and not that it's easier at 27, but just having -- it's almost like when you're in contention quite a few times you start to get a little more comfortable in that situation.

I mean, when you get good or bad banter or noise enough times, you start to almost kind of like, all right, this is just what's going to happen and what's my approach to stay grounded, move forward, and set goals and really just trust your team and have that be the noise that you listen to.

So I feel good about that. I mean, as much as 90 percent of it is all good and I do love the crowd support that I receive at events and stuff like that, I think it's still important to be as kind of shut off to the noise, block the noise as possible to free yourself up and just to be a kid out playing,

you know? You didn't have any of that noise when you were 14, 15, 16 years old, learning to fall in love with the game. So just try and be that kid as often as possible.

Q. We're all so bombarded with images these days. What can you actually do to block that out?

JORDAN SPIETH: Well, you can, I mean, you just have to, you have to actively -- I have to actively a lot of times block it out. Avoid going to places where there's noise. I mean, when you're at tournaments or you're asked questions in an interview room or there's crowds that are yelling stuff, I mean, it's unavoidable and so you just have to kind of have ways to -- and I'm talking good and bad, right? Because the more you kind of let your head get blown up, the more kind of emotionally you can take some hits as well, versus just kind of remaining as neutral as possible and understanding that stuff's going to come in from every which way and just learning how to be very levelheaded and almost nonreactive to things.

It is an active thing that I have certainly sought help for and talked to a lot of guys about, but also you kind of got to learn how to do it your own way too.

Q. This question's a little off topic. More recreational golfers are coming into the game from nontraditional venues, like Topgolf, non-green grass ways, or they just come to the golf course and they don't want to keep score. They just want to hang out, play music. What's your thought on that? Is that good for golf?

JORDAN SPIETH: Absolutely. I think it's great. The fact that rounds were up this last year is huge. Ratings staying pretty flat, that just show that there are golfers coming in that don't necessarily love -- you're not boosting, everybody's not boosting into, like we would like, into necessarily watching professional golf like they watch football on Sunday.

But the fact that more people are coming into golf in general is great, whatever they want to do. I mean, I've got a number of friends who five years ago hardly played any golf, I mean, high school, college friends, that now days are trying to get out two, three times a week to get out and play. And whether it's just a match with each other, they don't keep their actual score or they're just going out to play music and have a few beers or whatever it is, they love it.

And then they start to kind of inch their way in and get involved and ask questions and stories about professional golf. So it's almost like it will start to feed in, because when you grow up like playing basketball, right, then all of a sudden you're like, oh, I kind of want to see what it's like,

what the best are doing with it, right?

And so I feel like it ends up kind of being a little bit of a waterfall affect. I mean, people, whether they want to watch an entire Sunday round or they just want to see some social, whether it's trick shots or whatever it may be, I mean they're getting more involved in the sport, and for golf, I don't see how that's a bad thing.

Q. When you were younger did you go to Topgolf? Did you do any of those kind of things?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, I used to go, but I wouldn't hit any. I would just watch friends. I would just kind of sit on the couch and it was entertainment for me to watch them try and hit. I would hit a couple shots, but like I don't, I don't remember ever playing an entire game. But it was almost, it was one of the more fun things that we would do. I remember going in high school quite a few times, and I've gone since, normally with friends who just, they're trying to play for the first time and it's such a fun way to go try and do it, versus going to the range and just getting frustrated, chunking it off grass or whatever. I mean, you put the ball on a tee, they got food and drinks and TV's on and music, and I mean, it's just, it's an unbelievable business plan that's clearly worked and even for us professionals, I mean, it's wildly entertaining for us too.

Q. As you obviously, the things you've been working on have been coming around and showing in the results right now, but you've been trying to find it for a while and have been asked a lot of questions about that. Rickie is a friend of yours, I know, is kind of in the midst of that right now and on the outside looking in at the Masters, which maybe would make him press a little bit to try to get back into the rankings. What are the biggest challenges when you're going through that to try to stay positive, trust what you're working on, and do you talk to a friend like Rickie or I mean, I know golf's such a positive thing, are you trying to think about positive things, but do you guys ever talk about your struggles at all and how to get through it?

JORDAN SPIETH: Yeah, he's a close friend and there's certainly been some similarities in trying to be the best that we can be and having that be done well and then having it go through kind of dips as well. So for him, I think, and for me too, the most difficult thing about struggling is when you've had a lot of success and therefore it's almost impossible to struggle in silence, in darkness, and get your work done in the dark. There's just going to be so much noise around and so much emphasis on results versus the true understanding of what your end goal is and how much time that can take in golf.

We saw a nonhuman in Tiger Woods be able to make massive changes quicker than what is probably realistic for just about anybody else. I think that that can sometimes hurt the quickness of jumping to conclusions to people, and so I think publicly, struggling publicly when you're somebody like Rickie, it makes it hard, so blocking out the noise is so important and sticking to what you're doing is so important and having a team around you that can tell you that.

And I've certainly -- I mean, he's a buddy of mine, this is not -- when I think about it, this is not abnormal, this is not something that other players don't go through when they're trying to make changes. It's just, it's reality and he's trying to make changes with an end goal to be more consistent and better than he ever was. And they're significant changes. So it's not going to be easy. You can't just -- these guys are too good out here. You can't just continue to compete and win while you're trying to make big changes. I think he's sticking to it, he's a very, very, very positive person and I think that's going to serve him well. He also treats people better than just about anyone I've met. So all in all he's got a lot more people in his corner than are not and that believe in him and he believes in himself and as long as he continues down that path he's going to be very successful.

Q. It was about a year ago at this tournament that Tyrrell Hatton started emerging as one of the top players in the world. I'm just curious what impresses you about his game.

JORDAN SPIETH: You know, I think I actually see like similarities to when, when I feel like I'm playing well, you know, it's not going to be the longest, it's not going to be like the prettiest, necessarily, way to do it, but the guy's going to compete and he's going to get the ball in the hole faster than the other people and that's really the job.

So I mean he's a very -- he's a good driver of the golf ball, he's very -- every part of his game is solid. I don't know his game extremely well, I played him in the Ryder Cup last year, I don't watch a ton of golf, so I actually don't know -- but he's obviously able to win just about anywhere in the world and he's proven that now. But he's just a competitor. I mean, it's hard to kind of, that just comes naturally to people and he's one of those guys that possesses that kind of, that inner confidence and that competitiveness that, if things get a little off, he's going to save par. But when things are on, he's going to continue to ride that momentum. And I think just the fact that kind of the overall state of his game, he kind of does everything well and then when something, when he's doing something really well, he's in contention or wins.

Q. Do you recognize yourself a little bit in the way he also shows his emotions a lot, you kind of know how he's doing?

JORDAN SPIETH: Not maybe in the same way, but, yeah, I mean, he's someone that you can tell wants it really badly out there. And certainly -- I mean, I wouldn't consider our personalities to be matching, but in that way, in how bad you want it when you're out there, regardless if there's a microphone or a camera on you -- I mean, it's the same thing as high school or college for me, I'm going to fist pump when it's a big putt, I'm just really involved in the round and it's just, I guess, kind of just having your personality for sure.

JACK RYAN: All right, Jordan, thank you. We appreciate your time.

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