

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Will Zalatoris

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. We will get things started. We are joined here with Rookie of the Year Will Zalatoris. Thanks for joining us here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard.

Want to get some opening comments and thoughts about this tournament and the relation with Arnold Palmer, as being Rookie of the Year and an alum from Wake Forest, how special this week is.

WILL ZALATORIS: It's a huge honor. I was actually telling the story this morning that Coach Haas came up to me in a junior event saying he was going to offer me the AP, which at the time I was in the middle of doing SATs and AP credits for class, and I had no idea what he was talking about. I was thinking, Coach, I really appreciate that, but I don't know if an academic scholarship is up my alley. He said, no, it's the Arnold Palmer scholarship, you big dummy.

I got a letter from him congratulating me on winning the U.S. Junior and obviously accepting the scholarship. I've got that framed at my parents' house. It was actually pretty cool. Amy Saunders actually wrote me a letter as well after the Masters last year. It was pretty cool to see that tradition passed down in the family.

Obviously being Rookie of the Year was a huge honor, but being on his scholarship as well at Wake Forest -- I always tell people, when you get offered the Arnold Palmer scholarship to go play golf, I think your decision on schools is kind of made for you.

THE MODERATOR: Making your second start here and your debut in the top ten, how does your game feel entering the week?

WILL ZALATORIS: It's feeling pretty good. I would have loved to come back and play after Torrey, but unfortunately, COVID hit me. I've been feeling really good. Game's in a pretty good spot. Really the prep for the Masters starts now.

Getting ready in terms of hitting some more draws off the tee. I've been doing a lot of practice on some big sloping putts. It's nice to be playing a difficult golf course -- really the next three events I'm going to play leading up to Augusta are some pretty tough golf courses.

Obviously, the Match Play is pretty hypercompetitive, but when you have Sawgrass next week and obviously here, you can't really fake your way around this golf course.

Q. Will, playing off of what you just said about not being able to fake your way, Arnold Palmer is known for trying to create a severe test for players. What's it like out there? I saw someone hit it out of the rough the other day and could barely get it out.

WILL ZALATORIS: The rough is as lush as it's been. The greens tend to brown out by Sunday. The part that's funny about this place is it doesn't look that intimidating in terms of the shots that you hit, but one little mistake or one mis-hit, and you're fighting your way to save par. That's something that really -- it's one of the fairest tests that we play out on TOUR, in my opinion, just because great shots are always rewarded, but mediocre shots, you're going to have to scramble.

Q. Will, the tee shot at No. 6 is one that invites you to bite off as much as you can stomach. What is your comfort zone on that hole? And then what's kind of the thought process each day when you get there as to how to adjust one way or the other?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, even with my distance I still probably aim 40 yards left of those bunkers. It tends to blow around here, so I think, if we end up getting a day where I get the right wind, I might try to tee one up and maybe cover the far left side of the boomerang. Probably still another 120 yards right of Bryson's line. Typically, I just try to keep it in front of me.

Honestly, the second shot, in my opinion, is way harder than the tee shot just because, now especially with the rough growing up around the green on the right side. I landed a 5-iron today that literally landed a foot over the front edge of the green and still rolled to the back edge



towards the bunker. So we know that these greens get firmer and faster as the week goes on, and you've just got to miss it in the right spot.

Q. Lanny Wadkins played golf in a different era, but on the other hand, golf is still golf. I'm wondering what you picked up from him that is still really applicable to how you play golf on TOUR today?

WILL ZALATORIS: I've been fortunate enough I went to high school with his son Tucker. Tucker's brother Travis and I played a bunch when he was playing on the Nationwide Tour at the time. Really listening to his stories through the years of his career, I've really enjoyed picking his brain, especially when it comes to golf courses like Augusta and Riviera, especially.

He's been a great mentor, and I actually picked his brain and Lee Trevino's brain, since they're both Dallas guys, on Augusta leading up to last year. Both of them had incredibly great advice, especially on No. 12, of trying to figure out the wind and seeing where certain trees are blowing. That will tell you the direction because you can't really feel it off the tee.

So there's things that I actually do in my game that I actually kind of mimic Trevino to an extent. When he hits draws, he tends to weaken his right hand, and when he hits fades, he actually weakens his left hand. His thought on that is you can be as aggressive as you want of getting the ball to shape. You don't have to feel like you're holding on to something.

But Lanny really taught me a lot and really told me a lot of great stories of guys through the years, especially his Ryder Cup stories. Most of them are actually pretty hilarious, but they're actually telling me stories of swings and match play.

Like I said, I've known him since I was about 9 or 10 years old. He's been a great mentor and a great sounding board.

Q. Do you spend a lot of time with Trevino?

WILL ZALATORIS: A decent amount. He plays out of two courses I play on in Dallas. He's not afraid to tell a few stories. I see him on the range, and he says that he hits five balls with each club and then he goes home. He tells about 10 or 15 stories to all the members on the range and might give a few lessons here or there.

It's comedy hour when I see him working on the range with Tony Romo because it's incredible. It gives me a headache watching Tony try to figure out old school golf, but Trevino, the stuff that he does even now, he's 80-plus

years old, and he still can shape the ball both ways and still get it out there.

Obviously, saw him with Tiger and Charlie at the father-son. That's just who he is.

Q. Will, it's been 11 months since that magical week at Augusta. How much do you find yourself reflecting on it, and what's the anticipation like to get back there?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I'm sure probably every day since driving out of Magnolia Lane I've thought about it in some fashion. I'm going to go back and get a few practice rounds in before, go see some of the changes that they made.

Yeah, I'm very excited to get back, but at the same time, everyone starts at even par this year. So as much as I want to go out and try to do one shot better than I did -- or I guess two shots better than I did last year, just keep doing what I'm doing and keep learning on that golf course.

The local knowledge of that place, guys having yardage books for 30 years, adding in more and more information, you've just got to keep learning.

Q. And secondly, you had a nice week here last year, if I recall. What did that do to kind of fuel you for that runway to Augusta?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, I was kind of grinding to get in the top 50. I needed to -- at the start of the year, I got a couple sponsors invites on the West Coast, parlayed a couple top tens into getting into the next week, and then was able to be top 50 into here. Then that got me into Sawgrass. I was into Match Play, and after Match Play, just barely enough to stay in the top 50 to get into Augusta.

Really the difference in that seven-week stretch, because I played seven in a row, starting off the year basically just trying to get my starts wherever I could to all of a sudden basically into any of the big tournaments that are out here. Really this first seven weeks was kind of what got me going for the year.

Q. Obviously, you went to Wake Forest, Arnold Palmer went to Wake Forest. Did you know that when you signed with Wake Forest? Coming up, what did you know about Mr. Palmer?

WILL ZALATORIS: He's our inspiration in our game. He was the gentleman of our sport. Everyone out here at this tournament this week feels his presence. Every little thing of taking your hat off in the locker room or anywhere in the clubhouse, and I'm sure I'd be getting a nice scolding for

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

this really sorry beard I've got on my face right now, which will be going away before we tee it up.

Yeah, the stories that I heard, especially from Coach Haas and from Lanny, just the epitome of a gentleman and someone who cared deeply about people and obviously loved our game as much as anyone in the world.

Things like Golf Channel, every single day we're out here, there's something that Arnold Palmer did to make this TOUR better and something he provided. Unfortunately, I never met him, but I got a letter from him, like I said, when I signed with Wake Forest. So the personal connection, even though, like I said, I never met him, still means a lot to me.

Q. You're at the point now where you're starting to play a lot of these courses for the second time. Do you still find yourself learning new things about yourself each tournament? And is there anything specific that maybe you learned about yourself after Farmers that you didn't know entering the week?

WILL ZALATORIS: I had a really good off-season. I put on 15 pounds of muscle, added some length to my driver, which was really crucial. I was really looking forward to getting back to Pebble because in some respects that's kind of the home tournament for me, being born in California and a place that I'd gone to a bunch growing up.

So I really was looking forward to that week to kind of get some vengeance. Unfortunately, I had to sit on my butt for a week and take humble pie and go back and watch the tournament. Obviously, I knew the mistakes that I made because obviously I was there. But knowing the thought process that I had and being able to kind of look on the outside-in was really beneficial.

Each week, really compared from last year to this year, it's just about getting better every week. As much as I'm probably one of the guys out here that you could put me in the top two or three of, hey, when's he going to win, when's he going to win, but my job every week is to get better, and I know the wins are going to get in the way.

Honestly, if you even want to call the failure, I guess, of not winning Torrey is going to honestly propel me to win more because I learned so much about myself.

Q. Is it hard not thinking about when that win's going to come? You saw with Scottie, it took him a couple years, and he finally gets it done. Is it hard to tell yourself that you have to do that?

WILL ZALATORIS: No. I thought last year I really forced

myself to play better. This year I've done a much better job of staying patient and trying to get better. Every week is just trying to get better with my golf game, whether it's any aspect of it. If I keep doing the day-to-day stuff like I have been and keep asking questions of how can I get better, I know I'll win -- the first win will come, and I know that, if I keep putting myself in that position, the more comfortable I'll be, and I know that I'll get one soon.

Q. You had mentioned that Trevino would say like weaken or strengthen your grip to work the ball. Is there anything else specific that he's helped you with or taught you from your time with him?

WILL ZALATORIS: Yeah, those are really the two main things that I've picked up from him. It's interesting, especially in the -- I guess I've kind of been out here for two-ish years and seeing how everyone does their own thing. They do things -- really everyone does things their own way. Like Trevino always talks about hitting the inside of the golf ball to hit a fade, and if you ask anyone else, well, you're supposed to cut across it. His whole thought on it is trying to stay down through the shot, hitting the inside of the golf ball, and then being able to clear.

So seeing how he did things -- and it's the same thing with Lanny, that he would do things his own way. Granted, they're two of probably the top ten ball strikers ever to play this game, and just seeing how they do it and how -- frankly, I'm a golf junkie. On a week off, I'll probably play five days a week, and I'll try little things here and there that I hear guys trying.

It's the same thing that I'm fortunate enough to play with Scottie Scheffler and Jordan Spieth a bunch at home. Any time Jordan's inside of 100 yards, I'm watching. I want to see how he does things. It's the same thing with Scottie. Both of those guys are some of the best players inside of a hundred yards.

For me, I'm always trying to find the next edge, if you will, and I think as long as I keep asking questions, it will always help. And Trevino's been the same way. He's asking questions about my golf game, and I'm like why are you asking me questions? I'm 25 years old, and you've been around the game a helluva lot longer than I've been alive. Like I said, those guys have been great.

THE MODERATOR: With that, that's all the questions we have. Will, thanks for taking the time to join us and look forward to following this week.

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