

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Tuesday, March 4, 2025

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Sam Saunders

Quick Quotes

SAM SAUNDERS: We're honoring 46 years, 40 years, 30 years of so many people that are integral parts of making the event happen out here. It's just amazing to see the effort that's put into it and how many people care about, not just this event, but what it means, and having that opportunity to give back and help others, and that's really the main goal of this event.

Of course we want to put on a good show, of course we want great competition, but through all that we get to make a positive impact here in Orlando and around the world.

Q. Can you talk about what this tournament meant to your grandfather?

SAM SAUNDERS: This was my grandfather's adopted home. Obviously he grew up in Latrobe and that's a very special place to him, it's a special place to us now, but Orlando became as much a home as anything. Obviously now with hospitals here bearing his name, and our family has -- I was born and raised here and it's a special place for a lot of us.

So Bay Hill -- and you know, the opportunity to have the best players in the world come to his home and see his golf course, it was a huge source of pride for him, and he loved having guys here and putting on a good show, making it a tough test for 'em, and it's so great to see how many of the players on the PGA TOUR today have adopted this same mindset that my grandfather had. They are now making the effort to give back.

We just were up in my grandfather's office presenting the Arnie Award to Justin Rose. Justin Rose is an example of a guy who is obviously a world-class player, but he's doing more than just being a good golfer, he's taking his platform to help others now. So it's great to see the impact that he had and how many young guys now are following, too.

Q. When it comes to this tournament how is your perspective as being one of the guys that played their way in, how does that help putting this all together?



SAM SAUNDERS: Honestly, over the past 15 years I just made so many good relationships. I have so many friends at the TOUR, I have so many friends in the broadcast world, so many friends just through the entire business of golf. To be able to make some of those connections for our team now and make introductions for, Hey, here's some good people, these are our good people. We have similar goals in mind, but let's do great things together. It's really been great.

Q. You said the exemptions here are highly coveted. Can you share some of the insight of what went into some of those exemptions?

SAM SAUNDERS: Yeah. So that's a long process. We started in January. There were many meetings, there was a lot of thought and consideration put into that, and it's really important. I think my granddad cared a lot about providing opportunities for the entire body of golf. There's a lot of great professionals out there, there are a lot of great characters out there, and each and every player that got an exemption here this week is someone who not only embodies the spirit of Arnold Palmer but also is just, they're great players that deserve chances to play. It's something we're incredibly proud of.

Q. Tell us, where we're standing now, this tent and what fans can experience and learn about the foundation here this week.

SAM SAUNDERS: So this is an amazing activation here. You'll get to see some really great memorabilia, some great photos. I look over here, and I want to recognize the fact that we got our friends from Cherry Hills here. Part of what we're doing through the foundation and the support that we're getting is having these incredible connections with my friends like they're here, got Jim Cohen and Tom Lee back here from Cherry Hills, and they have made the effort to support the Arnold and Winnie Palmer Foundation, and support the cause of what we're doing up at Latrobe, trying to bring Latrobe back to its glory and have it be really a huge part of the Arnold Palmer legacy.

So there's some awesome memorabilia over here and honoring that the 1960 U.S. Open that my grandfather won



at Cherry Hills, and really just kind of such a defining moment of his career. So we've got so many great connections and people like that that are willing to support the cause and enjoying the mission that we're doing is incredibly meaningful.

But there's just so much to see, and we've got our friends from Golfzon here with a great simulator. We've got friends from U.S. Kids Golf. It's a team effort, and to me the world of golf is a family, and we're all trying to do good things, we're trying to grow the game, and we're trying to make it better. That's kind of our mission here.

Q. As a former player and now involved heavily in the tournament, will you find time to go watch?

SAM SAUNDERS: Yes, I will find time to go watch. I hope so, yeah. I got to play in the pro-am yesterday, see the course, I'm still buddies with all these guys. I keep in touch, I know all of 'em, and we do a lot of storytelling and catching up. But I'll be out there and trying to see as much as I can. I've got plenty of friends in the field and look forward to seeing a great competition.

Q. Are you going to be the guy on the 18th green on Sunday to handle all of your grandfather's old duties?

SAM SAUNDERS: I'll be there. We'll see what happens on 18, but, yes, I'll be there on 18. And I very much look forward to shaking the hand of our champion this year, because whoever can bear the test this week and come out on top, they have earned a pretty important trophy and place in the history of this event.

Q. (No Microphone.)

SAM SAUNDERS: My grandfather always wanted a true test. He wanted a tough but fair test here. What I like is Bay Hill and the Arnold Palmer Invitational, Bay Hill Golf Course, it has developed its identity and we've kind of stuck with that. We're not tweaking the course, we're not making a bunch of changes. The players all know when they show up here at the beginning of the week the rough is going to be long, it's going to be challenging, the greens are going to be incredibly firm, incredibly fast.

The consistency that we have been able to create here through the hard work of Chris Flynn and our agronomy team, and really just doing what we do well and providing a consistent, tough test for the players is the identity of Bay Hill. So it's no shock to guys when they show up and they see that long rough and they see the greens are bouncing like crazy.

Q. As a former player how different is 17?

SAM SAUNDERS: Not much. In terms of playability I would say it's slightly easier. I think some people might have been concerned when they see the bunker being gone that if you miss short the ball would go in the water. We were very thoughtful about that decision because 17 is already an incredibly difficult hole. It's a long par-3. Obviously to a back right pin it's a forced carry. And if every ball were to come back into the water that would be just a little bit too brutal. So we built that slope in a way where a shot that's short will stay there. We're not shaving the bank down so that everything rolls back into the water. It just a more consistent test for the players.

Unfortunately, that bunker, the beach bunker was just a, it became a bit of a mud pit at times, and it was really hard to maintain it in a way that was consistent with the rest of the bunkers on the golf course. So a lot of thought went into that, and I think that they did an incredible job, and it's a still a very tough hole, but in no way is it more difficult now.

Q. Do you think it's being talked about among the players?

SAM SAUNDERS: Sure. Yeah. I think it's being talked about, but I think once all of the players go through and see specifically that that slope is not incredibly severe, and that the grass will, a shot will stay there, I think they're going to say, okay, that's good.

Q. Tell us about Foundation Friday and this new initiative this week and how fans can participate.

SAM SAUNDERS: Yeah, so Foundation Friday is something that's hopefully a makes a huge impact this week, and also inspires other events to jump on and do similar things. We're really going to highlight some great partnerships that we have from local companies and philanthropic efforts that are all raising money and making an effort to raise awareness, not just for the Arnold and Winnie Palmer Foundation, but just for fact that this is really the main reason we have this golf tournament, is to raise money for foundations and to make a positive impact on local communities to try to have that broad reach. We've got some great partners that we're really excited to try. We're trying to get some players involved as well, I know we're getting some players involved, which is great, and it just speaks volumes to the character that some of these guys have that they also want to participate and chip in and make that effort, because they recognize that they're so fortunate to get to play at this level and for the purses that we get to play for today, it's great when you can take that opportunity to give back and help.

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