

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Nick Dunlap

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Nick Dunlap to the interview room at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Nick, we have a tradition here of bringing in the most recent recipient of the Arnold Palmer Award, which is the award for the PGA TOUR Rookie of the Year. Obviously you did a lot to earn that award last season, but what does it mean to you to win an award that is associated with Mr. Palmer's name?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, it's remarkable. I think everything he's done for the game of golf is spectacular, and a lot of the people that have also been lucky enough to hold that trophy, it's an honor to be alongside a lot of 'em.

THE MODERATOR: You've played last year here at Bay Hill, what can you just describe the atmosphere here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational, Bay Hill, the golf course.

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, this place is hard (laughing). Especially if it continues to blow like this. No, I'm very grateful to be back here at such a neat golf course and it's always in great shape, the rough's always very, very healthy and the greens get pretty firm and quick by the end of the week. So it's always a really fun event.

THE MODERATOR: T-17 in your most recent start at the Genesis Invitational, T-10 earlier to start the year, just comments on your game, state of your game right now.

NICK DUNLAP: Trending. Still working on a couple parts of my game that need some improvement. Everything feels like it's getting better. I'm getting more comfortable. I'm seeing golf courses now for the second time, so it's not as much of a rush early in the week to learn the golf course, where I have to go. It's nice that I know where I'm going to register now, so it's a little bit more familiar.

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

Q. So Luke Clanton's got a decision to make now, he's locked up his TOUR card, about whether he's going to turn pro or return for his senior year. Jackson Koivun might soon have that same decision. Obviously you

were in a little bit of a different position, because you won and you had access to all these big events right away, and I know you made it really fast, but what do you remember about the pros and cons of that decision?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, like you said, a little bit different. I think kind of what we saw Gordon do is hold that and continue to go to college and enjoy the college life and graduate, get his degree. I couldn't -- the longer I waited, the more starts I lost, and obviously being in those elevated events it's extremely important and being in the majors. So for me it was more of a, I either turn now or I wait pretty much all year, finish out the school year, and then kind of take that, you know, you lose half a year. A little bit different, but college is so much fun, I have so many memories with those guys and we're going to be brothers forever. Sometimes wish I may have gotten a little bit longer, but very, very grateful for what happened. But those two guys and Gordon and Luke and Jackson soon, they have got some really fun decisions ahead, and sometimes it can be stressful, but it's a really good spot to be in and kind of have a decision of whether I stay in college and enjoy that or I can go chase my dream on the PGA TOUR is not a bad spot to be in.

Q. Can you talk about your sports journey, you played a lot of other sports growing up before deciding to ultimately pursue golf, and can you also maybe share some advice for other young athletes who might be facing similar decisions about which sport to pursue?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I played baseball, football and basketball growing up. I played baseball probably the longest. Still have a lot of my closest friends play baseball, and some of 'em professionally, some of 'em in college. I just think that the team aspect of it and winning as a team and enjoying that, that's what makes college golf so fun for me. And then those were, honestly, my best memories in amateur golf is winning a college event as a team. I think when you're on a van ride or a plane ride back and you can celebrate that together is extremely special. I think there's a lot of lessons learned, especially for me kind of going through that stage of playing multiple sports, learning how to deal with your time and manage all of that, I think that's

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extremely important, especially as you get older, maybe not even in a sport, but just in life in general. That would definitely be something that I'd encourage other kids to do is play multiple sports, try 'em, see if you like 'em, if you don't like 'em, and there will be, you'll have a calling one way or the other.

Q. What's Justin Thomas's influence been on you and you guys' relationship?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, it's been great. Obviously past, both past Alabama guys, both have a cool connection with Alabama and Alabama golf and Coach Seawell, we both played for the same coach there. My caddie now, they were Justin and him were teammates as well, so a lot of cool connections. But, no, Justin's been great any kind of questions or opinions or guiding me from stuff that I shouldn't do out here. I stayed with him in Hero in the Bahamas at Tiger's event this past fall and, yeah, just playing with him at home, getting to pick his brain. He's obviously former world No. 1, one of the best players in the world, and to kind of have that, to have somebody that I can talk to frequently, and fortunately as much as I want, I'm very grateful for.

Q. What do you think it is about his game that kind of separates him and has allowed him to play at such an elite level?

NICK DUNLAP: I mean, I think not only him but anybody that is at that caliber, they don't have a weakness. They're consistent, they're good putters, they're good wedge players, they're good chippers. But more importantly they know how to manage a golf course and they know how to manage their week and what they do Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, that puts them in a situation come the weekend where they're ready to perform. I think Justin and a lot of other guys are doing really well with that and I can definitely learn a lot from what they're doing.

Q. What was your experience like last night and how did it feel playing for a team from Georgia?

NICK DUNLAP: (Laughing). No, it was great. It's really, really fun thing to be a part of. TGL is something that's new, it's exciting. I think it's pretty fun to watch. Not a lot of people have maybe all day to go watch a golf tournament or to watch it on a Thursday from noon to 6:00 or whatever time the coverage is. To be able to kind of turn it on Tuesday night at 7:00 on prime time ESPN and watch it, it goes quickly, you can kind of see our personalities a little bit. I think it's definitely trending in a really good light, and just was a really fun atmosphere and I'm grateful that those two allowed me to tag along and learn some of it. I was asking questions all night because

around the greens it's a little new. But, yeah, we had some hecklers out there, which was kind of neat as well.

Q. Before you turned pro who did you talk to or how many different people did you talk to, and whose opinion had the most influence?

NICK DUNLAP: On the decision to turn pro?

Q. Yes. I mean, there had to be somebody who said, No, stay in school.

NICK DUNLAP: No, no, not really, no. Anybody that was very close to me knew that this was my dream, this is what I wanted to do, and I did go back, I talked with my team and Coach Seawell and Hunter and my parents and Canon Claycomb was actually one of the ones that stood up in the team room before I kind of told 'em that I was going to turn and said, Hey, man, like, if you don't turn pro, we're all going to be disappointed in you. Coming from him -- and obviously it sucked a little bit for me because I feel like I left 'em kind of mid season and we had a really good thing going, I think we could have gone a long way in the tournament at the end of the year and in the NCAA's. But I really think it was a group effort, everybody was super supportive of my dream and what I wanted to do and that was to play on the PGA TOUR.

Q. What are some things you're working on right now in your game?

NICK DUNLAP: Be a little bit more consistent. I think it's -- the one thing about golf is you never quite have it figured out ... unless you're Scottie last year. But, yeah, I'm always kind of working on something. I'm always trying to improve, whether that's to be more consistent. I'm trying to drive the golf ball a little bit straighter right now. I kind of learned that last year that you can't, hard to play out the rough, it's hard to compete out here. Working on my speed a little bit on lag putting. I struggled with that a little bit last year. I'm pretty solid inside of 10 feet, but you continue to lag it to four, five, six feet, it's hard to make those over the course of a week. Chipping as well, I'm still learning, when you go from different weeks rough changes, the length of rough changes, and I'm still learning on how to read the lies. I think that's kind of going to be an ongoing thing for me, but I think that the more experience, the better I'll get at it.

Q. Speaking of Scottie, when Rory won Pebble he said when a guy has the success for as long as he has like Scottie you can't help but kind of look and try to figure out what he does and try to emulate some of it. Are there things you've seen in Scottie's game where you're like, I want to try to do that myself?

NICK DUNLAP: Yeah, I think something that's not talked about enough about Scottie is his short game is unbelievable. I mean, obviously he's, you know, probably right now the best tee-to-green guy out there. He's one of the best iron players in the world, if not the best iron player in the world. But he's also probably one of the best chippers in the world, too. So when he actually does miss a green he chips it really, really good, he chips in a ton. Like I said, those guys don't have a weakness, it's just, they're so consistent week-in and week-out and what they do and they perform at the highest level. And, yeah, of course I like to kind of watch them and see what I can kind of add from their game into mine.

THE MODERATOR: Nick, thank you so much for the time and best of luck this week.

NICK DUNLAP: Thank you. Thank you, guys.

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