

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Sam Saunders

From Recorded Audio



Q. (No microphone.)

SAM SAUNDERS: There's so much that goes into a tournament week in week out on the PGA TOUR, and to have everyone come here to my grandfather's home, a place that he loved, it's really special. It's something I know he really got a kick out of when everybody was here. And they wanted to be here. So far the feedback's been incredible. The guys are so pleased with what they're seeing on the golf course, which selfishly makes me really proud, because I know how hard the team works, both on the ground, but in the locker room, in the dining area. We have such an incredible staff here at Bay Hill throughout the year, so it's really fun when all the eyes of the world get to come and see what a special place Bay Hill is this week.

Q. How has this tournament changed over the last few years or is it basically the same as it was 10 years ago? How do you grow and evolve?

SAM SAUNDERS: Yeah, well I mean obviously there's been a lot of changes in the world of golf. But this event I think has always been a really special meaningful event to the players. I think any one of these guys who have grown up wanting to be the best and you ultimately you idolize the best. You see the names before you, whether it was Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Tiger Woods, Hogan, Snead, you get to go to a place and play in a tournament where there's that name associated with it, the meaning and importance of winning an event like that I think is elevated for everyone.

But as for how it's changed, I would like to say that our presentation continues to just get a little better each and every year. I had a great meeting with a couple of the guys with the TOUR yesterday and they had so many nice things to say about the golf course, but really just the presentation of the build out, the way we bring the fan experience to Bay Hill. It really is a special week and I'm just incredibly proud of how this event continues to get better and better each and every year because I know a lot of work goes into it.

Q. Your grandfather was always about building and growing the game of golf. The Arnold Palmer Cup and API have a very special relationship. How cool is it that these two events can merge together and produce a lot of names that people will eventually be rooting for on the weekends?

SAM SAUNDERS: No, exactly. The Arnold Palmer Cup is an event that I'm so excited. Drew Donovan and I have really been involved with this next event next year at Tralee, which I'm very excited about in Ireland, that was my granddad's first overseas golf course, and it's incredible. We were able to make a site visit there. And to have the Arnold Palmer Cup exemption be able to play in the invitational every year, we've got Daniel Bennett this year, but what's really cool is I played with Maverick McNealy when he was an amateur and I was playing on TOUR and he was the Arnold Palmer Cup exemption that year. It's something that's really special to have both the men and the women playing with each other against each other. That event is still a little bit of an unknown to a lot of people in the world of golf, and I'm so excited for people to be able to start following and really becoming fans of what the Arnold Palmer Cup is. Because I know it's incredibly meaningful to us, it was something my granddad loved, and it's really great to see the connection continue to grow and evolve here.

Q. What's your guys' approach to get it more known and to get more people to realize what it is and how special it is, given the tie in to this tournament?

SAM SAUNDERS: Yeah, like I said we got Daniel Bennett here this week. Keep an eye on him. He's an incredible golfer. You got Jackson Koivun who was the exemption last year. He's going to be the best player in the world at some point, if I had to put my money on it. Great young men, great individuals. There's so many great young ladies that play in the event as well. They get to go on and receive exemptions on the ladies side of the TOUR. So it's really a special thing and I think we'll be able to highlight that event more and more this next year at Tralee and then 2027 we're going to Cherry Hills, so we're really going to be start hosting that event in some really meaningful special connected places to my grandfather and the history of him



and the history of the game of golf. So it's really an event that is definitely on the up, I think.

Q. Whatever the changes going on shake out, is there any part of you that would like to see some of these big events expand their fields to, to whatever?

SAM SAUNDERS: Yeah, absolutely. I would love to see more guys here. There's so many great players. It's so hard to see some of the names that aren't here sometimes. But I know the TOUR has adapted and evolved to the times and we try to be as supportive and a team player as we possibly can, so I'm very optimistic and excited about the future and having more guys here, because at the end of the day there's a hundred guys that have cards on the PGA TOUR that make the FedExCup playoffs, that it has gotten so competitive and so difficult. And one thing my grandfather loved was, he wanted all the guys, he wanted as many guys as he could to come here and play his golf course and compete and have a real, honest, you know, meaningful competition, and whoever walks away as champion, it should mean a lot to 'em. So, yeah, it would be really nice to see that evolve and I'm very optimistic that we'll get back to that place at some point.

Q. They talk about all the stakeholders involved. Do you and Drew have a voice in this? Has your input been sought out through this process?

SAM SAUNDERS: Which process?

Q. Talking about the all the changes forthcoming on the TOUR.

SAM SAUNDERS: Well, you know, the TOUR runs their business, and we're a team player, but we run our business here. Drew and his team do an incredible job. Our staff here do everything they do. But we can only focus on us and what we can do to be the best tournament and give the best presentation that we can. And, yes, I mean, if there's an opportunity to voice our opinions and our feelings while still being supportive and trying not to jump off the rails on anything, yeah, we of course we want to be additive when we can. But really I think the best thing we can do as an organization is focus on our golf course, our event, you know, what it means to come to the Arnold Palmer Invitational.

Q. After last year did you identify anything that needed to be better?

SAM SAUNDERS: We made a few tweaks on the golf course. Which I'm really excited about this year. Every year. If you don't identify something that could be better the next year, then you're not really paying attention.

There's no such thing as a perfect event. You learn from mistakes. Whether you're a player or you're running a golf tournament, you have to learn from your mistakes. So I wouldn't say there's anything -- there was nothing bad, but there are things that we've tweaked to get better. We re-implemented some enhancements on the golf course that I'm really excited about to see, and so far the feedback from the players has been incredible.

Then operationally, yeah, there's always something. We've shifted a grandstand two feet in one spot and it provides a better sight line for the players. Just these small details that you get to build on each and every year. It's fun. It's fun to look back at a week and say, Wow, it was awesome, but let's do this next year. And people notice it, that's what's really exciting.

Q. Along the same lines, I believe this is the 10 years since your grandfather last presided over this tournament. As you have evolved and adapted with the evolving PGA TOUR do you still find yourself saying, What would my granddad do?

SAM SAUNDERS: Absolutely. That's our obligations here to carry on his legacy. I mean, this is, at the end of the day, this is still his place. So we, when we make changes or modifications to a golf course, the presentation, anything, we try to think of would he want this. And I like to think, I know we're trying our best to keep it that way and I do think he would be incredibly proud of what this event is and how hard everybody works. No, it's very special. I do think he's -- I think he would give us his blessing right now.

Q. Even if it comes to moving a grandstand two feet?

SAM SAUNDERS: Sure, sure. Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah, he liked it tough and he was, like I said, he was so proud of this golf course. He loved having the guys here and I know he would love the way it looks right now. It's absolutely beautiful. Our director of agronomy and the entire team -- it's so great for me, I worked on this maintenance crew 20-something years ago, and some of the people that were on the maintenance crew then are still out there now working for our team. I absolutely love seeing it. My grandfather treated everyone here like they were family, and there's a feeling at Bay Hill that people get when they come here. That feeling is still here today even 10 years after.

Q. Can you talk about the impact on the local community.

SAM SAUNDERS: Yeah, absolutely. So the best thing is this event it supports the Arnold and Winnie Palmer Foundation, which is our opportunity, that's what really



carries on the legacy of Arnold Palmer. I mean, my granddad used his platform to help others. That's what the Arnold and Winnie Palmer Foundation does. So locally what's been done over at Lake Lorna Dune, Lift Orlando, and now the impact we're having with the U.S. Kids local golf tournament, providing registration fees for kids to be able to have access to junior golf, and be able to get an introduction to the game, get outside, get in nature, live a healthy life-style. Obviously our continued support of children's health in the Orlando community is so near and dear to all of our hearts. So it's incredible to have this opportunity this week to put on a great show but most importantly to continue to raise money and make an impact and make a difference here in a community that my grandfather called home.

Q. What are the tweaks you made on the course?

CHRIS GOTTERUP: So we made a couple bunker modifications, front two bunkers on 10. More of an infrastructure, a little bit of a playability thing to get those in a better place.

Removed a front right bunker on 11. Created a little bit of a spine there on a fairway approach that's going to be I think really interesting take for the players. Also as an added benefit the other 51 weeks a year of that where we're having guests and members come play this golf course, it's a little bit more inviting and enjoyable for them. So it's a really fun balance to try to make the golf course more challenging, more thought provoking, a really interesting test for the players the week of the PGA TOUR. But you also have to think there's 51 other weeks a year here where other, you know, everyone's playing the golf course, and unfortunately not everybody hits the ball 320 yards and plays like these best players in the world. So it's really fun to enhance the course that way.

We did a bunker left on 14. We combined that, made it one larger bunker. There's a couple palm trees in it which I think is a really cool nod -- and those bunkers have been there or, excuse me, those palm trees have been there for forever as far as we know. I think that was something my granddad would love. So it's a neat look.

Then probably one of the most noticeable changes you'll hear talked about on TV this week from a playing perspective is we brought back all the short game areas, so all the runoffs around the greens we hand mow. Those are tight and you'll see a lot more variety in the chipping and short game shots around the green this year because it's not all rough surrounds. That's something that when we last redesigned the course in 2009 those were all designed that way, and during COVID we, unfortunately, didn't have the manpower to maintain those properly. It

takes a lot of work, it takes a lot of bodies to mow those areas. So it's really, I'm really happy to see those be brought back and I think it's like I said all the players have absolutely loved that. Because it makes you think a little bit more and it really changes the look as you're hitting into the greens. It sometimes can give a much more intimidating look. So I'm excited to see a lot of really fun shots around the greens this year.

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