

# Arnold Palmer Invitational

Friday, March 6, 2026

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

## Akshay Bhatia

### Quick Quotes



#### Q. How would you characterize the round?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Solid. Putted nice, drove it better. I got up and down quite a bit. Tough golf course. Honestly, I thought I shot 5-under, but 6 sounds a little bit better.

#### Q. How difficult were the conditions as the afternoon went along?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, I mean, you get some more gusts towards the end of the day, the greens get even faster and dryer. So you got to be very precise on your land numbers, where you're missing it, where you can be aggressive, which is very rare here. But, yeah, just kind of one foot in front of the other today.

#### Q. Do you like these challenges a little more than say 20-, 25-under to win?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yes, I think anything around like 10- to 13-under is like, it's a great golf course. I think when it gets a little dicey it can kind of like, it can be a very fine line. That's where I feel like this golf course can get. But I love challenges. I think it makes you focus more, especially for me. You have to be precise and it kind of can show who is playing really good throughout the week.

#### Q. What did you make of Berger sitting there at 13- and what's it going to take to catch him?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I mean, this golf course is hard. We have seen it, we saw it at Riv, Jacob had a very great lead, and I played with him the first two days, playing unbelievable. But it's still hard to win a golf tournament, especially when conditions get tough and the moment gets big. So, yeah, I'm just going to keep plodding along. Again, he could run away with it and I could be playing for second or it could be, you know, a little bit of a challenge, there's a lot of guys within six shots of the lead, which is not much around Bay Hill.

#### Q. What's your approach when you're paired with a guy who is shall, who has a pretty considerable lead

#### on you? Do you still stick within yourself or do you try to be intimidating in any way?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, I think it's very different that we're going into the third round, not the fourth. There's still two days, anything can happen. Just trying to have a chance on Sunday is the biggest thing. He might have a big lead tomorrow and make it even bigger or it could shrink, who knows. He's obviously playing great golf, and it's cool to see. We play at home and played a practice round this week actually which is pretty funny. So, yeah, just trying to have a chance on Sunday.

#### Q. Do you spend more time prepping early week at a tournament like this coming off multiple weeks of playing on the West Coast and in way different conditions?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Fairly similar. I think just certain golf courses where I know that I've had issues or challenges mentally is where my coach and I have kind of figured out, trying to figure out the best ways I can overcome those situations. So that's what I do this week, like I didn't play great here last year and it was my first time until -- there's certain things I knew what to expect, but at the same time, yeah, just trying to figure out a better plan of execution for each hole that I didn't like.

#### Q. Where does this golf course rank on the scar tissue list for you?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I mean, I've only played two rounds here, so you know, it's like there's a little bit. And there's certain holes where I was like, Okay, I'm definitely hitting it on this side this year. But, yeah, I figured it out, especially on the greens, I putted great. It's nice to see that on tough greens and a little bit of wind.

#### Q. When you say you're pleased with your putting, are you talking about the putts you made or the putts that didn't run five feet by the hole?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I'm just pleased with like my level of focus on each putt. That's a big key for me in the last couple weeks I figured out, starting at Waste Management,



how much focus I have to have to hit good putts. Sometimes I was kind of trying to figure out what is the best like routine and I kind of figured it out. Especially here. Like, the putter slides. My putter sits really open. So, it's fine on every other golf course except when we get dry Bermuda like here and Pinehurst.

**Q. When you say focused, are you talking about the read, the stroke, the setup?**

AKSHAY BHATIA: No, I mean obviously getting the putter set correctly, and then just a lot of focus on the hole, focusing on the ball. Not trying to watch my stroke, which I have a tendency to do. So, yeah, it's kind of crazy, like how much sharper I feel on certain putts.

**Q. Do you like really fast greens like these?**

AKSHAY BHATIA: I've statistically putted really nice on fast greens. I think too this week I felt really good with my Aimpoint. We do some stuff, my caddie and I, and I was like really sharp to start the week. So as long as my speed was good, I felt like my reads were going to be great this week.

**Q. What's the one thing Joe said today that made him earn his keep?**

AKSHAY BHATIA: I mean, I think it's just today I told him I was like, I still feel nervous today. Like a little more anxious, if you want to call it that. And he tells me this golf course is hard, pars are great. And, I don't know, I guess it's just like the way he says it or the way he talks to me, I just feel in a flow. I never feel like I'm restricted, never feel like I'm panicking. He always will say, As long as you have a heartbeat I think we can make par or birdie here. So kind of eases my days.

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