

**ROUND 1 INTERVIEW**  
**February 15, 2018**

**SAM SAUNDERS (-4)**



**GENESIS OPEN**

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**Q. Here with Sam Saunders. It's interesting, last year at the Genesis Open, Sam was a sponsor's invite and shot an opening round 64. You shoot a 67 today, and we were chatting and you said it was as good today as last year. Why is that?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** You know, first off, I just feel like I'm a way better player this year. I'm more in control of what I'm doing. Last year was kind of a hot day, I just kind of had everything going for me. Today I just played good golf. I actually left a lot of shots out there. I'm very pleased with my round, but I missed a lot of very makeable birdie putts and it just could have been a lot better round today. But it was just fun because I was very in control of what I was doing out there. I wasn't excited to be in the lead. I feel like I, you know, was really in control of my game today.

**Q. In your evolution as a player out here on the PGA TOUR, what have you improved the most in your opinion?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** Putting, short game in general, but really it's just the attitude, it's mental. It's my fourth year out here now. I'm not trying to make cuts, I'm not trying to keep a card. I've really focused this year on trying to come into it trying to win every tournament I'm playing. That's the goal is to try to give yourself a chance to win, and if you don't and you have a bad finish and you finish 10th, that's a great thing to -- by-product of not winning, I guess. So it's fun to have more of a mentality of I'm out here to beat everybody and treat it like work, and so far it's feeling a lot better this year.

**Q. Sam, well done out there today, 4-under par 67. You've been in this position before just a year ago. What's the difference between you as a player from last year and now this year?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** I'm not that excited right now. I'm very pleased, but I'm not overwhelmed. Last year was really neat to come and shoot that 64 the first round and have a couple-shot lead, but it's the first round. I've been out here for four years now. I know that the first round, it's nice to get off to a good start, but it doesn't mean that you're going to have a great week. So I'm really taking it one day at a time and just looking forward to the next three days out here. The golf course is immaculate and it's just such a fun course to play, and what's nice is I'm hitting the ball very well and I feel like I'm in control so it's going to be fun.

**Q. Got off to a pretty good start this year, had a top-10 at the CareerBuilder just a few weeks ago. What's been the key for you so far this year?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** Playing to win, just not trying -- not trying to make the Playoffs, not trying to worry about the numbers and the dollars and all that. It's a long season and I think it's real easy to get out here and start worrying about your position. You know, I went into this year saying I want to try to win golf tournaments. That's a lot more fun. That's the goal is to try to get trophies, and obviously I haven't gotten one yet, but I feel like I'm confident enough now and the mindset is more focused on that rather than just trying to have good finishes. I'm going to play a little bit less golf this year so that when I do play, I'm ready and focused on that and that alone.

**Q. Most of the people following the game and our listeners know that you're the grandson of legend Arnold Palmer. Is there something that he shared with you that he used every day when he played a competitive round that you could share with us?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** Gosh, one thing when I play every round, just stick to my system, you know? Believe in what you're doing, don't worry about what everybody else is doing out there, don't worry if other guys are trying to tell you that you need to do it a certain way. Believe in what you do and do it every day. Don't worry if you're not getting the results you want right away, you've just got to stick to it and stay hard headed, I guess.

**Q. Sam, if I remember correctly, you played really well here last year?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** Played well the first day, I shot 64 that first round, had the lead for a couple days because we sat in the hotel and watched it rain and had a really bad second round and then just kind of hung around for the weekend and finished, I don't know, 50th, 48th, somewhere in there. Wasn't a great finish but it was a good start.

**Q. What is it about this golf course that you like so much?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** You know, it fits my eye. I think it's a very fair test of golf. It's tough if you get out of position, but if you drive the ball well here, you can attack a lot of these holes. And the putting surfaces are so good and consistent, the fairways are so good and consistent, the ball sits up so nicely on these kikuyu fairways. If you're in them, you can really attack hole locations. So I've driven it well here and I did that again today and I like the greens.

**Q. Did the conditions change at all from the start of the round to the end?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** It started to firm up a little bit, but it was -- I noticed that last year here on Thursday, I've never played a course that was more consistent from every tee box to the fairways to the greens. Sometimes you get courses where, not to anyone's fault but you get some greens that are in the shade that may be a little bit softer, or some greens that sit up high and exposed get a lot firmer. These are just very good, consistent surfaces. I think it will be a really good tough test the rest of the week because it's going to firm up and get fast and you've really got to put the ball in position here.

**Q. Unlike last year?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** After the first -- yeah, the first day was like this, but then yeah, after that it was a little bit softer. Not that it's easy, it's just a different approach.

**Q. I'm sure you've been asked this, I apologize. How aware are you of your grandfather's record in this tournament?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** To be honest, not -- I'm not focused on it this tournament. I'm more aware of what I did he everywhere and the mark he left on the game, and just trying to do my best to make him proud and everyone else, and play my game, though. That's what he would want me to do. And I'm sure right now he'd say you can go ahead and start winning golf tournaments because it's about time.

**Q. Does it ever cross your mind, Tiger's out here, he's getting most of the attention, most of the galleries. Does it ever cross your mind, hey, my grandpa was here first, he did that long ago?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** No, no, I don't see it that way. To be honest, I was on the -- I was on the 12th -- excuse me, I was on the fourth tee, the par 3, today when he was teeing off of 18 there. I looked over and watched because I grew up watching Tiger do what he did. And I'm a big fan like we all are out here and it's really cool to see him out and we all want him to be out here every week and playing well. It just brings a different buzz to the tournament and it's really good for the game of golf, so it's cool for me to be playing in a tournament that he's playing in and be able to compete against him, a guy that I grew up just in awe of basically.

**Q. But it is kind of the same phenomenon, isn't it? I mean, when your grandpa was playing and he was bringing in people that hadn't paid attention to golf and the galleries, the composition of the galleries changed and got bigger and the game got bigger?**

**SAM SAUNDERS:** Sure, and I think that's why I have so much respect for what he did and admire his career so much, because I didn't get to see my grandfather's firsthand like I got to see Tiger's growing up watching TV. I know there's a lot of parallels there.