

Barracuda Championship

Sunday, July 23, 2023

Truckee, California, USA

Tahoe Mountain Club

Akshay Bhatia

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome the winner of the 2023 Barracuda Championship, Akshay Bhatia. We were speaking with you last week and just earlier this week that you said you feel a win is very close. And you just captured it in a playoff. What are your initial thoughts and feelings?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I mean, it's obviously really just crazy that I got it done today. I mean, that first nine I was playing very bad. Hitting shots that I don't normally hit. The feelings that I had, telling myself stories of what could happen, what if I hit it bad, what if I hit it great. What if I miss four 3-footers tomorrow. Anything could happen, right. I just kept reminding myself that I can do it. I had a lot of belief in my caddie today. He's done it for a long time. We've only worked four weeks together and we got a win. So it's pretty special.

I can't thank everyone enough. Especially Callaway, for what they have done for me. I mean, I've spent countless hours trying to figure out a putter for the last four weeks and they have gotten it pretty dialed.

Q. What was that turning point? Kind of maybe a little frustrated on the front nine. Was there a certain shot or moment or hole where it started gaining momentum?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, I mean, I hit a few good shots on the par-5 6th. Made a birdie there.

Hit a great shot on 7. Hit a great putt that didn't go in.

Then 8, I made a really nice probably 15-footer to kind of gain some momentum.

Then 9, I hit another great shot to probably 10 feet and made that dead center.

I felt a lot of confidence and my caddie kept telling me like before this event that you just need to have a chance on the back nine. In this format anything can happen. Whether you make an eagle on the back nine or he kind of



can make a couple bogeys or whatever happens.

But I hit a great shot on 10. 10 was probably one of the hardest holes all week. Hit a great putt there.

Then 12, I made a pretty casual birdie.

16, I hit a great tee ball on the green to 15, 20 feet and hit a good putt. Just kind of got some wind gust.

18, obviously, was a pretty special moment. You think about Tiger and all the greats that have to make a putt to win. To get into that playoff, to make that putt was pretty surreal. I don't even know how I reacted at that moment. But it was just everything came out.

THE MODERATOR: Kind of go over more the highlights of the first time in regulation, 18. Standing over that putt and then seeing it drop in.

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, pretty crazy. I mean, obviously my hand, my arms everything was shaking. My heart was beating so fast I could barely breathe. But my caddie and I have a great system of AimPoint. We just started doing it the first couple weeks. I told him it's a one percent. And it was, I mean, it couldn't have been an easier putt to see and to feel. And I hit a great putt. I told myself, You got this. Just keep your head down. And I kind of kept that mentality the last couple holes. It just went in dead center, dripped in, which was great.

THE MODERATOR: Are you normally kind of a leaderboard watcher? Do you allow those conversations with your caddie Brian or when did you kind of realize you were in contention?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I am a leaderboard watcher. But I try not to be. But I'll still peek my eyes over there. I think I asked him on 16 or 15 maybe what he was at. I didn't really know what I was at either. I think I was at 36 points and he was maybe at 41. But he told me, like, he's got to hit these shots, too. I hit a great shot on 15, which is a really tough par-3. But, yeah, I do like watching leaderboards. It's probably not the best thing, because I get anxious pretty easily. Yeah, it just kind of happened.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned week four with Brian. Kind of tell us how that relationship started and then how



the dynamic between you two and how it's working.

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, getting special temporary membership was huge for me. But I played a lot of really good events. I've been thankful to have a lot of sponsor exemptions throughout my career. I knew it was just kind of a matter of time of finding someone that could really get me to that next step of winning on the PGA TOUR. Because, other than the last couple weeks, I finished 40th, 50th, 30th. That's not very fun. It was just -- I know how good I am. I know how good my ball striking is. He saw a lot of swag in me. He took a risk on me. I mean, he's been doing this for a long time. He could have worked for anyone. He decided to go with someone who doesn't really have full status out here. Hat's off to him for making that decision. I just can't be more happy to be in this position four weeks down the road with him.

THE MODERATOR: Successful amateur career. Winning on Korn Ferry Tour. Then coming up close Puerto Rico Open. Were there certain past experiences you were drawing upon today?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Definitely Mexico playing with Jon Rahm and Tony Finau in the final group. I think everyone kind of knew they were going to be in the final group together. But I wanted to add myself to that picture. Playing with them talking to Jon and talking to Tony, like you don't have to do anything special, you just kind of plot your way around. I took a little bit of, I've done it with the best player in the world kind of mentality. Kind of like, I can do it. Whether or not I felt great starting the round, it still kind of showed how good I was being able to play with them toe-to-toe and finishing fourth there.

THE MODERATOR: Starting the morning were you kind of watching The Open Championship or what was your routine this morning leading into the final round?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, I woke up like 9, 9:30. I was definitely watching The Open Championship. Brian Harmon, I know him pretty well. We have the same agency. Yeah, definitely watching. It's kind of cool that two lefties won on the same day. That's pretty cool to have that happen. I was so excited for him, obviously, and for his whole team. Yeah, I was just kind of chilling. We packed up. We had a nice cabin this week in Truckee. It was fun. But I think I'll have to pay for the whole house now, so that's great. (Laughing.)

THE MODERATOR: How would you explain the season? Playing, getting yourself to special temporary membership to now winning on the PGA TOUR. What's away to summarize this so far?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I don't know. I mean, you can't summarize it, right. I expected to play on the Korn Ferry Tour. I was excited to play on the Korn Ferry Tour. I knew I was going to be one of the best players out there. Just with the year of experience. Yeah, I mean, it all just happened so fast. I remember I was on Cloud 9 when I got special temporary membership in Puerto Rico and I was so thankful for two sponsor exemptions when we had a break during the Korn Ferry Tour season. But we, my agent Tommy, he knew I was going to get it this year. He said it before I even got the starts that we need to look into this. For it to all come to fruition, play with some of the best players in the world, play some of the greatest events in the world, and to win on the PGA TOUR, to hopefully solidify myself into the FedExCup playoffs. It's a great feeling. Because job security now I can kind of, not free wheel, but I know how to win. I know I can do it against some of the best players in the world.

THE MODERATOR: With this win and our partnership with DP World Tour getting membership there. Can we expect to see you playing in Europe?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I hope so. I mean, I would love to go to Europe. Obviously Dubai would be one of my favorite spots that I've never been to. Just going over there in general would be amazing. Hopefully I can make that happen. I'm excited that I get that opportunity as well. It kind of opens some flood gates over there. Hopefully, I can make it over to India one day, because that's a dream of mine. I was supposed to go a few years ago during COVID and then kind of shut down. We couldn't go. But I'm hoping I can make that jump over there.

THE MODERATOR: Probably a day you dreamt about. Are there any plans of celebrating tonight here in Truckee or Tahoe area?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Definitely good food. I was supposed to drive to the airport tonight and catch a flight tomorrow morning, to 3M, but I think we're going to probably just eat, chill and just have a good time. Everyone's put so much work into this win and I know everyone's super happy. So I can't wait to call everyone. It's going to be crazy looking at my phone. I don't even want to. (Laughing.) But, yeah, just probably some dinner.

THE MODERATOR: Have you had a chance to look at your phone? Any messages you're seeing or is there maybe any player or any someone you're wanting looking to reach out?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I keep feeling my butt vibrate, so I know it's a bunch of stuff going on. But I called my coach and I'm going to call my parents here soon. Man, it's going

to be cool.

Q. I wanted to ask you the about the journey. In Detroit you talked about maybe you were wondering if you made the right decision. How much validation does today give you?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I can't, I don't think I ever questioned my decision, necessarily. But we were just kind of going through a couple things mentally in Detroit. And we knew it was just, to me, I told my coach that I can, I feel like it's coming. But I feel so far away as well. Especially in Detroit. I just wasn't hitting it great. It was my first week after a two-week break.

Then I felt at John Deere I was going to win the golf tournament. I played pretty solid throughout the week.

Then Barbasol maybe a little bit of high expectations to win that golf tournament. And I felt like I didn't play that great and I still was able to finish off in the top 10.

This week, it's kind of crazy. I mean, I didn't play Wednesday. I only played nine holes on Tuesday. I kind of relied on my caddie to do the work and he said, Hit it here. Hit it here. Then also I changed a little bit of just some setup stuff and kind of led to some really good tee shots, which I was really happy about.

Q. I heard you mention your girlfriend Presleigh a couple times. She's been on the bag. Just talk about what she's meant to you during this time.

AKSHAY BHATIA: Sorry. Wow. I mean, so much. Gosh. She's been through it all with me. I mean, she had no idea what golf was when I first met her. To win with her in the Bahamas was pretty special. Then, I mean, she travels every week with me. It's not easy. Especially it's all about me a hundred percent of the time. For her to support me every week, to walk 72 holes every single week is, you know, I couldn't imagine my life without her. Couldn't imagine being on this journey without her by my side.

She's done a lot for me. She makes my peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every morning. She gets my snacks together. She does a lot. She's a huge part of this win. I mean, she's seen me cry in the hotel room. She's seen me super happy. For her to kind of just help me get here and keep telling me -- she always will remind me how good I am. Even if I question myself, she's always right there by my side. I can't wait to celebrate with her. We don't drink necessarily, but we might tonight, so...

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