

Shriners Children's Open

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TPC Summerlin

Sahith Theegala

Press Conference



Shriners
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THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Sahith Theegala to the virtual media center here at the Shriners Children's Open. Coming off of a tie for will the last week at Sanderson Farms Championship, I know it didn't end the way you wanted, but what a learning experience and what a great show you put on. If we can get some comments on that event first, please.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, it was pretty special for all the events in the last couple months they happened so quickly and to lead to that last week was really cool. It was almost a blessing that it happened so quickly so I didn't really have time to process what was going on and just kind of playing my golf and sure enough after each of the first three round I found myself at the top. So that was really cool. Just that experience on Sunday, being in that position, final group, it's something that I'm going to carry on for the rest of my career and something I look back -- I had so much fun that week too. Just really staying in the moment and grinding through it all, it was a blast. Obviously that back nine on Sunday was tough and I was able to reflect on it the next day and learn so much from it, obviously, but, yeah, what a great week.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of, you talked about sort of quickly gaining success, just talk a little bit about the progression you've already made from such a successful collegiate career and then earning your card through Korn Ferry finals and now to already be seeing some success out here on TOUR. Take us through the last year or so if you can, please.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, so graduated May of 2020, knowing that I have I had another year of college if I wanted for the COVID year. But I just felt like I was ready. I had made such big strides my senior year of college, not only as a golfer but just as a person in life and just felt like I was ready to move on and kind of took that leap of faith into just playing mini-tour stuff and trying to make the most of my starts and luckily I was able to get enough points to make it to Korn Ferry finals and at that point I was just so happy that I made it to Korn Ferry finals that I felt like I had no expectations and that's been a big thing the past year is

like the people close to me, my father, my coach, we're all just like, hey, you shouldn't have any expectations, you had nothing to start and all of a sudden you found yourself on the Korn Ferry finals and just kind of having that mindset through that played some of my best golf I ever played at the Korn Ferry finals to get my card. So just having that mindset of not putting any unnecessary pressure or expectations on my shoulders was really big this past year and the progress I've made just in my game as well has been great. I feel like every week even if I'm getting .0001 percent better, that's great, if I can make that progress the rest of my life I'll be very happy with that.

THE MODERATOR: Now you're here at the Shriners, if you can talk a little bit about this golf course, have you seen it already this week and what's, how does it suit your game?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I played the Monday pro-am and then I played nine holes yesterday. I live like three and a half hour drive away in Chino, just right down the 15, so I've spent a bunch of time in Vegas, played a lot of junior tournaments here and very comfortable with not only the environment but even the slight elevation change and how the ball goes a touch further over here. But I really like the golf course, I played it a couple times before this week once with the actually both times with the Pepperdine golf team, but really comfortable with this course. It's kind of a shoot-out type of course, even if the greens get firm, if there's not a ton of wind there's going to be a lot of low scores because the course plays pretty short and off the tee I feel like it's pretty for giving but it's a great course. You still have to think your way around, really have to focus on every shot, that's probably a pretty common theme on PGA TOUR courses, but, yeah, I really like the golf course. West Coast golf kind of thing. So I feel pretty comfortable out here.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Obviously we know that you have an Indian connection from your parents are from here. So for the Indian audience here can you just throw some light on your like where are your parents from and when you grew up in America where did you grow up and

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how did you get into golf and the journey at the start of your life.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, so both my parents were born and brought up in Heidelberg. My dad was the first one to leave India in the family. He went to IIT Madras and then he did grad school at Kansas State. So he was the first one, pretty much came here with nothing, really cool story, how again just going back on it really thankful for the opportunity my parents gave me, but went to Kansas State on a whim spent two and a half years there and then bought a car for like \$500 and drove to L.A. looking for jobs. So, yeah, he came to the states when he was first 23 and then went back to India, got married, my mom came over when, trying to think when, but she was maybe 21 or 22, so young. But, yeah, they moved to L.A. and they have been there their whole lives and I was born and brought up in L.A. as well. In terms of how I got into golf, obviously nobody in my family played sports, it just wasn't a thing. But my dad when he came to the states -- he was very active even back in India, he ran some marathons and played some cricket and did all kinds of stuff, but he loved watching sports and I think he got into that culture when he went to Kansas State. So when I was young he would always have sports up on the TV. The three main ones were basketball, golf and cricket. But so I got into basketball and golf, because, America. But, yeah, I got into basketball and even football actually when I was really young, maybe three years old and then got into golf when I was five or six. But it was pretty funny because nobody in my family really knew, okay, so sports are just for fun kind of thing, right? But we found out pretty quickly that I was really good at golf, so and again more credit to my father, he found a way with no background or knowledge of how to kind of get me to the next level, found a way to do it. So that's how I got into golf. But, yeah, both my parents were born and brought up in India. I spent a little bit of time in India when I was younger, I haven't really been much recently. Obviously very proud of my heritage and my background.

Q. Can you just tell me what is the reason behind the name being called Sahith Theegala and not Sahith Reddy Theegala?

SAHITH THEEGALA: So I have to check this with my dad again, but obviously all my cousins and everybody back in I understand I can't last name is Reddy, right. It was something with either something military earlier or just coming to the states that my middle name and my last or my dad switched my middle name and my last name, so Sahith Reddy Theegala. Instead of Sahith Theegala Reddy. It's like even my cousins that are over here their last name is Reddy. So I obviously see myself as a Reddy as well, but yeah. Theegala kind of stuck.

Q. How many headlines you are missing because of that? If it's Sahith Reddy?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I know. (Laughing).

Q. The Americans won't know the fun of having, you know, headlines with your name then.

SAHITH THEEGALA: I know. Exactly.

Q. I wanted to know your mindset going into the Barracuda Championship when you were just outside the top 200, things were not really going well, how many, did you have any self doubt? I mean it's almost impossible to think that you did not.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, it was definitely an interesting time, I was very nervous I honestly didn't even know if I was going to get into the Barracuda Championship. Funny story, I was driving up to northern California to stay with my caddie for a few days who lives there before the Monday qualifier for the Barracuda. So I had no idea I was in but in my last 30 minutes of a seven-hour drive, Chris Hoff, the tournament director, he calls me and he says, Hey, we got a spot for you, you're in. So I wasn't even like fully mentally prepared to be in the tournament, so that was really, really great call to have and I got to meet Chris at last year's Barracuda, he's a great guy, but, yeah, once I got in I knew if I have a good week this week I can pretty much secure myself that top 200. And it was definitely I was nervous but I think the format also helped a little bit, I've always been kind of a little bit of a streaky, explosive player, so I like to make a lot of birdie and the format kind of fits my style. So it took a little bit of pressure off, knowing that if I have a few bad holes I can always rip-off a stretch of birdie and kind of make that ground up. So also having the experience from last year was really helpful. So, yeah, I had a really good finish to the first round and that kind of eased all my nerves a little bit and then the rest of the week I honestly didn't even play my best golf, I was just really grinding my way through and I was really happy with the way I finished for sure and sure enough I got enough points by four points or something crazy. So, yeah, it definitely helped also that it was in California, a little comfort there as well.

Q. The first thing is over the last two years particularly kind of following you and your game, it's pretty clear that you have this streak of resilience and ability to take chances when they come your way. Example being your run from playing the fourth round in a big tournament and then running for the final sectionals to get through the U.S., you've done Monday qualifiers and trying to get into tournaments and so on, so forth,



where does that streak ever resilience come from in your game and how do you kind of prepare for still producing your best after the grind?

SAHITH THEEGALA: I think that comes from just being at a young age I've always been a player, I was never, I never loved the practice and the grind when I was younger. I got to kind of see how more action how much more important that is later on, but I think just playing straight on my skill set and my talent when I was younger has allowed me to just kind of be free mentally as well. So I don't feel like I need as much preparation leading into let's say a Monday qualifier after a four-day event kind of thing. And then a lot of it is mindset. Obviously the physical part is tough, making sure your body is, has enough energy for that kind of stuff and I feel like I have learned that I can't push my body too much or else I'm not going to be able to perform at my highest level. Same thing goes mentally. If you don't give yourself a little bit of a mental break here and there you can just wear yourself out really quickly. So I was just seeing these Monday qualifiers and the U.S. Open sectional qualifiers as just another opportunity to perform and knowing also that other guys that are playing this event are already exhausted physically and mentally, so I felt like I had a little bit of an upper edge in that regard. But, yeah, I think that also comes from how my parents raised me to be resilient and not to let your guard down at any point and if you have an opportunity, might as well make the most out of it and try and take that opportunity.

Q. Last week the first day you made some 150 feet of putts. You made a 30-footer to regain a share of the lead. Just playing so well through nine, 21-under, and then you make the turn, I know you already said when you spoke to John at the start and said that it was tough and you took some lessons off of it, but can you just maybe give us some more insight definitely in it a little more and try and tell us what was happening in the moment and what happened on Monday.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, so that Sunday I was obviously able to look at some of my shots and my body language and stuff like that from Sunday and it looked really good. I think me and my caddie did a good job of just staying in the moment and trying to play it shot by shot. But I did realize I was a little bit figure he tee on the golf course maybe. I'm not usually that expressive of a player, but I hit some shots and I was kind of giving it some body language and I hit a shot on hole 8 to get to 21-under I hit it and I was like went on the ground almost. And I feel like I haven't really done that. I think that was just nerves kind of getting to me a little bit. Obviously it was my first time in that spot, so that back nine, again, I thought for the most part I stuck to my process and even Carl told me to slow down because it's so easy to get ahead of yourself and get

quick but I just hit a couple shots where, sure, maybe I felt like I was slowing down but my swing wasn't that way and I hit 2-iron shots in a row right on 10 and 11, which I haven't done in for the whole week and that cost me three shots right there potentially. And then obviously I learned the hard way that the PGA TOUR is such a fine line because I played, obviously I played really well all week, had the load for most of the week, and then all of a sudden I make a couple bogeys there, silly 3-putt on 13 and all of a sudden I'm fighting for a top-10. And I wasn't really thinking that on the golf course, but I've had to make like a 15-footer for par, another 5-footer for par, on those last four holes, just to come in 8th. And I felt like I played so well and it seemed like, okay, if you didn't win you come in second or third. But I learned the hard way that it's such a fine line and I was still really proud of how I handled that situation and I think moving forward just having that -- nothing even tangible really, but just having that experience in the back of my mind is really going to prepare me well for the next time I'm in that position.

Q. You pretty much told a fair bit about your history. I just want to know when did you really decide to pick up golf, No. 1, and are you in touch with other Indian players like Arjun Atwal or Anirban Lahiri and the other guys who are on the TOUR, etcetera, I mean do you really get to talk to them, etcetera?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, so I started golf -- my first time going on the golf course was maybe when I just turned six years old and my first tournament ever was when I was six at the Junior Worlds in San Diego. And it was funny because I never practiced or anything, but I ended up winning that Junior World so that's when we were like, okay, you know, he could have a potential in this sport. And I was very good when I was young, I kind of tapered away maybe middle school, high school and kind of regained my form college. But I started when I was pretty young. And then in regards to other Indian players, I think I've been a little more involved in that the last couple years, I guess start of my college career I wasn't a top name or anything, so I didn't really have the opportunity to kind of put my name in there with some of the other really great Indian golfers. But it was pretty cool, like maybe a few months ago I followed Shubhankar Sharma for awhile on Instagram, but I asked him -- I was like looking through his page, this might have been right after the BMW, so not that long ago I clicked on unfollow, but I followed him again and he ended following me back. So I thought that was pretty cool and that was before I got my card even. So that was cool. Anirban has been really supportive of me since I would say the last year at the Safeway championship, I made the cuts on the number, and then shot a 64th third round and Ban also played well that third round and I never introduced myself to him yet, but he came over to me, we

were the in dining area, I'll never forget this, he probably doesn't remember, but he came over to me in the caddie dining area and he's like Hey, man, great playing, like really, really good stuff, like looking forward to seeing what you do kind of thing. And I thought that was really cool and he's been really supportive of me since as well. I just saw him on the range yesterday and I was walking past him not really wanting to disturb him but he turned around and gave me a little handshake and said really good playing last week. So it's pretty cool to kind of start these relationships with some of these guys and I'm looking forward to continuing that as well. I haven't gotten to know Arjun Atwal very much, I know his or Ban's caddie, some of the caddies know these guys well, so they told me some stories, but yeah I'm excited to kind of spending some more time around these guys.

Q. Obviously hearing all your stories and we are all very excited to hear about your stories, could you tell me about the Korn Ferry TOUR and the way you made it from the looks of it looks pretty easy and the way you had a great collegiate golf career. But there have been many Indians who tried that too going through that Korn Ferry. Ryan Gange (Phonetic) is an example, but obviously they didn't find that amount of success. So if you could tell what is behind the scenes how you prepared for it and how was the route for you from the Korn Ferry to getting a PGA TOUR card.

SAHITH THEEGALA: So interesting thing is I played maybe six or seven PGA TOUR events in my life before I played my first Korn Ferry event. My first Korn Ferry event was in Louisiana this March. And I played a total of six regular, no, seven regular season Korn Ferry events and then the three final additional events. So 10 total. Which I think is about how many PGA events I played. But the crazy part is it's, I can't even speak to the level of the Korn Ferry players. The fields are so strong and I think the last couple weeks kind of showed that because a lot of the Korn Ferry graduates already I think last week out of the top-10, five of them were Korn Ferry graduates from this past year. So obviously the next wave of PGA TOUR players is playing on the Korn Ferry TOUR, but it was, it's pretty crazy because I had some really good weeks on the Korn Ferry and it didn't necessarily produce great results. I finished 19th in my first one and I felt like I played really well. Ninth in another one that I felt like I played well. Obviously the Korn Ferry finals were probably two of the best events I have played in my career and I missed out on the win by a couple in Ohio and then by six or seven in Indiana, I came fourth and sixth. But played really, really solid golf. A lot of those guys are either going to be the next stars on the PGA TOUR or have been on the PGA TOUR, had a little off year and then they come back and then they get their card again and do great things. So I

can't speak for how high the level of golf is on the Korn Ferry and I think that leading up to the Korn Ferry finals and some of the PGA TOUR events really helped me prepare as well.

Q. If you could tell me more about the who was your first coach, who was your first coach instructor and who is currently coaching or training with who are you training right now and in this upcoming season what is your target for the season?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, so I've had pretty much one coach my whole life his name is Rick Hunter. I started working with him when I was really young, maybe eight years old, nine years old, at a local driving range. Only driving range, no golf course. Off mats. But he's done great job in really learning my game and I really just enjoy talking to him about golf stuff. Even if I don't, if I go see him we won't work on my swing or anything, which that's a really another important part about Greg Connor is that we don't really mess with my swing, we tried to when I was younger and it just didn't work. So my swing is my swing and we're just trying to improve a little bit by little bit and a lot of it is set up, tempo and rhythm stuff. My swing has kind of stayed the same for a very long time and he also helped me kind of get through along with a lot of other people, like coach and/or my head coach at Pepperdine, Michael Beard, but after my wrist surgery kind of helping me develop my new swing, which is a little bit smoother, a little bit less over the top kind of deal. But still swinging my swing. He's still my coach. He's an older gentleman, but he's great, so I fully plan on working with him moving forward as well. But, yeah, in terms of plans or goals for the rest of the year, again, like I haven't really had time to sit down and kind of map out the rest of the year. It's so nice having a schedule, by the way though, because it's the first time in my pro career that I'm actually able to book flights in advance and book hotels in advance and not have to pay \$600 for a last-minute flight. But I'm not really worried about setting that many goals or stuff right now, I'm just kind of staying in the moment and I'm trying to put as little expectations on myself because it's been working recently, not recently, for awhile now and just trying to enjoy every moment of it because I'm just obviously blessed to be in this position and to make it to the PGA TOUR so quickly is a dream come true. So I'm just going to, I'm trying to soak in every moment I can and maybe when I get -- like next week I'll have a couple weeks off maybe then I can kind of sit down and kind of reassess the situation. But yeah, I'm just really excited to play the rest of the season, knowing that I have 15, 20 more events left.

Q. You mentioned a little bit earlier about resilience. Just curious have from your Asian/Indian heritage, what maybe some of the values that your family has

instilled in you?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I mean one of the main things is just seeing my parents' journey to the states and how they managed to raise me and my younger brother and give us such a good life. The hardships that they went through and the hardships that some other family went through in India, like the life that me and my younger brother are living are nothing compared to the resiliency that my relatives and my parents have shown. So just kind of keeping that in the back of my mind has really grounded me as a person and just to take advantage of any opportunity I can get because again I'm really blessed and thankful that my parents and grandparents put me in this position to be able to succeed. So I think just taking off of that looking at any speed bumps in the way is kind of just a means of moving forward, kind of something else that is going to help me progress in life and golf. Yeah, I definitely think that Asian heritage part is a big part of why I've reached this point.

Q. Do you model your game after any player? Did you have like a golf idol growing up?

SAHITH THEEGALA: That's funny, not really. Obviously the big three, or big four even, Tiger, Vijay, Phil, Ernie, like those guys are the guys I grew up watching and they all had these just long, fluid swings and I was never really able to swing like any of them, I wouldn't say my swing's as pretty as those guys, but I've always been a very scrappy player, my short game has always kind of saved my butt through my whole life and that's why I really like Phil's short game and that kind of thing. But I don't really think I've modeled my game after anyone just because it's in the very similar to anyone's game. But, yeah, obviously I grew up in the era watching those guys pretty much.

Q. The Americans are once again regaining supremacy in golf, we see the rankings, it's dominated by the young Americans. We saw what damage they can cause in the Ryder Cup. All young Americans playing really, really well. The talent is very, very strong. Now you're an American, you had a very, very promising amateur career and you've progressed to the PGA TOUR, you're a very talented young serve. So for you to be competing against very similarly, I mean talented youngsters, how does it feel?

SAHITH THEEGALA: It feels great because a lot of these younger guys like Scottie Scheffler, Collin Morikawa, Matt Wolff, even Viktor Hovland on the European side. I grew up playing junior golf and college golf and seeing them succeed kind of puts a little bit more fire under my belly as well, knowing that I competed with them my whole life. Obviously when they were younger their trajectories they

started a little bit higher than I was. I felt like I was like not a tier below but I wasn't playing at the same level as they were until really recently. I mean I still have a little bit of a ways to go, but it just gave me a lot of inspiration, knowing that I played with these guys and these guys are able to do it and nothing drastic has changed in their kind of games to take them to the next level, like good golf in college is still going to lead to good golf at the next level. So seeing Collin win two majors and a WGC and all the success is really, really cool and hopefully I get to talk to him a little bit coming up, but it just gives me more confidence to see that it's doable, even Sam Burns winning last week his second win in, what, five months, I think? He's also, he might have been, he might be a year older than me but he's the same year in school as me, so he's another guy that kind of dominated junior and college golf and was someone that you kind of strive to try and compete with. So to see him have that success as well, it's really cool and, yeah, I think the Ryder Cup and Presidents Cup teams coming up for the U.S. are going to be really, really strong and it obviously showed that it was a bunch of young guys, I think Dustin Johnson was the oldest at 36 or 37 maybe, so, yeah, it's really cool to see that. It's really cool.

Q. I have to go back to that sectionals because the front nine didn't go well for you there. I'm sure you stopped by somewhere, drank a little bit of water and set out for the rest. Can you just talk me through that, because it was very big in the sense that the prize wasn't small and you were coming off a very demanding week. So what did you do after you were for perhaps three down or something like that, I can't exactly remember.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, so obviously I just played the Memorial, had a really solid week there. I think I finished 32nd or 33rd or something. But grueling week. Because I had to play 36 holes on Friday, Thursday got rained out. So it was a lot of golf on a wet demanding long golf course and obviously I was exhausted, but my caddie at the time who was Zach, he was just a buddy who was only going to caddie for a little bit but he ended up caddieing for a long time and I'm thankful for him, but we just had a really good time and I had never seen the golf course before, so I made some really silly mistakes on the first nine holes, hitting it way past the hole and those greens were so severe that you had no chance from past the hole. So we were like, okay, now that we got a little bit of information about the golf course we can just go and a being at that because there's nothing to loose, you're not protecting your score against anything in a qualifier like that. So at that point I was like, okay, let's just attack everything. My swing was still feeling really good and I actually got a, I played well that second nine of that first round, got it back to maybe 1-over and we went and got some Wendy's, which I

never eat that kind of fast food stuff, but like, okay, let's just get some quick energy. I ate some nuggets and got back and we were just having a good time. We were like, why not, just attack everything and I actually didn't even make that many -- I think I maybe made five birdies, one bogey the second round or something like that. But it was good enough in a playoff. So, yeah, it was just that kind of that mindset of not worrying about hitting bad shots because again it is a qualifier, it doesn't really matter what you end up shooting, so just having that mindset was -- and then obviously to qualify at Torrey Pines, which is, I live an hour and a half drive away and have all my family there and that was really cool.

Q. I wanted to ask you, you are the Fred Haskins Award winner, Jack Nicklaus Award winner, Ben Hogan Award winner of the college golf season. I just, I mean, Rohan is a very good friend of yours I know and he's a very close friend of mine as well, coming from Dubai, and I know he has struggled a bit getting into the OSU team, but there are many other Indian players in the juniors section who are a bit wary of going to the U.S. college system. Being all these kind of, you have No. 1 player of college golf, what would your advice be to Indian junior golfers, what would you say to them about going there and trying their hand out?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I will say the first year obviously is not, it's not going to be easy, you're in a completely different environment and you're kind of learning how team golf works because you never really, growing up you play individual golf your whole life and you kind of learn how to deal with a lot of pretty hard school work and then all your scheduling stuff and all that, so it's not going to be easy the first year, even for me I was born and brought up in Los Angeles and I went to school in Los Angeles and it still took me a year to get used to it. And my freshman year I played well but I feel like I underperformed and I was really struggling with my academics too trying to keep up both of them. So it's going to be tough but then you sigh the benefits of it, not only in golf, but you learn really great time management, you learn how to deal with people really well, and then sure enough you are surrounding yourself with really, really good players, like other players that are playing D-1 golf, they're there for a reason and you start to pick up little things from each of these, each of your teammates and then obviously picking really good coaches is really important too, coaches that have good experience and can help you get to the next level. So college golf really provides a lot of opportunities and a lot of places, different places that you can learn to take your game to the next level, so I will say it's definitely a challenge and if you feel like you're mentally strong enough to take on those challenges the benefits that you

can reap from it are so great. I mean so many, so many great players out here have gone through the college system and I think a lot of people speak pretty highly about it. There's a reason that a lot of golfers don't go straight from high school to turn pro, there is a lot of benefits I think of picking the right college, so even as OSU, great program and obviously Pepperdine is becoming a pretty great program as well with Michael Beard and all that, so I think there's definitely a lot of benefits. It's hard, it's not easy, but there's just so many things that you can better yourself going to college and taking those four years.

Q. I want you to know, if given an opportunity would you like to come and play in India? I mean, when any professional opportunity arises.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I would love to play and come in India at one point. You I've never actually brought my golf clubs over there. One time I played I played with like some rental clubs at I don't even remember, it was such a long time ago, Boulder.

Q. Boulder Hills?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Boulder Hills. Yeah. I played when I was like maybe 11 or 12 with a rental set. But I would love to come over there and play because I have so much of my family over there still and it would be really cool for my grandparents and some of my family that doesn't get to come over here to watch me play and I think that would be really cool experience for me too. But, he I can't, I would love to come over there and play for sure.

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