

The 150th Open

Mixed Zone

Friday, 15 July 2022

Sahith Theegala



SAHITH THEEGALA: I feel great. I've hit the ball really well. The big key for me always is my driver. I feel like I've always been a good iron player, and that's improving too. I've never been a good driver of the ball. I've driven it really well out here. A part of that is being able to start as far left as I want and hit my big fade, power fade, I guess I'd call it, out here.

I've struck it really well. Honestly, I missed a decent amount of putts that I feel I could have made but just couldn't put a good stroke on them.

They're going to fall eventually. But, yeah, I'm really happy with how I've struck the ball.

Q. Have you played much links golf in your life?

SAHITH THEEGALA: No.

Q. This is your first time over?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, first time. I've never -- actually, I was here nine, ten years ago. I remember so little. I played Carnoustie, and I'm like this is the hardest course I ever played. I birdied 18 to break 90, shot 89.

This is my first like firm -- like it actually wasn't very windy the last two days. These conditions are so firm, so much fun. I love it.

Q. You grew up in California. Summer gets pretty baked out there. Any similarities?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah. It's funny that there's no water or grass on a lot of California public courses. It's like hitting off the hard pin. You kind of learn to hit these spinning wedges, like cutting them or hooking them. I feel pretty comfortable on some of the lies out here because I know some guys change their wedges or stuff, less bounce. But I'm used to hitting off hard pins.

It's a little purer out here, obviously. But, yeah, I think it definitely helped a little.

Q. Any slight changes at all in your swing recently coming into this week or with your short game? Any little tweaks

with ball position or anything like that?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Literally nothing. The only thing with some of my non-full wedge shots is a little more weight on the front foot just to get a little more ball-first contact because you can't use the bounce out here on wedge shots. You're not going to spin it.

Yeah, no setup changes at all. Luckily, I've always been pretty shallow with my cuts at least. So club's not getting stuck in the ground or anything. Also feels good on the wrist not getting it stuck on the ground like I used to. Yeah, nothing changing really.

Q. What's the right attitude, approach for the final 36 coming up this weekend?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Just keep doing more of the same thing. Playing really well and having a good time. But also staying in the process every shot. It sounds cliché.

I think that's a big key for me is sometimes I might get in a zone or something where I take a shot or two where I'm not fully focused or committed. I think I've been committed every shot out here so far. So just trying to keep the same thing.

Q. I wonder what kind of work you've done with putting because putting here is a different planet.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Putting, yes, okay. I was thinking about that question. I did change my putting. My Coach Rick Hunter, he just sent me a text like, hey, just remember -- I have a 37-inch putter right now, so I'm gripping down a little bit on it. My stance is a little bit wider.

I think I kind of shuffle my feet before a lot of my putts, so just making sure it's a little bit wider. For me personally, keeping the club head a little bit lower back.

I definitely need to work on my speed. I left everything short today. Yeah, on the short putts, it's helped me really with more centre strikes for sure.

Q. Did you enjoy those 50-foot putts?

SAHITH THEEGALA: I love it, absolutely love it. It's the best.



You don't get to do this anywhere else.

Q. Can you tell us about that wind switch that Carl was talking about? Have you ever had something like that?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Never.

Q. You can describe it so everyone understands.

SAHITH THEEGALA: So 15, straight downwind, blowing 20, 25 downwind, just shipped me into the fescue. Didn't hit it great, went 350, and just chipping a wedge onto the green.

Then on the walk from 15 green to 16 tee box, it got really cold, dropped maybe 10 to 15 degrees, and the wind was down off the right, about a 430 wind on 15. Get to 16 tee, the wind is like a 930, 10, hurtling off the left. And it switched in five seconds. It wasn't like it went -- it just went from that way to that way. It was crazy.

The last three holes were playing so long. 17 was -- I think I had 200 yards for my second shot, and I hit a good drive. 18, I had 85 yards for my second shot, and I would be hitting 3-iron on the green normally.

Q. What did you have into 17 yesterday?

SAHITH THEEGALA: I had -- to the back pin, the pin was 20 paces further back yesterday, and I had 130 to cover the slope. No more than 155 hole. Today I had 200 hole to the front pin.

Q. Sahith, to start with the bogey on the 1st. Then to end with a birdie, par like the way you did, make that 10-footer. Can you just tell us about both those situations. What goes through your mind when you have a bogey on the 1st after a very good tee shot?

SAHITH THEEGALA: It was a pretty similar situation. I just juiced the wedge shot a little bit because I was playing for a little higher spinnier shot, and I just hit my normal flat shot on both of those shots.

It was the right play on 1. That putt is so hard to get to the hole with the burn just sitting right across the hole there, and I left it six feet short. I hit a good second putt, but it horseshoed and hung on the lip. It was crazy. I don't know how -- it was one of the worst lip-outs I've had in a long time.

So I just kind of shook it off, like, okay, whatever, you can't do anything about it. Just went about my process.

And making the putt on 3 was big. That was my next like shortish putt, ten-footer, put a great stroke and went in.

18, I did the same thing. I knew -- just get it to the hole. I know

there's a slope right behind it. It's downhill, but it's slower than you think. Left it ten feet short.

I got a good look at Sebastian and Keegan's putt, so I kind of knew the speed and the break from there. I hit a great putt. That definitely feels good heading into the weekend.

Q. Left a good taste in your mouth?

SAHITH THEEGALA: For sure. Makes dinner taste so much better.

Q. Can you just go back a bit and tell us about the excitement you had when you first got the call to come here. Then from there to the position you're in right now, can you just talk us through that?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I was fully ready to -- I didn't think I'd move up after the Travelers world ranking-wise, and I moved up a little after John Deere too. So I was fully ready to go back to California.

I was going to take Scottish off because I didn't want to travel and just play my home state event at Barracuda. So I was prepared for that, but I realised I moved up to 63 or 65 in the world ranking, and I realised, wow, I might get in.

To get that call and not be an alternate, to relieve some of the anxiety, it was awesome. Especially because of the magnitude of the event and not only my first Open, but St Andrews, The 150th. Just seemed like a great culmination for the tournament. So I was very, very excited.

It honestly took me a couple days to kind of settle down here. I got here, and I was almost too excited. I was walking the course on Monday even, and I wasn't really focusing in paying attention on the prep work. But I think once I got to Tuesday, the normal prep started.

Yeah, I've just had a ton of fun, even the last two days being on the course. It's a blast. Major championship golf is insane. On top of it, to be here is doubly insane.

Q. Can I ask you, when you're in the back nine there and Tiger was finishing up on 18, was that something you were aware of? Can you talk about how he's been an inspiration to you?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Oh, yeah, I think it goes without being said, anyone from 10, 15 years older to me to even 5, 6 years younger than me have grown up watching Tiger.

Some of my earliest memories of golf was between '06 and '08 when he was still playing at the highest level of golf in the world.

It was so cool seeing him in person and going through his full prep work and on the range and the people he attracts. It's just incredible what he does for the game. We're never going to be able to thank him enough.

But also just knowing that he's another dude, another golfer who has bad days. Obviously he had a couple bad days here. The strength he has just to even make it out and play in a major championship is unreal what he's shown this year.

Both days, the split green on 8 and 10, I was on kind of the right side of the green on 8 and he was just right of the pin on 10, maybe 40 feet apart. It was just cool seeing him putt out. I saw him make birdie there yesterday and hit a couple shots there.

Yeah, obviously he's a competitor, and it's going to hurt playing like that, but it was incredible seeing him out here.

Q. Can I just clarify, you said Carnoustie, was that the last time you played links golf?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Actually, I went to Australia in 2020 and played Victoria Golf Club. It was concrete out there, really firm, really windy, short course. You're laying up from 60 yards all the time. So it was pretty similar to that, and I played really well there.

So like just kind of drawing off of some of that was big out here too.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports