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Tuesday, 3 December, 2024

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Riyadh Golf Club

Othman Almulla Faisal Salhab Shergo Al Kurdi

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Guys, welcome. Obviously we're looking at what could be one of the biggest Saudi Internationals we've ever had. How do you feel going into this week, Faisal?

FAISAL SALHAB: Super excited this year. I think the more people that come out to support and see the game, that's how the game will grow a lot more in Saudi. By having the event here and doing what they're doing, I think it's amazing.

OTHMAN ALMULLA: We're super lucky. I think a lot of the people here have kind of seen the growth of the game from the first year we had the Saudi International at KAEC and how it's big ambitious plans of what we're trying to achieve in Saudi Arabia in the game of golf.

We're at the Riyadh Golf Club this week. We had the Saudi Open here a couple months ago, and just to see the changes and the development in a short period of time, it's heartwarming to see kind of all that hard work come to fruition.

When I joined in 2019, it was just me, and now there's five of us. So it's such an exciting time for sport in Saudi Arabia and for us as golfers. Super excited for the week.

Q. Shergo, your thoughts coming into the week?

SHERGO AL KURDI: It's fantastic what they've done and the hard work they've put into this and put into the sport, especially being here in Saudi. The field that we have this week is unbelievable. The amount of major winners we have here is -- I mean, we've never had it before. It's fantastic. I've always loved coming to this golf club. What I've heard from the guys so far, they're enjoying it. So it's



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going to be a good week.

Q. Othman, you describe yourself as the father figure of these kids. Forget your own personal ambitions this week. What are your expectations of -- four players in the field apart from you, is that correct? What are your thoughts?

OTHMAN ALMULLA: Yes, that's correct. I would love to say I'm a father figure of these kids, but I'm still trying to beat them every week we play together. I think Captain Ali Balharith far exceeds me in age and experience in the game of golf in Saudi Arabia. I'm very, very proud.

I've played golf with the guys playing this week for a very, very long time. I've been representing Saudi for over 20 years, and even five years after I turned professional, I'm still pinching myself at the thought of us competing against the best players in the world in Saudi Arabia for one of the biggest prizes.

Faisal had a great week last week in the season finale on the Asian Development Tour in Aramco. Shergo's been playing really well, had some really good scores. Saud and Khalid as well. Saud had a great couple of weeks. He's just turned professional. It's rare to have the team mentality in such an individual sport.

We're on the road so often. It's actually a little blessing to have -- yes, we compete every single week, but there's 120 players every week. Yes, one of us wants to win, but we're always cheering for each other as well as being competitive, and that's very, very rare.

The game of golf can be very lonely. It can be very difficult at times. So it's nice to have the five of us traveling together to most of the events to keep supporting each other to kind of achieve -- we all have the same goal to represent Saudi Arabia in international competitions and see how good we can be.

I don't think anyone knows what the final -- when it's all said and done at the end of our careers, but we want to be Asian champions, we want to be world champions and win events and make Saudi proud.

It's a super longwinded answer, but I guess the next goal

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and dream is to have a female Saudi professional golfer. Female participation is on the rise. We have a lot of juniors, boys and girls, playing the game of golf. It's a huge honor to sit up here with Shergo and Faisal and to see Saud and Khalid every week playing together. I think something special could happen.

The game of golf, again, is tough, and we're playing at the elite level of the game. Yes, we're grateful to be here, but we all have ambitions to do some really, really great things on the golf course.

Q. Probably the most important week arguably for your entire season, all of you. Do you feel extra pressure this week? Because great performances from you guys will elevate the reputation, the status of Saudi golf. How are you feeling on the eve of the tee-off?

SHERGO AL KURDI: I think Othman and Faisal will agree here that like there's two types of pressure. You can feel pressure, or you can feel excitement, the excitement to do well or the pressure and the fear to not do well. I think as golfers we train ourselves to feel the excitement and try to perform the best we can and just do the best of our ability.

I think this week, especially because a lot of us know the golf course very well, we've always played here as a kid. So for us it's a big excitement. We've all trained. We've all worked extremely hard for this moment. It is the biggest tournament of the season.

But definitely for myself, I feel a lot of excitement for this week and I honestly can't wait.

OTHMAN ALMULLA: I think pressure is a privilege. I think we're on a very, very unique situation to be the trailblazers for golf in Saudi Arabia and to be on the front lines of this big ambitious dream of growing golf in the Kingdom and the region. I think of course we're going to feel pressure, it's normal. I think we all really want to do well and we want to represent ourselves and our country in a way we all can be proud of.

But I think it's also important to be grateful for this opportunity and grateful for us to be teeing it up. We look at the Saudi football league. We look at some of the other sports with the participation of some of the best players in the world. The whole country is growing and super ambitious.

I think, like Shergo said, you can do pressure two ways. We know the responsibility we have to carry ourselves in a professional manner and to leave an impact whether we play well or not play well. Yes, it's an important week. It's

the most important week probably of the year, like you said, but we don't see it as like the end game. The end game is to kind of beat some of the top players in Asia, some of the top players in the world, and this is hopefully a step in that direction.

I think only one person is going to win this week. Only 65 players of 120 of the best players in the world are going to make the cut. I think this can be either a super positive experience or a learning experience, something we can take forward for the rest of the year and going forward. I think, again, we're super grateful to have the opportunity.

FAISAL SALHAB: I agree with what both Shergo and Othman said. Like Othman said, it is a privilege to feel those nerves, but at the same time, it is excitement. It is such a big event and our season-ending event and could do a lot for us, but also, like Othman said, it's really kind of a place where, I don't know, we just have to keep -- it's not the end goal, right? We want to keep getting better. We want to keep grinding.

No matter what happens, we're going to wake up the next day, go to work, and keep striving to reach higher, the highest heights, right? We want -- we're now five professionals. We want to show that this is -- like we want to show the future generations that this is a thing that you can do as a Saudi. You can compete, and you can be at the top of your game.

Like you said, hopefully we win, right? Even if we don't, we're going to keep working, and hopefully the goal is a long ways ahead.

So super excited. Looking forward to seeing what we can do.

Q. As you say, there's more Saudi professionals competing this week than ever before. You've seen the ground swell of young Saudis, kids, taking up the sport that we haven't seen before.

FAISAL SALHAB: A hundred percent. The initiative, what Golf Saudi is doing and what the Saudi Golf Federation is doing for both juniors and women, just like opening the doors for them and creating more access for them to kind of come into the sport, have more places to play, see great players, it's very new for us, but they've done a great job.

You see much more players -- even this week you're going to see so many players. Having the golf in the capital, I think it's going to be amazing. People are going to be able to come out and see the game for ourselves.

We won't have to convince them. They just come here,

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they try the game, and a lot of people will fall in love with it.

OTHMAN ALMULLA: Yeah, for sure. Like Faisal said, to have professional golfers from a country that doesn't have a steep history in the game of golf is really special. We started in 2019, and we had two years of COVID.

It seemed so, so long ago now, but it's only been really three years of development with all the challenges, not having the golf courses yet, with all the challenges of trying to -- I think we have three main objectives. We need to increase awareness, give access and opportunities, and then nurture those opportunities for people that are interested in the game.

What SGF, Saudi Golf Federation, and Golf Saudi are doing on the ground, I like how they do it. We have these events, and there's a lot of media. We kind of highlight what we're doing, but it's a lot of work in the background. We kind of want to show people what we're doing with the results as opposed to the big flashy thing.

We've got some exciting kids coming through the program. We've got a lot of really cool school programs that are about to launch that I think will have an immense effect on the future of golf and the Kingdom.

Again, I've been playing a long time, and when I used to take time off from school or university to go play golf, a lot of my friends didn't even know it was a sport or we had an international team. To see how far we've come in such a short period of time is something we can all be proud of as Saudis, and hopefully we can be a beacon to grow the game.

There's so many different sports because it's not one sport, it's for everybody. I think the big goal is we just want you to come out and see what golf is all about. You may like it or not like it, but at least you know what golf is. I like to watch Formula 1. I like to watch soccer.

That's kind of the end game. If there's a golf tournament in Saudi, even if you don't play full-time or you're an avid golfer, I like the sport. I can come and watch, it's a beautiful day out with my family. I'm always an advocate that the game of golf is the only game that a mom and dad and son and daughter can go out and play at their different levels and enjoy time together.

I think the fabric of society and families need to come back together, and it's a great time to do sport together.

SHERGO AL KURDI: 100 percent what Othman said there. It's a family game, especially when I was growing up, very much my family was involved in it. I think for the

younger generation out here watching this week, it's good to see that them and their family are coming here to watch it and enjoy it. Even if they're not playing it, just to watch and enjoy and spend time with your family, that's what life's about.

Even this morning I was saying to some of the guys walking to the range for the Pro-Am, looking at some of the juniors, it is unbelievable how far we've come. Like the amount of golfers, the skill, everything, the excitement that they feel, I mean, that's the aim for us.

We just want them to be excited to play golf and to be inspired because we were all that kid, we were that kid once, and we felt inspired by the golfers. That's what we want to do. That's the aim.

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