

# WM Phoenix Open

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Scottsdale, Arizona, USA

TPC Scottsdale

## Sahith Theegala

### Press Conference



**THE MODERATOR:** All right, welcome like to welcome Sahith Theegala into the interview room here at the WM Phoenix Open. Making his fifth career start at this event. Couple close calls. Talk about being back at TPC Scottsdale.

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, it's great to be back. Thankful I got a sponsor invite into this week. Very reminiscent of four years ago where definitely attribute this tournament to kick starting my career.

So great to be back. I really love the golf course. Always plays firm and fast. Great memories. Again, like a lot my family and friends come out, so just a great tournament in general.

It's very different than every tournament on TOUR, so it's something I always really look forward to. Just happy to be here.

**Q. Two straight Top 10s on TOUR coming into the week. Just talk about the state of your game.**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, game feels great. It's been -- obviously a tough year last year and a lot of it was just not being 100% healthy. A credit to a lot of guys out here. A lot of them aren't 100% healthy and still putting up results every week.

Yeah, just didn't have any speed. Hurt myself in a couple different ways. It just feels great to be healthy and able to put in the work golf-wise that I wanted to be able to put in last year but my body wasn't letting me.

The ball striking feels good. Really made another emphasis on my short game. It's always been the best part of my game and probably wasn't giving it the attention that I had always been giving it, so off season I put a lot of work into the short game.

It's just awesome to see kind of the results come in early. I knew I was just going to have to stay patient and keep doing what I'm doing, and hopefully come weekends, you

know, have more chances coming down the stretch.

Last two weeks were awesome. It was good to get that taste again.

**Q. With the solid play of late you enter the week No. 6 in the Aon Swing 5. I know that's very important to you as you're trying to get into the next two Signature Events.**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah. Oh, it's massive. There is a decent likelihood that I wouldn't have gotten into any of these three events, including this one based on my priority ranking this year.

So to be in this one is huge, especially needing another good finish this week to get in the Aon Swing 5. Being in the Signature Events the last three years, it's such a boost at the start of the year. And the amount of points, obviously so important to get kind of a jump. It's tough to kind of play from behind from a points perspective as well.

Especially on the west coast, two golf courses, two places that I absolutely love in Pebble and Riv. Getting into those will be a huge goal.

It doesn't really make a difference on like my game plan this week or how I try to play. A little added extra motivation for sure.

**Q. The last four holes here are always talked about. They always influence the outcome of the tournament. Based on your past experience, are you approaching those holes differently? How do you think you need to attack those?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, I think the entire back nine here is awesome honestly. Awesome design. Provides a ton of excitement. The easiest holes on the golf course are there and the toughest holes as well.

I think that's pretty apparent with the 15, even 16 sometimes and 17, definitely three of the easiest holes on the course. But on the flipside you hit one bad shot and you're easily walking away with bogey or double on any of

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those holes.

Just the heightened sense of focus I think once you get to that part of the golf course. There is a -- the buzz is a little louder. Yeah, you really have to hit a good tee shot on 15, a good second shot. Just got to stay locked in and focused on all those shots.

If you do I think playing that four-hole stretch in 2-under is about par or is about what a lot of these guys want to play that four-hole stretch in.

So nothing different. I think maybe 17 I've been comfortable hitting a draw recently, especially with my 4-wood. I think every single time I've played the hole I've tried to cut it off the water or off the left side of the green. This year not sort of a -- just because of how my game is right now I feel comfortable starting forward on the very right edge of the green and kind of just playing for that chipping area on the right.

Yeah, other than that, the same stuff on 15, 16, 18. Got some of my speed back, so the water on 18 shouldn't be an issue as long as I hit it solid. That's very helpful on that hole as well.

**Q. You're been here a few times, but do you still marvel at this place and how big it is and how many people come out here?**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, especially on Tuesday, Wednesday. It's pretty wide to see the buildouts and how many people are still in those buildouts. There is nothing like it. The buildouts are enormous, and the energy is always really good.

It's a pretty wild place. Yeah, it doesn't get old. At least the last five years I still get here and I'm like, oh, my goodness. It's unlike any other golf tournament. It's really fun. I love this tournament. I look forward to it every year because it's just different and unique and definitely has more energy around it.

**Q. Big fan of yours. As a junior golfer who would love to be in your stance one day, what are two things you focused on as a junior golfer to get to the pros?**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Thanks, Maverick. Appreciate that. I think it's tough. It's tough, especially with I feel like golf is just getting better at an earlier and earlier age.

You know, I'm seeing guys that are in high school and college hit it further than guys on TOUR. The distance thing is a big thing. I think something that's -- it's easier said than done, but just ignoring that part and finding your

own path.

I've seen a lot of kids lose their game trying to chase distance rather than hone in their craft. What I did personally and what I think has worked for a lot of my peers and a lot of my friends is focus on the part of your game that I love the most. For me that was chipping.

I just chipped as much as I could. Did a ton of chipping contests. Didn't matter if I knew they were a good our bad chipper, I just wanted to beat them, and I got my best practice in that way.

I struggled with my driver a lot early on. I knew I was struggling with Driver, but when I was doing chipping contests or chipping games or working on a crazy spinny chip, I forget about all the other stuff, all the other parts of the game.

So I just wanted to feel like my chipping was better than anyone else's chipping. In a way it freed up the rest of my game as well.

I would say find a part of the game you love, focus on that.

In terms of transition from junior to pro golf, college golf is great. You're there with 6 to 7 of your best friends. You all want to kind of make it to the same level of golf. You all want to be a pro.

Just kind of push each other in that way. Listen to your peers for sure. Yeah, golf is the best, so just enjoy it.

**Q. When you're dealing with injuries like you were last year, do you even attempt to work on your game as well? How do you balance like recovering and also trying to improve?**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, it was a unique situation for me because the only other big injury I ever had was my wrist injury in college. That was really easy to deal with because I couldn't do anything. I needed surgery and sat out for six months. I went almost a year without playing a tournament.

That was really easy and clear cut. In this case it was just a muscle strain. I tried playing through it for so long and lost lot a bunch of speed, mechanics went down. Docs were are telling me I could play through it, which I could, but it was a mental struggle. Am I just being soft? What's going on with my body?

Eventually when I was like, I just really need to listen to my body. Ended up tweaking my neck, too. So rested it for a few months, did some rehab stuff, and then I realized how

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hurt I actually was when I got healthy again.

That was a new experience for me. It wasn't like an injury that was affecting my life. I could pretty much do anything else fine. Just couldn't rotate aggressively at all. I think my numbers, lost a ton of speed last year, four, five miles per hour for the year almost.

Nice to see that back.

But, yes, not that I -- I don't think I needed another learning lesson but apparently I did. So working on your game while you're injured is not the move. It is just how can I get my body to where I want it to feel. Especially this early in the season it should feel pretty close to 100%. Later in the season nobody is at 100%.

So, yeah, I've learned that now. It's just like whatever, if I'm not playing my best golf just focus on my body.

**Q. Earlier you were talking about 17, kind of switching your strategy a little bit. I hate to bring this up but obviously we know what happened the first time you came to this tournament.**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah.

**Q. When you step up on the tee box in competition do you ever feel yourself thinking back though those moments?**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah.

**Q. How do you block that out or deal with it?**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, for sure. Yeah, I've thought about that hole way too much probably. It's really nice the position I'm in now, especially hitting that draw with the 4-wood. I definitely carry it further than I did my 2-hybrid.

So the reasoning for that draw is it feels like it makes the hole wider for me because I can push and pull and feels like it'll be okay. If I pull it it covers that knob. That's like 30 yards short of the green, so there is no variance for any kicks. It kicks -- whatever the ball flight is doing, it'll kick that way.

The biggest issue which is just didn't carry it far enough off that shot and it kicked off that mound. It does free me up a little bit. If it's a little into the wind it's still a driver I think as well.

Yes, I did think about that shot. I think about -- I remember Scottie just like almost like whiffing one out right just perfect. Like right where you want to be and chipping it to

three feet and making it look so easy.

Yeah, I think about that probably more than I should, more than I need to. It's a good microcosm of how a shot like that, one shot in a career can really impact you the rest of the way so you don't make a similar strategical mistake.

**Q. New driver for you this year. I talked to Carl and he said you have the 9-wood with you this week. I remember the interview from last year on Golf Channel where you said you wanted to keep experimenting with your bag. With the injuries, was that something you could still do? Where are you on the process of finding a 5-hybrid?**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, last year was -- I was not focused on equipment at all. Actually, that's not true. I did switch golf balls for a month because I lost speed. I was under-spinning my Pro V1 and went to the X for a bit and I realized that -- I was like, what am I doing? I've played the same ball for so long, so I went back to the Pro V1.

But, yeah, I think the 9-wood has been in the rotation for a few years now. I used it last week at Torrey. It's a great Torrey club out of the rough just to chop out. This week's it's a great par-5 club. A lot of the par-5s if I miss my drive a little bit I have 260 -- somewhere between 240 and 260, 270. I can carry my 9-wood out here 240, 245 and it lands really soft.

Goes to the exact same distance as my 4-iron does out here but just spins 1500 more than my 4-iron does. My 9-wood literally spins at 53, 5500 and then my 4-iron is and just under 4000. It's a great week for that.

The 5-hybrid, I do have a 5-hybrid. Haven't put it in play one time yet. I don't even travel with it. I hit it a lot at home because it's so fun. It's funny watching the ball speed on it is like 150 ball speed and it flies like 205 or 210 yards. It's a fun club. I don't think that's going to make the rotation.

I'm set on my 9-wood, 3-iron, 4-iron rotation.

**Q. Sahith, going back to holes on the back nine, hole 11 last year was the hardest hole on this course. What makes that hole so challenging tee to green to your eye or overall?**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, it's a great hole design. It's similar to 12 at Augusta. It's like if you hit a draw into the green and you bail short right you're in the middle of the trees on the right, which is a miss. It's absolutely the miss.

And then the reason why it's so easy to do that is because long left is dead. Even off the tee. If you just pull it a little

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bit and it gets hot, that side of the hill there will all the coots kind of eat the grass away so it's really thin. Anything drawing on that left side of the fairways is going straight in the water. Nothing is staying up.

So then vice versa you're like, all right, let me try and hit the cut into this fairway now. Similarly it feels the same way. If you kind of pull smoke the cut it's still -- it's trying to fight the hill. Again, the hill is so bare it just goes into the water there. The miss is always kind of a little soft flair out right. And then all of a sudden you have 210 yards in from the right rough.

So it's -- I have a plan for the hole. It's to hit 4-wood. Sometimes if I'm uncomfortable I try and smash driver and honestly hit it in the right rough. If you hit the fairway to any of the pins it really is a birdie hole because the fairway is firm and a lot of time you have a 9-iron into the green.

Green is pretty benign and flat. It's like one of the flattest greens on the course. You see a lot of guys roll 30-footers I feel like there. The left pin gets dicey. Seen plenty of people chip it in the water.

I would love to make four fours, get out of there. But it's a great hole design. If you hit a good shot you're absolutely looking at birdie. If you hit a bad one you're staring double bogey in the face.

I think the hardest part of the hole is that left side is like a cliff. It just falls off. You know if you pull it at all there is no chance of staying up.

**Q. You mentioned sort of the buzz of the fans throughout the week. Do you think weeks like these help grow the game of golf when fans are allowed to push the boundaries?**

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I think so. I think it's great because it brings people that usually don't watch golf into the game. I have a lot of friends that could care less about golf that ask me for tickets for this event. That shows something for sure.

It's great. I think people having a good time on the golf course is only good for the game. Certainly there is aspects of it that you can't really control as a tournament or someone putting it together. People getting too drunk or whatever.

I think it's great. Everyone has a good time. The players I think really enjoy the event. It's just so unique and different. If it was a weekly think I think it would not be good, but just because it's such a unique environment, it's what Waste Management Phoenix Open is known for, I just

fully embrace it.

I love it. Yeah, I just fully embrace it. I kind of get lost in the sauce when I'm out there.

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