

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
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SAHITH THEEGALA



Q. Sahith, thanks for joining us. Second time playing this tournament, can you talk a little bit about the course? Just got off your nine hole pro-am.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, yeah, actually yesterday the pro-am got canceled because the winds were so high, so I was going to go play nine right before the pro-am but didn't end up doing it. So played 18 today, nice calmer day for sure. I think the forecast for the rest of the week is pretty windy.

That's nothing new here. I think last time I played three of the days were super windy so we know what we're getting into when we come here. The course is honestly designed perfectly for this wind. It's a short course but some of the holes play so, so long. There's a lot of like 6-iron through 4-iron approach shots. You'll see a bunch of guys hit woods into the some of the par 4s, even some of the par 3s. It's a good fun test.

Then there's other holes where you drive it right up by the green, try to get up and down for birdie. So there's a lot of variance in the scoring, which I think always makes for a fun watch and also fun playing. If you can play well, you can shoot a low number, but if you're not on your game and not on top of it, you can usually shoot a pretty high number. Super fun course.

And this is probably the best condition I've seen it. A lot of guys kind of said that sentiment this week about the course.

Q. Couple top-30s in your last two starts entering this week. How do you feel about your game? Do you think you're kind of trending upward?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I finally feel like a hundred percent. I've been a hundred percent for a few months but I haven't gotten my speed back, and something that a lot of guys just told me I've just got to stay patient about it.

I feel great. I'm moving along in the gym, maybe stronger than ever, but just the golf speed just took a really long time to come back. It's finally back. I think these last two weeks after Utah, even Utah and Japan I drove it great and played like I felt like I should have played.

It's just good to be back. That's why I'm using this week and next week as a runway to kind of start the next season, get a few more reps in. I just felt like my season's been so broken up through a couple injuries. Yeah, game honestly feels great. If I can just roll in a few putts, that really cost me the last few weeks. Just excited to compete again this week especially back here.



Q. You had the oblique and neck injuries earlier in the year. When did you feel a hundred percent back and I guess how much of a relief or confidence boost was that?

SAHITH THEEGALA: I missed quite a few events. I know I missed two majors and probably at least two or three Signature Events so that was a bummer. I kind of rushed back a little bit at The Open just because I didn't want to miss the third major of the year. I was healthy but I just didn't play any golf, I was just in the gym. Thought maybe if I could do something special, but in hindsight, I mean, whatever. I got the clearance, I wasn't going to reinjure myself there.

I'd say I was a hundred percent in Napa was probably the first time, so it's been two months now. I felt great, just a lot of work with my team outside of the tournaments, which has been super fun honestly. Feel like I'm kind of due for a fresh start next season, which is fun.

I've got to play my way into everything. The majors, the Signature Events, I'm not in anything, so I'm excited for that challenge. Kind of the goal is to get into those Signature Events and to stay healthy. I have a good blueprint.

It was honestly my fault, so learned from that. It was a bummer that I've been so healthy the last five, six years and for my first one to be something that really affected the whole season was a bummer. Yeah, I'm pumped for next year to start.

Q. And then Thursday, Friday you're grouped with Rafa and Michael Brennan. Have you had a chance to meet Michael yet?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah.

Q. How familiar are you with his game?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, yeah, that's a good question. I played with Michael today in the morning, the first nine holes I played with him, and Hunter Wolcott, who both tore it up in Canada this year, or PGA TOUR America. I have a really good buddy and teammate, Derek Hitchner, that played with Michael Brennan I think three or four times in the final group in Canada this year. Unfortunately, Michael's got the best of him every time.

Derek got his Korn Ferry Tour card too and he's a baller, but he just said that Michael's a different breed of golfer.

I got to see that in Utah honestly. I hit balls next to him. Looks like the prototypical new generation of golfer, guys hitting 185, 190 ball speed in his sleep. Obviously he seemed like a super nice guy as well.

This was my first time getting really to spend some time with him. His game's really impressive. His swing, it looks so easy, it looks like he's not even trying to hit it hard. You



can see the control in his golf swing, especially at a place like Utah where I think he had a historic strokes gained off the tee week.

But it's not just a bomb-and-gouge golf course, you've got to put it in places and clearly he was able to do that with driver, which was super impressive.

And he kind of ran away with the thing. To do that, especially coming off what he did in PGA TOUR Americas with the three wins, he's going to be a special player for a long time. Yeah, I think there's definitely a group of those guys that I wouldn't be surprised to see them rattle off a bunch more wins. Yeah, I'm excited to play with him the next couple days.

And then Rafa, obviously what a great story that was last year. Got to spend some time with him and his wife at Sentry this past year. Like the nicest people ever. So happy for him. I'm excited to play with him, too. See how he kind of dissects the course. Obviously being a past champion he's doing a lot of things right out here. I think it will be a good grouping, hopefully some good vibes.

Q. Do you see some similarities in their victories given the unusual or unexpected circumstances?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, yeah. I think it's an interesting thing in sports, you see it all the time. When someone's back is up against a wall, or you have a little bit of an extra chip on your shoulder, I feel like you always play a little bit better.

And I think I'm not so sure about Michael, he's obviously had such a great summer and was probably expected to do good things, but I saw something after the week got retweeted on social media like you should fade Michael Brennan this week because his two previous starts on Tour were terrible and like his Korn Ferry Tour starts were kind of a mixed bag.

I'm like, the guy's playing the best golf of maybe anyone right now.

Maybe -- I don't know if he saw that. I might ask him. Yeah, I think when you're not expected to win and you really need to do something special, there's something in there, something intangible for sure.

And then obviously Rafa was in a rough spot and the birth of his child, I didn't even think he was going to play the event. I think he ended showing up Wednesday or something, something crazy. Some things are just out of your hands. A week like that last year for him is definitely super, super cool and super, super special.

Like I said, there's some intangibles to it. Felt like the "perspective" word gets used a lot, but I'm sure with the birth of his daughter and a lot of other life things that I'm sure he has going on, especially later on in his career, he's just like I need to step up and do it and sure enough he did. Seems like the great ones in any sport do that, so it was cool to see him do it.



I think it's breathed some new life in his career for sure. I hope he's out here for another 10, 15 years or whatever he wants to be out here for. Definitely some similarities.

Q. You played here one other time in 2021. Is there something specific that stands out about that week here in Bermuda?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, it was a crazy, crazy week actually. It was only my fourth or fifth PGA TOUR event as a member.

My caddie, Carl, couldn't make it here so I had my buddy Robbie, who's caddied for me a couple other times, he caddied for me in Canada and a Korn Ferry Tour event in Maine. We're good buddies. Had him caddie for him this week.

I ended up getting paired up with Michael Sims. Simsy's a local legend, one of the nicest guys out here. He works as an agent now so see him all the time as well.

And then Brian Morris, another absolute legend, especially in the golf world in Bermuda. I think anybody who's related to golf in Bermuda has some sort of story or some sort of help from Brian to reach where they were. I know he impacted a lot of people really well.

He actually had -- I think when he got the spot he had terminal cancer. Yeah, it was a bummer, but like his attitude and just how he dealt with it, I've never seen anything like it. He was not going to back down to it. He didn't let it really affect his personality. He was just a really kind dude, made everyone else's day a lot better.

A lot of the locals shared their stories with me four years ago about Brian. And his character didn't change. If anything, his character got better and stronger once he found out he's got terminal cancer. He's also a great player. I think a lot of people on this island learned a lot from him.

It was a wild week. And then my grandfather actually died Wednesday night of this week, so there was just a lot of stuff going on. I took it kind of in stride. I was just happy to be here. I had just got my Tour card, here with one of my best friends, so just trying to make Brian's last couple competitive rounds as cool as I could have. Half the island was out here supporting. They were cheering for every one of my shots as well.

Yeah, I remember the first hole he striped a little hybrid down there, hit it to eight feet. I was like, oh, my gosh, this guy's gonna do it. He ended up making par on the first hole. Definitely some other memorable shots. He honestly played pretty well for how -- obviously the cancer was affecting his stamina and his strength, but I think he put up a couple rounds in the 80s. I think he ended up outliving his prognosis by like two years, something crazy. The guy's just an absolute fire, and again, he never let the cancer put him down.

It was a crazy special week. It's a week that I reminisce on a lot.



Also, I was missing the cut by like four or five with six or seven holes to go and I birdied like five of my last six just out of nowhere. Again, another intangible thing I talk about, my grandfather's definitely looking out for me. I remember making birdie on my 36th hole and I'm just throwing a fat fist pump, which I don't do a lot of that, especially to make a cut.

Yeah, it's a special week. A lot of people here associated with the event still honor Brian. Simsy actually gave me a hat, he has these three hearts, I think it's green, yellow red, I forget what order, but I wear the hat all the time just as a reminder just to be kind to people. That seemed to be Brian's big thing.

Yeah, I think his wife's going to be here. Yeah, he's the man. And to see all the guys that were here part of the tournament four years ago still talking about the positive impact he had is pretty cool. It's a week I'm never going to forget.

Everybody remembered my caddie's name, Robbie, four years ago, which I thought was cool. I need to call him. Maybe next year I can bring him out here again. Yeah, special week. Just glad I could be back and hopefully play four days of good golf.

Q. One other question on that. You yourself, were you under any pressure when you were playing with Brian? I know there was a lot of pressure around with a lot of Bermudans supporting him obviously, but for you yourself, I know you are a professional golfer but you were young in age at that part of your career. You acted so professionally, quote unquote, with the way you let him take his limelight and I think that's what a lot of people will remember about what you did for him as well. Does that stand out to you?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, yeah. Again, I got a lot of credit but I just felt like I was thankful for the tournament for putting me in such a special moment and such a special place for not only Brian but kind of everyone on the island that has gotten to know Brian and that he's impacted.

I know we had a talk with the rules official about hey, if things get slowed down, we'll try to speed it up, but I didn't really let that affect me at all. I just wanted to have a good time and make sure that Brian and Simsy had a great time. I don't think anything was actually going to stop Brian from having a good time no matter where he hit it, no matter how long it took. He played fast, give credit where credit's due.

Obviously I give credit to O.J., his caddie. He kept things moving along as well. I know he stayed out of the way. I know he was nervous, too.

Q. I think it's a testament to you that you remember obviously your own caddie's name but the fact that you remember Brian and Michael's so well, and you also attribute to O.J., who was caddying for Brian in that tournament. Any special moment that sticks out in your mind about Brian? A word that passed between you or

something that will keep you remembering other than the red, yellow and green hat?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Well, he said some words that I can't repeat here, but one of the statements was -- it just made me laugh. He was talking about, hey, man -- this was like early on in the time. Like I didn't know how to bring up the cancer with him, but at some point I was just like I'm just going to talk about it, he seemed so chill.

Like man, how's it been, how's everyone treating you, like what's your prognosis?

He's like, shit, Sahith, now that I have cancer I can say whatever the F I want, I can do whatever I want, I can ask for something.

In the darkest times of his life and I'm sure those around him, he's able to be -- still show his humorous side and never took it for granted every day that he still had a life. There was a lot of kind of moments like that out there.

He hit some -- he whiffed a few shots, and the first thing, he put his hand around me and just gave me a hug. He's like Sahith, F this game, man, it's the worst game ever.

But he also said multiple times it's the best game ever and golf has saved his life pretty much. I think he attributes a lot of his kind of just relationships that he made through golf and why he felt like he was so lucky in his life.

Q. One other question from us: Bermuda was early in your career.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah.

Q. You find yourself back here after a pretty rough season through injury and so on. Was this meant to be here, was it meant to be? Was it always on your plan to make a comeback here?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah.

Q. Why do you come back here? Why have you come back and played this championship?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, yeah, for sure. Bottom line this is still a PGA TOUR event and every PGA TOUR event that I play is an honor and I don't take it for granted.

A lot of people ask me why I'm here this week because I'm exempt next year and don't need to try to get in the top hundred or anything like that.

Again, it's just a place that I have a lot of good memories of. I feel like my game is starting to get in a good place, just wanted to get more competitive reps. A big thing I've been struggling with the last few tournaments is just getting back in the swing of things, maybe a



little focused too much on the mechanics in my swing and how my stroke looks and all that stuff. I know out here none of that stuff matters. You've got to flight your ball you have to score as much as you can, you've got to get up and down from some gnarly places. So I just thought it would be a great week, just put me in a good mindset, you know, on island time.

And again, the people have been so kind to me. It's an event that Jevon's the man, so I always told him I'd be back, don't worry about it, you don't have to convince me too hard, so glad to be here.

Q. Last question, I don't think we can let you go without asking about the engagement, you and Juju a few weeks ago. Can you talk about that, where you guys were or anything?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah. Man, I'm glad it's over. I was just super excited. I'm not a planner. She literally plans everything in our relationship, where we eat, flights, booking stuff. Literally does everything outside of golf in our relationship. So for me to plan this was a lot of work and a lot of stress. Thankfully her sister and her dad helped me a lot.

Kind of had to keep it a secret for over a month, just kind of coordinating everybody was difficult. Again, her sister helped me a lot, which was huge. Still, it was like had to keep it a secret. Again, it's so hard to hide a secret from her. I think she had an idea especially when I was like hey, let's go to Hawaii between Japan and Utah. We're going to have to go back to California anyway, it's like right in the middle. I think she actually bought that.

I made sure to not receive the emails when we booked our flights, and when we tagged our bags in Japan, I was like we're going to Hawaii but I'm not going to tell you what island. So she didn't know what island we were going to until we got to Honolulu and then connecting to Kauai.

It went great there, all our family was there. My parents were in India so we Facetimed them right after, but my brother came and we had our closest people from both sides there. It was a blast.

But I'm glad I didn't lose the ring. Just traveling in Japan with the ring, every day I was stressed. I'm glad I didn't drop the ring in the ocean. I proposed on like a cliff side. All I could think about was, oh, my God, going to drop this ring in the ocean and never find it again.

Honestly, it went well. I don't know if she for sure knew or not. I think she had an idea but she acted like she didn't, so I appreciate that a lot as well.

Yeah, we had a great time. It worked out perfect. It honestly, it went better than I thought it would. That's all I can ask for.

Q. Have you guys set a date or are you still working that out?



SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, we're working that out. I think we're going to get a date this week actually. She's meeting with a couple wedding planners tomorrow. Sometime October next year, or November. Probably in Hawaii again, but we'll see. Yeah, I think in Hawaii.

