

AKSHAY BHATIA ( -6)

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**Q. It's been a year now since you turned pro. Great round of golf today. Did you learn a little something as you were moving along and start your career off just so kind of interestingly and at such a young age?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah. I mean, every week I get to play I think I learn something. The player I am today is a completely different player than I was last year here. Yeah, it's fun. Like I'm just thankful for the opportunity this week and many other weeks that I've had on the PGA TOUR.

But, you know, it's only a matter of time when I start understanding the comfortability part, the structure prior to the event and I felt like this week I did a good job of it as far as just doing my own thing and, you know, just the weather was really nice. There were so many things that went my way and I played pretty good throughout the day.

**Q. What do you think is the biggest thing you learned? For me when I first turned pro, my good golf's good, but my bad golf needs to be better, I need to tighten up my days that I'm not playing as well.**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I think the biggest thing that I've learned is just like how my mind changes during certain situations on the golf course. I've said it many times, but just being able to play these Tour events, you learn so much. Obviously the courses are set up harder. So it's weird, we were looking at the pin sheets today and I was like, holy crap, all these pins are tucked. I feel like I've never really seen that in a PGA TOUR event.

The biggest thing is just understanding how to control my mind when I felt my heart rate got up or when I'm playing well. It's just, it's really changed. Like I'm able to make a lot of birdies in a row and I felt like I haven't done that as much when I've started playing pro golf, and I've really learned how to do it obviously playing mini-tour stuff and winning and being in contention's really helped with that.

**Q. You had a few things working for you out there. What was the key to that round?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I had a lot of fun. My friend, like I said, he's been caddying for me the last few months and just having a lot of fun, laughing a lot, enjoying myself. I really kept my mind under control today. I said prior to this interview that I felt like my prep work was a lot more efficient than overdone in the last three days prior to this tournament. I don't know, it's been a good week. It's nice to see a familiar golf course. I'm swinging a lot better than I have been in a tournament situation. It's really exciting just to see the results. And I drove it really good today.

**Q. Speaking of that prep, is it right that you played a practice round with Phil Mickelson and you've got a good relationship? Can you speak to that?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah, definitely. I played with Phil Tuesday, Wednesday. I've gotten to know him, you know, the last few, probably six, seven months. Went to Saudi Arabia with him, got to talk to him a lot. He's always keeping in touch, he's always been a role model. Ever since I've turned pro, he's really taken me under his wing. Just thankful to play with someone who's had a lot of experience out here on Tour and obviously one of the greatest players of all time actually caring about me is pretty special. It's a good friendship that I hope lasts a long time.

**Q. What sort of tips has he given you out there over the last few days? And we know he likes to put people under the gun, so to speak, in practice rounds. Was it enjoyable for you to be in that situation?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah, I think what was good for me was he made me feel like it was a tournament situation just because he's Phil Mickelson. Obviously he's won a lot. But there wasn't a lot of like advice that I really asked him other than, you know, a lot of trash talk on the golf course, and that's fun going back and forth with him and playing against him because the way he thinks around the golf course is pretty smart in particular. I definitely pick up on a few things when I play with him.

**Q. So is it fair to say he's helped you I guess loosen up in the lead-up to tournaments where you might have been tighter in the last 12 months?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah. I mean, anytime I get to ask him certain questions, he'll give me a pretty good answer. I would say that he knows, you know, my potential, but it's just allowing it to happen and I think that's the biggest thing for me is just allowing it to happen. So he just supports me and gives me a good laugh anytime I need it.