

**PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE**  
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**SAHITH THEEGALA**

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**MODERATOR:** We would like to welcome Sahith Theegala to the interview room here at the 2024 Texas Children's Houston Open.

Sahith, it's a home game for you now living here in Houston. Played here a couple of times at this golf course, just what's it like for you to be here and ready to come back and have a third go at this Houston Open title?

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, very excited. It's always a nice thing when you're sleeping in your own bed for the week. Even the first year I played here, it was right before I moved to Houston and I stayed with my buddies and ended up staying for 10 days I think. I came early and then stayed. It does feel like a third home game, third year in a row doing that.

I'm really excited. I'm really happy the schedule is how it is now with Houston being in the spring. I think it makes a lot of sense with the Florida swing right before and Valero and Augusta right after. It's nice. It already feels a little bit more low key in a sense. I woke up this morning, girlfriend made me breakfast and did my usual morning coffee routine and drove up here. Just those little things feel nice this week. But very excited to be here. I know a lot of my friends and family will be out, so that's exciting, too.

**MODERATOR:** And the last time this event was played you finished tied 22nd, but you had a really solid finish with a good final round. Just what do you remember about that 64 in the final round?

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, it's probably one of the best rounds I've played on Tour honestly. It was early November that this was played, or late October? It's always cold and it's kind of dried out bermuda and the lies are tough, around the green gets really firm and sketchy, so the 64 I shot was again one of the best rounds I think I've ever played on Tour. I went bogey free, got off to a good start and made a lot of nice four- to eight-footers for par I remember on some of these -- these par 4s are really long out here, maybe some of the longest on Tour, those almost feel like birdies. I chipped in on the last hole, I remember it was a slam dunk on 9, so that was a good way to end the tournament.

Yeah, I think I started the round in 60th and shot 6 under and found myself in 22nd at 4 under. It's a tough course and I know correspondence the scores are not going to be super low. I love hard golf courses. I think -- I don't know if my track record's necessarily better on hard golf courses, but I just feel like I love hard golf courses because par is that much more important. It's nice starting the week knowing that you don't have to shoot 22, 25 under to win the tournament. You just kind of plot your way around the golf course, shoot a couple under per nine and you could be right there come Sunday.



**MODERATOR:** Started with a runner-up this season in Hawaii and then three top-10s in your last four starts. I'd say that's pretty good, but how would you characterize your season so far?

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, it's been a really great season so far. Even the West Coast Swing I had a couple of middle of the pack to back of the pack finishes, but I still feel like this is -- starting my third year now and it feels like this is the best golf I've played on Tour. The consistency has been really awesome to see. That's one thing I've kind of tried to work on -- not work on, but made an emphasis to my team like I just want to be consistent week to week and want my body to feel the same or close to the same week to week.

To start the way I did this year, I think we're on the right track. Just kind of waiting for all parts of the game to click at the same time, because it's been cool to see each week I feel like there's one or two parts of the game that have really kind of shown through and are where I want them to be, especially off the tee. Off the tee it's been really nice this year. To just kind of keep that momentum going and hopefully get it all to click. Last couple weeks I played really well with top-10s, but I wasn't really in contention so to speak. Yeah, hopefully just keep that kind of momentum and that consistency rolling and hopefully it leads to me being in the hunt.

**Q. You haven't played this course this week yet, right?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** No, I just came out to practice yesterday short game and putting because I heard it was overseed and wanted to get a good feel for the grass right away yesterday before I go on the course. It's pure, it's really healthy. I think the greens are going to be really, really nice this year. Just yesterday on the putting green you could tell they didn't really cut them and they're still rolling 11 and a half and super true. So I don't know what the sheet has, what the greens are going to be rolling this week, but I could easily see them rolling almost 13s by the time it comes Thursday.

**Q. You're really playing a different course this year from the fall course?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Correct. I think a few big things, obviously I haven't been out there yet, but just looking at the course and the grass difference, typically when the rough is overseed, you're not going to get the ball rolling through. I think the last couple years with the dried out bermuda you can miss it in the rough and it still scampers 20, 30 yards down the fairway. So I think flying the ball in the fairway this week's going to be way more imperative.

In some ways the course is going to play longer, but I do think with the greens and around the greens being overseeded, up-and-downs around the greens are going to be a little bit easier. Last few years it was brutal around the greens. I mean, you miss the green and you could be 20 yards off the green in the fairway and you see a lot of guys putting because it's just really tough to chip around here. I think -- well, obviously I haven't seen the course yet,



but my first thought is that it will be playing a little bit easier just because of that confidence you're going to have around the greens.

**Q. I apologize for not knowing this, but I should: What brought you to Houston and why did you settle here?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, yeah, it's funny, a lot of people have asked me that question.

I've kind of had ties to the Woodlands Houston area for a long time. My aunt used to live here and my parents kind of made it a point for me to come over a week or two during the summer to play a couple junior events or just spend time with my cousins. That was probably when I was 12, 13 through end of high school. Just got familiar with the area. There's a large Indian population, which is awesome to see as well and a part of my comfort level for that as well. It just felt like almost a second home already.

Then just happened to be that one of my teammates who I got really close with at Pepperdine, Fred Wedel, he's a Woodlands native. Ended up working out perfect. After graduating I wanted a cheaper place to move out to and a place where I can actually have access to a lot of golf courses and The Woodlands worked out great. During the COVID year right when I turned pro, came out here, was able to meet the GM at The Woodlands Country Club. They're awesome up there, they let a bunch of pros that are trying to make it go out there and make it their home course and give us access to practice facilities and the golf course.

That's kind of how I started. I was like, all right, everything's kind of lined up. It's in the middle of the country, traveling is going to be fantastic. Living expenses are probably half of what it would be in California, so it was kind of a no brainer for me.

And they had an empty spot in their house, it was \$400 a month for rent, so it was like this sounds like a dream for a kid right out of college. Worked out great and I've really grown to love it here. I definitely see myself spending a good amount of time here. L.A.'s always going to be my first home, born and brought up there, but yeah, it's been awesome to call this place another home.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** I'm still renting, still in an apartment here in The Woodlands, yeah. Hoping to get a house next year.

**Q. Four hundred a month for rent, that was for your first year or so?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah. Shoot, I lived there till last year, a year ago right around this time. Then I got my own apartment with one of my buddies, and my girlfriend moved in recently. A little bit of an upgrade.



But yeah, it was nice having -- I lived with three other guys in a home, so kind of felt like we were still in college and we would go and practice and get meals together and stuff. It was a good gig, yeah.

**Q. And who was that with?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** It was with Fred Wedel. The guy who owned the house is Matt Eschenburg. He went to U of H, actually went to Lamar and U of H, I believe. He's pretty well known in the golf community at The Woodlands, he's a teacher up at Augusta Pines. He's the man, he's opened his house up to a couple guys that really could use it struggling with money and he understands the grind of making it out on Tour.

Yeah, all kind of started with him. It was Fred Wedel and then we had kind of a rotating third roommate between Mike Mattas, Roy Cootes. It's a bunch of just like friends from junior and college golf. It was just a lot of fun. It was a lot of fun because we were all chasing the same thing, chasing the same grind and it's nice to have good buddies push each other.

**Q. Because you had that wild couple years where you were playing some KFT, some Tour Monday qualifiers, wild story with getting into the Finals. When you look back at that run, what comes to mind and how do you think that helped kind of lead you into this part of your career?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, I honestly look back at that a lot and just grateful for all of that, those experiences because it taught me a lot of things. It was a grind, it was a lot of travel and a lot of sleepless nights. A lot of the times it never worked out, like you Monday and you don't make it through and then you play the next week and you feel tired and you're like great, I have to play against some of the best players in the world and I'm not a hundred percent.

But it really showed me that I do love this game as deep as it can from inside me. It just showed me that I really loved it and I would have done anything to have that opportunity to make it on any tour, the Korn Ferry, whatever it would be. Like I would have loved to play on any tour. I think it really got me to fully just dive into the grind and it made me want it so bad.

I definitely got a little lucky there with the points at the end. I had a couple nice low key clutch finishes to finish like 30th at Barbasol and Barracuda. Definitely got really lucky to sneak in that top-200 nonmember points.

I look back at that, I'm just -- my attitude was I have this opportunity to do something really cool and check the box of a lifelong dream. So that's kind of the statement I used to take the pressure off of me instead of putting more pressure on me. I've kind of kept that through on my Tour career so far. Yeah, it's kind of an invaluable life lesson I would say that whole year of mini-tour, Korn Ferry, Korn Ferry Finals ended up culminating into a Tour card.

**Q. And kind of along similar ethos, your good friend Clay Feagler had a nice week in**



**the PGA TOUR Americas debut and won. What was it like seeing him win and what are kind of your memories of just living with Clay and knowing Clay from college?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, Clay's the man. Funny enough, me and Mark were just talking, I spent last night at his house. He came back for a couple days. His girlfriend was caddying for him down there so they invited me and my girlfriend to go over there watching the finale of the, was it The Bachelor, finale of The Bachelor?

I ended up going there just to hang out, say congrats to him. Him and his family are some of the best people I know. His mom Karen, his sister Chloe, they're awesome. It's so nice that they're living in The Woodlands, too. It's just like a little bit of our Pepperdine community is here as well.

Yeah, it's so awesome to see because there's a good group of guys of eight or 10 guys that we have money games with, we play and practice all the time together. It's crazy how fine the line is between being on the PGA TOUR and almost having no status. I'll tell you what, Clay, Fred, these guys that I play with all the time, they beat me just as much as I beat them. It's always competitive. You shoot 6 to 8 under, you're going to lose money.

It's cool to see all the hard work that Clay has put in come to fruition. The guy is just a winner. He won four, five times in college and really went under the radar big time. Got out of college, did really well in the Forme Tour that one year they had it, went straight to final stage Q-School, got his Korn Ferry Tour card right away. The guy's a baller and he has a lot of game.

It shows how tough the golf landscape is, the fact that he lost his car on Korn Ferry and had to Monday into this PGA TOUR Americas event. It's always cool to see a Monday qualifier end up winning the event. I know Monday Q is going to be pumped about that.

I'm just really happy for him. Golf's a hard sport and there's not a lot of times where you can truly be happy. It was really cool to see him really happy yesterday not just about the win, but kind of gives you confidence going forward the rest of your life almost. It's like OK, I'm putting in all this work and all these sacrifices that I'm making, spending less time with family and friends, whatever it might be and culminating to his first professional win is massive. I know he doesn't take it lightly, but it's awesome to see him get it done.

I was at Champions Sunday and technically not allowed to have phones out there, but I was just on my phone refreshing the whole time. Went into the locker room and there's a couple guys that Clay knew that were rooting for him. Me and my buddy Fred and Chris were all in the parking lot just scrolling, refreshing the leaderboard. We have a couple guys that we play with all the time, Derek Hitchner and (indiscernible) were down there giving us shot-by-shot updates in the playoff. We were fully invested. The Pepperdine guys had a group chat. It's just awesome to see like all of us rallying behind Clay being the first ever winner of a PGA TOUR Americas event.



**MODERATOR:** Sahith, since you've been on Tour and had some success, has Clay sort of reached out to you and asked any questions and for advice and what sort of path to take?

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, I think it's really cool that I'm lucky enough to be in a position to even answer some of the questions that a lot of the guys have, and Clay, too, because I get to play and practice with him a decent amount and I see how good he is. It's nice to me -- for me to give him affirmation that, dude, you are good enough. Like the golf doesn't really change that much from level to level, it's just almost trying to get yourself to peak at the right time.

It's been nice knowing that I can wholeheartedly say that, dude, you are good enough to be on the PGA TOUR, and not only to be on the PGA TOUR but to compete on the PGA TOUR. Again it's just a fine line and you just have to wait for your moment. A little bit of that is not probably even up to us, it's just how the world works. You've got to wait for your break and you've got to take that break.

But yeah, it's been cool for them to -- Clay, just to be able to answer questions that he has and just give him affirmation that, dude, you're good enough and your time is going to come. This is just I think a steppingstone for him, it's just a sign of things to come. I know he's going to take in this win and enjoy it, but I know he's flying back to Mexico this morning to go take care of business again the next week.

It's funny, even talking to him last night, he just wants to win again. It's not like he's settling or anything like that, he just wants to win again. I think having that attitude is so, so important because ultimately the reason we all play in tournaments is to win, top-10 or 25 feels nice, but the ultimate goal is to win.

But I think he knows that, I think he knows that he's good enough and just keep putting in the work and your time will come. It's kind of on you to make sure that you're ready for when that time comes.

**Q. Sort of -- I know you don't spend a lot of time in Houston obviously, but if you have to choose your favorite Indian cuisine here?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** You know what, I actually haven't been to a lot of Indian restaurants. I've probably been to two and I don't even remember the names of them. They're both good, but I'm still on the search for like a really, really nice Indian restaurant. I'm excited these next few months because I'm going to spend plenty of time here to kind of explore. My parents are coming down Thursday night, so maybe we can do some investigating to see if we can get some really good Indian food. I'm sure there's a lot of great Indian places.

**Q. Kiran's and Pondicheri come quickly to mind for me. Also Khyber.**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** What's the last one?



**Q. Khyber, like Khyber Pass. These are all right in the center of Houston a long Kirby Drive, Richmond and Alabama. A little local --**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** OK, I'll have to check some spots out. I know Houston sneaky has some really great food. I've eaten every single cuisine out here and I've been very happy with it all.

**MODERATOR:** Sahith, I've got to close by saying I think this might be the first time in PGA TOUR history that we've had a Bachelor reference, TV show during a press conference and I know it made one media official in the back pretty happy, so thanks again for your time.

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** I haven't watched it. My girlfriend's watched all of it and then Clay's sister's watched all of it. I was just kind of thrown into this finale. I was like dang, there's a lot going on here.

My thought was it seemed like they're pretty happy with who he chose. Kelsey was her name? Apparently there was some drama about who the next bachelorette's going to be, too. Someone that wasn't expected. My girlfriend's Asian so she was pumped that the next bachelorette is going to be Asian. Yeah, it was fun.

**Q. I did want to ask with this course being a muni and locals can play for 30 bucks, juniors can play for 10 bucks, what's that like as a player knowing that this is a course where really anyone in town can come out and play and try and hit the shots that you guys hit after watching you guys?**

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, yeah, I think it's awesome, I think it's awesome that -- I think there's a few on the rota now that are public golf courses, munis, and especially this one being as affordable as it is and being so close to the center of Houston. It's awesome.

It's cool because a lot of the guys that just this week when I was practicing at Woodlands and Champions, a lot of the guys were like, hey, we just played here three weeks ago, like this course is really, really hard. I was like yeah, that's kind of how it is most weeks out here.

Yeah, it is fun. It's awesome that the week after this tournament that anyone can go out and play and see how hard the golf course is set up and the conditions that we play on. I think it's important for the fans to see exactly what a PGA TOUR test is. There's got to be something like a fan challenge or -- I think it would be awesome to see a scratch handicap go out and play like the Monday after a tournament, keep the same conditions and see what they would shoot just to put it into perspective how hard a PGA TOUR golf course is.

Because the media's always funny, you look up. oh, he's really struggling today, he's even par through 16. I'm like I'm pretty happy with being even par through 16 right now. It's just the level of precedent that the top guys in the world like Scottie, Viktor, they just make it look too easy sometimes.



But I think it's great. Golf needs to be as accessible as possible. I think we're heading in the right direction towards that. It's important. And obviously growing up on public golf courses, it's always fun to be at one for a Tour event.

**MODERATOR:** Would you come out and watch an event like that the next day after a tournament?

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Yeah, I would. Shoot, I'd commentate on it so they know exactly like -- it's so funny because you watch on TV -- I have a pet peeve, sometimes when I watch golf on TV, a great example is hole 8 at Valspar last week. It's a 230-yard par 3, the green's 12 yards wide and someone will hit the middle of the green and, you know, they'll be like, oh, really smart shot there.

I'm like, well, no, he's absolutely laced this 4-iron in the middle of the green, that's right where he's looking and to hit a 4-iron that straight is really, really hard. I think commentators are getting a lot better about giving pros credit for some of their shots.

Yeah, even like chipping, a lot of the stuff just looks flat on TV but then when you get over the chip, like, oh, great, I have to land it over a mound on a downslope down grain?

Yeah, it would be interesting to see some kind of format like that. I know YouTube golf is taking off and there's a lot of really good players on YouTube making great content. Sure, there's some ideas like that. I don't even know if I'm allowed to talk about this, but the Myrtle Beach Q thing with a bunch of, I don't call them influencers because they're doing such a great job on YouTube growing the game and stuff.

Yeah, more stuff like that can only help the game because it brings more fans into the game and brings a slightly different crowd into the game. I'm all for it.

**MODERATOR:** We appreciate you coming in and sharing some in sight. Have a great week.

**SAHITH THEEGALA:** Sure. Thanks, Mark. Thanks, guys.

