

U.S. Amateur Championship

Quick Quotes

Wednesday August 16, 2017

Sahith Theegala

THE MODERATOR: Sahith Theegala, winner in 19 holes over Gavin Hall. I'm just going to open it up to questions because these guys followed you the whole way.

Go right ahead, folks.

Q. 17 seemed like the turning point. You were 1-down and didn't hit a very good wedge shot, and then you made that putt.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah. So the second shot was kind of dodgy. There was no chance I was going to reach the green, but I was just -- I guess it wasn't a very smart shot, that is for sure.

Luckily I nailed it and it just carried the bunker. I don't have a 3-wood in the bag this week. I just have a 2-hybrid. That's by design. But I just felt like it wasn't going to matter out there necessarily; I guess I was wrong today on that hole.

It just barely carried the bunker, and, what, 40-yard chip shot up the hill. I had a perfect lie, perfect for that little spinner. Right as I took it back, for some reason, I never think this on chip shots, I was like, Whoa, that is way too far back. Just kind of came over the top and hit like a thinny weak little shot; came up like 25 feet short.

It was a pretty basic shot, and to do that was really disappointing. Then he hit his bunker shot up and I was like, All right. There is no other thing here. I've got to make this or he's got a good chance at making his.

I knew right when I hit it the speed was going to be right. Kind of a tricky putt. Double breaker. It broke right initially and didn't really break right as much as I thought. Kind of stayed right center of the hole there.

Luckily didn't turn as much left as I thought. Just went in dead center. All my emotion came out there for sure.

Q. That was 25 feet? 22?

SAHITH THEEGALA: It's between 20 and 25 feet probably. I would have to see.



Q. How about on 18? What happened on the second shot?

SAHITH THEEGALA: I was trying to account for my adrenaline on the second shot, so I tried to hit 50-degree from -- it was only like 141 yards maybe.

Q. 50-degree wedge from 140?

SAHITH THEEGALA: 50-degree wedge. It was only, what, 131 to the front edge downwind. If I hit a little draw 50-degree I hit it about 130, 135. I was like, Okay, adrenaline maybe another five yards.

I hit it and I was like, Okay. I miss-hit it for sure. I hit it low on the face. I was like, Okay, maybe that has a chance, and it landed like 20 yards short of the green. I mean, it was a terrible, terrible -- I just didn't execute.

Maybe I was rushing my thought process a little bit, too. I just picked up the club and almost hit it right away. Again, chip shot, really good lie, pretty basic chip shot, a chip shot I've had my whole life, practiced my whole life, and just hit it a little fat. Took the spin out of it. Had a really tricky probably five or six-footer there.

I just tapped it and was praying that it would break and just didn't turn in there.

Q. What about what he was going through on 18?

SAHITH THEEGALA: That was unbelievable. I couldn't even believe what was happening there. I mean, that's the rules of golf, though. There is a TV wire there and then a TV stand there. I think that's what it is. He was basically dead; going to chip out.

He might have made bogey either way, but that was a crazy drop. That's just what happens. I got a good break on 13, too. Probably would've had an awful lie into wiry grass and I got to drop in the kikuyu. Didn't take advantage of that break, but he did.

That's how golf works. That's how match play works for sure.

Q. You freaked a lot of people out after your 13th tee shot when you turned around and ran the other way.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah. I didn't even look at



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anyone when I did that. Just the adrenaline from the last hole I was like, Okay, maybe I can hold it in. After I hit the tee shot, it was like, No, I got to go. I just sprinted toward the...

Q. Did you fear you would be late coming back?

SAHITH THEEGALA: No. I wasn't worried. I think I ran fast enough there.

Q. When he hooked the second shot after the drop and then you get to hit yours, do you think, This is my opportunity?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Oh, yeah, of course. I mean, I knew down there -- it was kind of an uphill/sidehill chip shot that he had, so it was doable depending on his lie. So I figured just hit on the green and put the pressure on him, and obviously didn't do that.

Q. What are you sensing in terms of experience from the Genesis Open helping you in this event in terms of course knowledge and the golf course, the kikuyu?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I think the kikuyu is a big thing. I think people, especially coming from the east coast, they don't play on kikuyu very much at all. I grew up on public courses, so I feel super comfortable chipping and hitting shots out of the rough here.

I know it's tough. Like you can either get perfect lies or it's just almost, almost impossible. I had a couple lies today where I knew it was almost impossible and I tried to leave it on the side that would be an easier way to make par. That definitely helped me out a lot.

Sightlines obviously. This is like my 10th time playing Riv now, so sightlines with my driver I'm really comfortable with. I missed a couple drives throwing it up in the fairway whereas I think other people, maybe they were lining up a little bit differently and if they miss it they're kind of in a bad spot.

Course knowledge is huge.

Q. The playoff hole, what did you have?

SAHITH THEEGALA: I had 181 yards I think, 180 or 181. Me and my caddie have different numbers. It was downwind probably ten yards at least. I was going to hit just a tiny draw. I hit 8-iron again. A little bit of adrenaline.

I knew if I hit it exactly how I wanted to it might be a little bit past the hole, but that was by design. If I miss-hit it a little bit, it can still get over that bunker. I hit it basically perfect. Drew.

It a little more -- I think it rode the wind a little more than I thought and it landed maybe 15 feet past the

hole and caught the slope and rolled back maybe five or six feet there, so I had maybe ten feet.

But, again, it's a brutal ten-footer. I'm going to have to play like three feet of break and still miss low.

Q. That had to be really fast just like the one on 18.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah.

Q. So was that going through your mind? You went by three or four feet on 18.

SAHITH THEEGALA: No. Might have been -- I think it only went two, two and a half feet. I wasn't really paying attention. I marked it and tapped it in basically.

No, I think my speed with my putting is the strongest part or one of the strongest parts of my game. It's almost like an afterthought. I kind of see the line and I'm just trying to make the putt with die speed, especially out here with the greens being quick.

Q. 12 and 13, did you think at that point things weren't going to go well for you?

SAHITH THEEGALA: No, 12 and 13 are two holes I've struggled with my whole time at Riv, so I figured, you know, don't get too caught up in it. I didn't hit too bad of a drive on 12. Just hit it a little high.

Q. Hit a tree?

SAHITH THEEGALA: I don't think I hit a tree. I just hit it so high the wind killed it. I had like 220 yards in and then I just pushed my second shot into the tree there.

And then 13, again, I just think I was getting a little quick with my driver there and blocked in the tree. Had like 215. Kind of had a tough lie in the kikuyu there.

I wasn't really sure if I'd get an iron on it and have any control. I tried to chop down on a hybrid. I actually don't even know what happened. I think I hit it a little low on the face and it sliced like 60 yards. It was nuts.

The chip shot on 14 was huge. I thought I hit it good tee shot there. I hit 8-iron like 155 into the wind. I didn't swing very hard and it went a good ten yards past the hole there. To get that up and down was huge. Wasn't an easy chip by any means.

Q. Seemed like if you play No. 1 eighteen times you'll be in pretty good shape.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, pretty good shape, yeah.

Q. Do you know Doug, who you'll play tomorrow?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, really solid player. He's a good guy, too. That's what I've heard from people.

Q. You've been playing pretty well this summer.



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What kind of frame of mind did you come into this tournament with? Do you have expectations? Everyone knows what you would hope to do.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah. Obviously had a good summer. I'm a local guy, so I have all my family and friends out. I mean, Pepperdine is only 25 minutes from here; I live 45 minutes from here.

So I know there is a lot riding on this tournament, but I try not to think about it. I just try think, Okay, I'm playing Riv and Bel-Air, which are two awesome courses right by home. It feels like a home game.

So I had two solid stroke play rounds. I couldn't really complain on either of those rounds. Obviously I could have shot better, but even par on these two courses was I thought was pretty solid.

That definitely calmed me down, to get into the match play, because I know something inside me just gets really excited for match play because of the volatility of it obviously.

I tried not to think about everything surrounding the tournament and all of my family and stuff like that. I was kind of doing for them at the end. After that fist pump on 17 how loud they got, I mean, that was awesome. That basically made my week right there.

Q. Every time I've talked to your father he's been unbelievably positive and happy and smiling.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Oh, yeah.

Q. Is he always like that?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Oh, yeah, absolutely. He embraces it now. He likes -- I mean, obviously he wants me to hit good shots, but he likes when I'm in tough positions so he can kind of brag about me, I think. Made this up and down or something like that, and I love my dad for that.

He's so supportive on and off the course, and he does a good job of separating golf from the rest of our family life, too. Yeah, last at least five, six years he's been incredibly supportive. No negativity at all, but still the right amount of criticism and stuff like that.

Q. So you're staying at home this week? You're commuting, sleeping in your own bed?

SAHITH THEEGALA: So half and half. I was staying at home the first three days until Monday night, and then I'm staying with a host family here.

I figured if I was going to get done with this round before maybe 1:00 I could get home, but not now. It's going to take three hours to get home.

Q. Talk about your recent trip to India, and did that serve as the mental break that you needed to prepare for this Championship?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Oh, yeah. So I was playing -- I actually haven't played too much golf this summer, but I still felt a little bit burnt out after I think it was the Pac Coast in Seattle. I finished the Pac Coast on a Friday and we flew out to India Saturday morning, so it was a quick turnaround. That was a little bit hectic.

But once I got over there, I had such a great time at my cousin's wedding. Got to see all my family members again. I made it a point not to not even talk about golf. I didn't bring my clubs, nothing.

Whenever someone brought up golf to me, it was like, I'm sorry, I'm here for the wedding only. So that was a huge mental break for me. Even a.

And then even after I came back I didn't touch a club for a couple more days. It was basically two full weeks off there. That was huge for me, I think. I was swinging it just as well right when I came back from it, too.

Q. When was that? When did you come back?

SAHITH THEEGALA: I think -- what day is today, the 16th? I came back the 5th, I believe, so like ten days. I only had like six, seven days to prepare maybe. No, I had a full week to prepare.

Q. Didn't you win Sahalee?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I won Sahalee. That was probably the highlight -- I mean, obviously the highlight of my summer, but actually that and the U.S. Open.

Q. When you're going through what situations you were in during the first round here, did you use anything that you got last year at Oakland Hills making it all the way to the quarterfinals that maybe steadied you somehow?

SAHITH THEEGALA: 100%. When I was 1-down through -- once I got 1-down I was like I won -- at least my match against Sam I was 1-down through 14, I believe. I kind of was like, Okay, I'm still in. I could still win. I still got three or four more holes to go.

That was a little bit calming, too, especially since I really like 18's tee shot. Gavin seemed to hit a little cut, which is what I hit too, off the tee, and I knew that that would be a tougher tee shot for him than it would be for me.

That kind of gave me calming sense, too. I mean, it's never over until the last hole. That's the way you got to think about match play, and you always got to think the other guy is going to do something crazy.

