

**FINAL ROUND INTERVIEW**  
**January 19, 2022**



**AKSHAY BHATIA ( -14)**

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**Q. Akshay, the first 2022 Korn Ferry Tour event is in the books and you can now call yourself a Korn Ferry Tour champion. I want to hear how you're feeling right now.**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah, I'm super happy obviously. It's just crazy. I didn't even think I would get these four starts and somehow I fell into a category to create opportunities for the whole year. Just to be able to win out here against these players is unbelievable. Everything just kind of fell into place this week. My girlfriend caddied me, which probably was such a blessing in disguise. I wouldn't be standing here without her. It's awesome.

**Q. When I talked with you earlier this week, you said after these events I don't know what's going to take place after that. Now you can kind of schedule out the rest of your year. So how does that feel knowing you have more starts?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah, it's great. I'm happy I get to play next week. My goal today was just try and finish inside the top-10. If I win, great. If I finish anywhere inside the top-10, I'm in the next week and that was my goal.

Now for everything to happen the way it did, it's crazy. I don't know how I managed my emotions, but I did. I felt really calm. I think 15 tee we were waiting a while, so I just sat and looked at the ocean and somehow it always gets to me where I get clear headed. Yeah, it's cool.

**Q. You're the third youngest to win on the Korn Ferry Tour, so walk me through how that feels. And then also, yeah, just how that feels.**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah, it's cool. Like I said, to play against these guys, guys who have been out here forever, past PGA TOUR winners and players, it's just awesome. For me to be able to mentally and physically compete and win at one of the highest levels in golf, it's something that I'll cherish for a while. I'll just keep going and try and chase that Tour card.

**Q. Not to put you on the spot, but could you guess who the two players ahead of you are?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I know Sungjae Im won at 19.

**Q. It's a pretty big name: Jason Day. To be in that category of the only teenagers to win out here, that's a pretty good category with those two players.**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah, it's definitely pretty cool. Those guys are some of the best

players in the world and hopefully I can keep the legacy on with what they did and play on the PGA TOUR.

**Q. When you turned pro at 17, you obviously had the vision of accomplishing these things. Is it fun to start to see it all fall into place, seeing the trajectory happen?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** It's crazy, the first year I turned pro is one of the worst years I've had playing golf. I struggled mentally, I missed every cut. I had a lot of people expecting me to play well and it didn't happen.

But with COVID hitting obviously was really hard for everyone, but it was a blessing for me because I got to sit back, talk to my coach, realize where I'm at in my life. After that, you know, my life's kind of -- I've just climbed the mountain slowly and slowly and slowly. And yeah, it's cool to win out here. I'm just super happy and thankful.

**Q. Are you proud of yourself? You seem so calm right now. You kind of mentioned just sitting there looking at the ocean. Is it fun to be able to look at yourself and be like, taking in this moment but being so casual about it?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I'm sure I'm going to scream once I get back to my hotel room. Yeah, it's cool. I don't know what to say other than I'm just happy to be here. This place really is really calm, peaceful, people are beautiful and very nice here. The aura about this place kind of leads into why I'm so calm right now honestly.

**Q. Golf-wise, you said it started to click. Was it about the course, your game? Kind of golf-wise, how did it all --**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Three weeks ago I dislocated my shoulder and didn't know if I was even going to tee it up this week. Once I started hitting balls about a week ago, my swing actually turned out to get better and better as I went on. Once I got here, I just -- the course suit me really well. I knew what to do with everything. My coach and I worked -- you know, everyone's worked hard with their coach, but me and my coach worked every single day and I just knew exactly what shot I needed to hit on every single hole I felt like.

No. 18 today, I kind of reflected back on the U.S. Open when I qualified. I hit a pitching wedge to like three feet, four feet, so I was just trying to do the same thing there. For it to hit the flag and have a tap-in was awesome. I don't know, golf's crazy.

**Q. Playing through pain all week?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Sometimes. Some shots it hurt. Mentally I was pretty tough about it, not being scared about hitting any shots. Yeah, it seemed to get better and better as the adrenaline kept rushing through my blood.

**Q. Did you know where you stood? Are you a leaderboard looker or did you have any**

idea?

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah, there was three leaderboards out there, I think. I knew Carl was I think at 13 under, but it was hard to say because I've seen some scores get messed up this week.

I knew where I stood. My goal was to top-10, like I said. Birdies just kind of came to me once I finished the round. I knew Paul was playing well, but I didn't know if he was 7 or 8 under, so I didn't know what he was at total.

**Q. Do you think that helps you, the fact that you're not playing match play against Paul, even though I'm sure you saw with all the cameras that it probably did come down to you, but you didn't get into match play with him. Did you get into match play?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** No. I mean, 17 he hit a really good iron shot and I knew if I -- if I birdie -- if I could get two more coming in, 16 through 18, I had a pretty good feeling that 14 or whatever I finished at, 13 under would get it done. Paul played great. It was great because our whole group played pretty much really solid the whole day. Feeding off that energy really helps.

**Q. Fourteen. You sell yourself short.**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Yeah, whatever it was.

**Q. Distance and club on 18, the approach?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** 156. The wind was like helping off the left, so I hit just a pitching wedge.

**Q. Is that considered the best shot you've ever had in your career considering what it resulted in?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I guess.

**Q. If there's a better one --**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I made a chip in junior golf to win by one. I chipped in for eagle at Valhalla, so that was pretty cool. For that to seal the deal is, I'm not going to complain about it.

**Q. One step closer to the PGA TOUR card. It's not official, but you're setting yourself up well. How do you play the rest of the season. Is it attack now?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I'm just excited to play next week. I have never had a schedule. Just to be able to have a schedule and obviously like look forward to playing certain events like the Rex Open, Rex Hospital Open, my home course, there's just all those things I get to look

forward to this year. I would like to win three and get promoted to the PGA TOUR, so I guess that's my goal.

**Q. Can we bring a special guest down here?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Oh, yeah.

**Q. You gave us the analysis earlier, but what was the dynamic like on the course this week? Good vibes the whole time?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I guess. She can speak on it, she was kind of watching.

**PRESLEIGH SCHULTZ:** Yeah, he kept saying, "Are you nervous?" I'm like, "No, I'm fine."

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** I say that as a joke.

**PRESLEIGH SCHULTZ:** We tried to stay pretty calm and it worked out.

**Q. Was there any point where you were saying -- goal is to top-10. Was there any point where that starts to flip and you're saying, "I can win it now"?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** No. Walking up 18 I told her, or 17 maybe, I told her like this is my time, like this is my time to win. Just for everything to happen with her on the bag and we got a comped room at Sandals, like nothing could be better. Yeah, it's just really cool. She always supports me and is always there for me for whatever I need. I mean, carrying the bag for 72 holes is not easy, especially if it rains or whatever. I don't know what I'm going to tell my caddie, I really don't because this is obviously working right now.

**Q. You have a three-day vacation now before you're starting up again. What do you do the next couple days? Is it right back to golf or do you take a second to kind of decompress and relax?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** We're probably going to eat some food. I don't know. I think we're on the charter flight tomorrow, so tomorrow we're taking off. We'll hang out.

**Q. Did you think it would come this early?**

**AKSHAY BHATIA:** Hard to say. I mean, did I believe that I could do it? Yeah, but for the caliber of players out here, it's pretty hard to do. Everything worked out this week.

**Q. Are you going to negotiate your cut for the week?**

**PRESLEIGH SCHULTZ:** I mean, I don't know. I'm fine being on the bag still. It was pretty cool because I know how bad he wanted it and being next to him, working for it was pretty cool.