

PRESS CONFERENCE
August 1, 2023

AKSHAY BHATIA



ALLIE LeCLAIR: We would like to welcome Akshay Bhatia bat into the Wyndham Championship press conference room, making his third career start here.

Can you talk a little bit about being back home and having a home game here and what your game plan is for the week?

AKSHAY BHATIA: It's obviously very nice. We drove here yesterday, we brought our dogs for the week. It's nice, it's a very home feeling event. Obviously have a little bit of experience here. Yeah, I'm just looking forward to the week. It's kind of a nice relaxing event for me versus trying to secure any sort of points or card. It's just kind of go wheel it and hopefully have a good week.

ALLIE LeCLAIR: Speaking of that, this is your first PGA TOUR stop since winning the Barracuda Championship two weeks ago. Can you talk a little bit about your emotions from that and how you celebrated?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, a ton of emotions. I mean, I was on cloud nine for about seven days, so it was pretty surreal. Just all the emotions that went into that week, of that putt going in and then going back to the playoff, riding in that cart. I mean, my heart just was pretty normal, then I get back on that tee and I'm like here we go, this is it, this is my opportunity. Yeah, just unreal experience to get it done.

It's nice coming to a home event because I know I'll have a little bit, you know, more of a fan base now, which is nice.

Q. Akshay, you mentioned that coming back, coming here in previous years trying to make the cut, doing all these things. Does your mentality or attitude change now that you've won, you kind of cleared that hurdle? Is there a sense of validation to that? There were people who questioned what you were doing and now you got special temporary, now you won. Once we got the pandemic behind us, everything's kind of started to roll.

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, I think I'm a very different player than I was when I was 18, I think 18, 19. It's a different feeling. I don't think my mindset changes. Obviously I want to go out and play good golf and have a good week and earn my spot into the Playoffs next week. But I think it's a little more freeing. I know how to do it, I have done it, I know the emotions that go into it, I know the stories I can tell myself and it doesn't matter the day before. I think I just have a really good team around me, I have a great caddie now and we've just kind of finalized everything as far as our prep work and it's paid off.



Q. I'm sure maybe four years ago you had a plan to get to the point you're at today where you're a PGA TOUR winner and all that, but to get from point A to point B, was it a lot different road than you thought?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I mean, I didn't know what to think when I was 17, it was just the coolest thing to play PGA TOUR events and travel the world and get courtesy cars. You get so many perks out here, right?

I don't know how I could explain my journey with the pandemic and being 17, couldn't rent cars, then playing Korn Ferry Tour, winning, then hurting myself. It was just a lot of different things went on that I wouldn't have imagined that would happen, but for it to happen now at 21 with special temporary membership, everything that went on this year is pretty gratifying.

Q. You mentioned a new caddie. Can you tell us a little bit more about that relationship, how it started and how it's helped you elevate your game and get that first win?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, I mean, I started working -- my caddie's name is Brian Dilley. He worked for Aaron Wise for a while, couple other guys, had a lot of success. He's caddied for 20 years and I'm 21, so he's caddied pretty much as long as I've been alive.

He's just, he's a different person. He's very direct, he's very smart. We don't make mistakes like I have in the past. I think that was kind of the missing piece for me, just having someone who can help me not make mistakes or guide me around a little more and kind of free up.

He believes so much in my abilities and it's definitely never easy for a caddie to help me because I hit so many different shots. I can explain how I'm going to do it, but it still can be -- it could just about right over the top of your head how I'm gonna hit the shot, but he's gotten the hang of it really quick.

Jon Rahm's caddie, Adam Hayes, has been a big influence for him. They're great buddies. And for me, I've looked up to Jon the last couple years, getting to know him, getting to play a couple practice rounds with him and Adam's been a big help in this process for me.

Q. Akshay, you played here at Sedgefield as a junior at the AJGA Invitational. How did playing at a PGA TOUR venue as an amateur golfer prepare you for the last few years and also for this week here?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I think any time you get a chance to play a golf course where the PGA TOUR players get to play is pretty cool. They treat us just like PGA TOUR players. Just being able to have access to the clubhouse and kind of be in the locker room with all your friends, just kind of play a similar setup is really nice. I was fortunate to play a couple PGA TOUR venues in the AJGA with PGA National and here obviously. It's nice getting more familiar as a junior when you get out here, then it's not as, oh, where do we go or what do



we do here.

Q. Going off of that, knowing what you know now, what would one thing be if you could go back and tell your junior self?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Like when I turned pro or before I turned pro?

Q. Before.

AKSHAY BHATIA: Before I turned pro? I don't know. I mean, it's very hard. I felt like in junior golf I was always kind of No. 1 in my class and I felt like I was so good that it was going to be easy coming out here, but it really isn't. You have to do so many -- you have to work so hard to get out here. So when I turned pro, I felt like I was ready, but I really wasn't. I've really realized that.

Yeah, it's just different. You've got to not practice as much as -- like as much as you want as a kid, you've got to really take care of your body. I think if I would have done that a little earlier as a 15-, 16-year-old, I think maybe I wouldn't have got hurt last year. But all hindsight, right?

Q. Akshay, I'd like to circle back to the dogs, that you brought them. What kind of dogs? Do you get to travel with them? Are they yours, your family's dogs? Can you tell us a little bit about them?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, so my girlfriend and I, we have two goldendoodles. They're pretty much my parents' dogs now because they watch them most of the weeks that we're gone. On the Korn Ferry Tour we were able to travel with them a little bit more, but on the PGA TOUR it's a little tougher with so many more things going on on the golf course with a lot more people. logistically it hasn't been as easy.

This week it's great because we're staying with a couple other players, they brought their dog and they're just having a ton of fun. It's nice coming home and kind of being like a daycare for them.

Q. What are their names?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Torrey and Goose.

Q. Going back a few years, you were one of the first McConnell golf scholars. Can you talk a little bit about that, when you got it and what that meant to you in your development?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, I was very fortunate to get that scholarship. He offers junior golfers, they're able to go play at some country clubs, which is great. And he owns so many now, like you could go wherever, just call and you could go play. I was very fortunate to get



that.

When we came here, I grew up five minutes from a golf course from my parents' house, but to get to that next level I was able to start playing with a couple PGA TOUR players, a couple Korn Ferry Tour players as a 15-, 16-year-old, so it was definitely nice.

Now I'm an honorary member at Wakefield Plantation, which is very special because they kind of treated me like family. To have that when I come back and not worry about where am I going to practice or where am I going to play is a nice feeling.

Q. You say that being out here just requires a lot of hard work. What are the sacrifices that go with that besides like your time obviously?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah. So I would say schedule-wise you have to be really smart about it. I mean, from working out to eating to sleeping, you've got to sacrifice a lot. Like I'm a kid still, so I just want to be on my phone when I'm going to bed, but I've got to realize I've got to go to bed at 9:30 and I've got to wake up, I've got to make sure I eat a certain amount of calories. There's so many things that go on when you're out here because you're playing four, five weeks in a row, you're traveling anywhere and everywhere. It's just you sacrifice a little bit of the fun part of going to see some cities or whatever it may be and you've just got to really just be disciplined in everything you do.

ALLIE LeCLAIR: Thanks so much, Akshay. Good luck this week.

AKSHAY BHATIA: Thank you.

