

ROUND 1 QUICK QUOTES
December 5, 2024



AKSHAY BHATIA (-5)

Q. Akshay, what was working so well for you today?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I mean, I played the par 5s pretty well today. You know, I haven't played too much competitive golf so I was a little more nervous and so all in all, it was pretty good. I have this new prototype driver in the bag which is -- is a big thing for me. I felt like my driving stats last year kind of went downhill a little bit. I was fighting a two-way miss, making good swings. Some weeks it was good and some weeks it just wasn't there. This driver so far is a big test today, I mean this golf course, you get a little bit of wind and some definitely difficult tee shots and it was nice to see those results so far.

Q. What is this prototype going to do to maybe help with the dispersion on your drives?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, the spin rate's gotten a little tighter. The misses especially for me when I hit it off the heel, it's starting right and cutting versus, sometimes I would hit it off the heel and it goes straight right. Yeah, it's been -- it was really, really encouraging.

Q. When you don't play as much, as you said, you haven't played a lot of competitive golf recently, what's maybe the biggest thing you need to focus on when you come back?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, being at home, we just moved so I've had that on my mind for the last couple months. Trying to get stronger, been working out a ton. There's just so many things I've got to get used to of just getting back to practicing and you don't feel the nerves like you do. Even though it's a 20-man field and it's a pretty laid back event, I felt pretty amped up today. Just getting back into the flow and that's what's nice when you play two, three weeks in a row.

Q. What made you decide to switch to the long putter?

AKSHAY BHATIA: My stats were so bad in the year prior, in 2022, or I guess 2023. So after seeing like Lucas Glover win back to back events, I figure why not give it a try. Tried it kind of earlier in the fall season of '23, hated it. Then at the RSM Classic I put it in the second round and I told my caddie if I miss the cut you can blame me and we'll never use this putter again. But I started to feel like I rolled it a lot better. You don't have to be perfect, which is nice. Like you can kind of get away with not a great stroke and it will still start online. It has that kind of, you know, the way it moves, it can start online a little easier. You never feel like you have to be perfect. And it's always kind of a learning curve. You're not always thinking technical, you just kind of, when you have an 80- or 90-footer you're like I



don't know how to do this but you just kind of react and it works.

Q. How big a difference has it made in your game?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I mean, I went from 180th in putting to 23rd in putting. It was a big monumental change for me. I've always been a really good putter. It's been a nice tool to have and just to kind of keep building on the momentum I had this year into next year will be a fun challenge.

Q. What's the prototype driver? What do you like about it?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Sorry?

Q. What do you like about that prototype driver?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I just have a one-way miss now. I always used to miss it left. I curve the ball a lot, so the driver I was playing with was two, three years old, I had so much success with it and the one I had success with failed, I guess it got too fast or whatever -- yeah, so it failed testing.

I had 10, 12 different heads. I had one I won with at Barracuda. It still wasn't perfect. We got another one that was pretty good for a while. I think just the more and more my body's changed and my golf swing's changed, it just started to have two-way misses. When I'm aiming down the right side and it's not cutting, it's a scary feeling for me because I've always cut the ball with driver. Now I have that opportunity to start it, aim it right, feel comfortable it's going to go left and having the one-way miss is important.

Q. Akshay, you're one of three left-handers in the field. Do you feel like that gives you any advantage on this course?

AKSHAY BHATIA: I think the sample size is too small. I think anytime someone asks me that question it's a difficult one to answer. I would say the only exception is Augusta National. I think for me, since I curve the ball a lot and I've always played well in wind and for whatever reason tropical weather, I just enjoy the challenge it has once it starts blowing. I think today was unusual just not having any wind and yesterday we had 20-, 30-mile an hour gusts. Bob obviously played well, but Bob hits it dead straight, Harman hits it dead straight, so we've got three different games.

Q. You have a lot of fan support out here, but when you come here to the Bahamas, do you feel -- have you noticed a little bit of difference?

AKSHAY BHATIA: Yeah, I feel like most of the volunteers know me and they call me by my last name, so that's pretty cool. I think too having Hero Motors sponsor this event being an Indian company is pretty cool. I see people that are more my culture and kind of respect what I'm doing. It's pretty quiet out here, but you still get a little bit of the warm feeling here.

