

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
February 17, 2026

SAHITH THEEGALA



THE MODERATOR: Hi, everyone. We'd like to get started with Sahith Theegala here in the interview room at the Genesis Invitational. Sahith received the Charlie Sifford Memorial Exemption. Can you just give us a couple thoughts how meaningful that is, the exemption, and secondly, how it actually happened?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I'm just so glad to be here. I honestly didn't expect to be here. It's probably my favorite event of the year. I grew up close by. All my family is from here, grew up here. Yeah, I'm just super, super happy to be here, especially to receive the Charlie Sifford Memorial Exemption. That was enormous to me. Any part I can play in growing the game and diversifying the game and what Charlie did when he was young in his career, one of the big things he stated when he was playing was he just wanted to play the game, and he's allowed minorities like myself to just go ahead and play the game. There's no other ramifications surrounded by that.

Just hope I can do my part to keep his memory alive and all the hard work that he did for us to keep that going. But yeah, I'm just so, so pumped to be here.

I only found out maybe Wednesday of last week. I got the call from Mike and was super, super honored. My buddy -- actually a couple of my buddies have gotten this, but I remember vividly my buddy Aaron Beverly getting it and how cool that was for him and even how cool it was for me. We had another one of our buddies caddying for him so I knew how special that was, and for me to get that was such a huge deal.

Q. We're playing this event one year after the devastating Eaton and Palisades fires. To be at Riviera Country Club in your hometown, honoring those who lost everything with this tournament, what does that mean to you?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, it means a lot. Obviously it hit really close. Luckily me and my immediate family were all good, but had a lot of friends and the closest one really was my caddie Carl, his sister lost her home, and she lived in Palisades

I got a firsthand look into how much it affects -- it's way deeper than what you even see on media. It's really devastating. It's brutal and kind of -- I feel like with a lot of tragedies, you kind of see it in the media but then it's kind of over, at least to the media, but real life is still going on for all these people that were devastated by the fires.

It made sense to not have the event here last year, and I think this event is really good for the community, and it's going to be a really long rebuild.

I have a place in Santa Monica and I've driven past these areas, and it still looks fake to me that



everything is kind of burned down and gone. It's a big bummer. But hopefully we can come together this week and just bring together the community and hopefully raise a little bit of money, as well, for the ongoing project that it is to rebuild Palisades. Even with the Eaton fire and Altadena, it's brutal.

It's nice that sport can kind of bring everyone together for a good reason.

Q. Sahith, the collegiate showcase, what that meant for your career and what sort of an indelible memory, I guess, from getting to play what was I believe your first TOUR event at the time?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, the funny thing is this might technically be my third because in 2022 I wasn't in, but I was playing really well at Phoenix and Mike gave me a call Saturday night when I was leading saying that I was in. So I don't know if I actually got in through exemption or got in somehow.

Anyway, the 2017 deal was pretty epic. It was kind of last minute-ish that Pepperdine was even in that. We had one of our beautiful boosters, Paul Porteous, help out in giving the entry fee for the collegiate showcase.

I just remember being so nervous that I even had a chance to play in a PGA TOUR event. Big shout-out to Paul; he really settled the nerves down, and I think I ended up shooting 2- or 3-under and got in.

Yeah, it was a crazy week. I was staying on campus. I still had -- I was doing homework and taking tests. I don't even know if people in my class knew that I was playing. It felt cooler that way for some reason.

Yeah, I played really, really well all week. I think I finished -- I had a really good first two days, but I think I finished maybe in the 40s, high 40s somewhere and played with Phil for 36 holes on Sunday. I just had a sea of my family and friends out on the weekend.

There's a lot of memories from that. I think I just turned 19. I had my high school assistant coach on the bag. Yeah, it was just an epic, epic week.

It was definitely kind of a pinch-me moment. It was also a big moment for me from a confidence perspective. I felt like my game for some reason or another, I stepped it up after that. It gave me a lot of confidence I was able to make a cut in an invitational and play at one of the hardest courses in the world and have success, so a lot of awesome things from that year.

I can't believe it's been nine years. That's insane.

Q. Sahith, Riv is turning 100. Talk about what makes this course such a worthy tournament venue.

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, funny, we were just on the phone with Stads and he was saying



that the golf course hasn't changed much in 40 years to be honest. A little bit of lengthening but in terms of contouring and green complexes and all that, it's really not changed very much.

It's just awesome to see a golf course kind of stand the test of time. It's just an architectural masterpiece. I'm not even big into -- I don't know a lot about golf course architecture, but it seems like every part of the golf course is very intentional. There wasn't a bunker or a tree or a slope or a dogleg that was just by luck happened to be a good design aspect. It seems like everything was super intentional.

You have to hit -- even for us, it's not the longest course on TOUR anymore. I'd say it's somewhere in the middle, maybe somewhere on the shorter side. But you still hit every club in the bag. It's not just a driver off every tee and blast. There are holes where I hit 3-iron off the tee or 4-wood and you've got to think your way around.

Just seems to have all the aspects of a course that is championship tested. You can host the best events in the world here, with major championships still being held here. That's something to be said. It's probably my favorite course in the world. I'm a little biased in that way, as well.

It's so wonderfully designed, and the greens are -- shout-out to the grounds crew. The course is always in I am peck believe condition. The greens got to be running 12.5, 13, and they're perfectly sloped, as well. I could go on and on about the course, but it's a beauty.

Q. Picking up off that, the 12th hole is ranked the toughest hole the last five years. Talk about what makes that hole so challenging tee to green?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, it's a great golf hole. Even from a tee up -- I don't know what the yardage is from the back tee. I think it might be 470 or 480 now, but it seems like it's always into a puff of wind. It's an uncomfortable tee shot.

You actually have quite a bit of room in the left rough there, but obviously if you miss left of the left rough, it's out of bounds. In our minds, I feel like unintentionally we try and sneak it down the right side of the fairway, which makes the fairway tight. Those overhanging trees really come into play. Yeah, it makes a lot of us look silly. A lot of us hit that tree about 180 yards off the tee and we end up in 11 fairway or in the rough somewhere laying up just short of the brink.

So the tee shot is tough. And there's a lot of holes where you hit a good tee shot and you kind of take a deep breath and, all right, kind of a nothing second shot, but that's not the case on 12. There's no easy pin placement in my opinion on that green. That front pin is difficult because that right bunker is dead. The back pin is difficult because you can't really miss the green anywhere to have an easy up-and-down. You kind of got to lay up to 40 feet essentially and try and two-putt from there.

It's similar to a lot of other holes out here. There's a lot of aspects, but you have to hit two very solid golf shots, and there's no bail-out, there's no easy side of the green to necessarily miss on. You think the left side of the green -- left of the green is the easy place to miss, and it rolls six inches into the kikuyu rough and you have no idea what it's doing from that lie, and you chip



it to eight feet and miss. Story as old as time there on 12.

So it's a great hole. Again, it's just so purposefully designed. Like I said, even from one tee up, it's still a difficult golf hole.

Q. You've had a couple of top 10s in five starts this season. You come in here and you've made five cuts in five starts here. What sort of confidence do you carry in here this week knowing that you've played well here in the past and you're off to a good start?

SAHITH THEEGALA: For sure. I love this place, and growing up in California, I grew up on munis with poa greens and kikuyu fairways and roughs. There's certainly an intangible aspect had a I feel like I have an advantage out here. There's just some lies where I can't even explain what I do, to be honest, but I just kind of know how the ball is going to come out. It's a bit of a calculated guess, obviously, but just that comfort level is huge.

I don't know what the metrics say, but obviously I love poa greens and I feel like I putt well on them. Whatever mental edge that gives me is always awesome.

I love starting the PGA TOUR on the West Coast Swing for very similar reasons. My friends and family with able to come out and support, and for one reason or another, I always seem to start off well.

Just happy to be healthy this year. Super pumped to be here. I didn't think I would be starting with six in a row to start the year but here we are. But super thankful and lucky for the opportunity. Game is feeling great.

I got the driver kind of -- I was actually able to hit some fairways last week, which was not the case the first four tournaments. I feel good. Every part of the game has shown some flashes. It's just see if we can put it together for a week.

Q. I think you answered my question in a way, but how much do you look at stats? You mentioned you don't know how you deal with maybe poa versus bent. There's a new putting metric this year that will be able to detect, left to right, right to left, stuff like that. During the season, do you look at numbers or do you do a year-end analysis, or do you ignore all of it?

SAHITH THEEGALA: Yeah, I don't really work with anyone on the statistics side. I do enjoy looking at it. I feel like I look at my stats and compare it to other players that I think I can improve from or whatever it might be that way.

Yeah, I usually don't make any concrete decisions based off statistics. I think the only thing I did a few years ago is it was two years of data. My rookie year and my second year on TOUR that I was not great from 75 to 125, so I kind of made that a little bigger emphasis in the off-season and leading up to the week.

Actually, I think I've improved a little bit. I haven't really looked that hard.



I love looking at random stats, whatever it might be. But in terms of how it affects my overall game, I think I'm just kind of a weird player where there's not a lot of -- what's the word? Statistical consistency sometimes. Leading up to last week, my approach, chipping, putting were all incredible and my driving was, like, bottom 10 on TOUR, and then last week I was, I think, top 10 in strokes gained off the tee and then just dead last in everything else.

I think even with golf course fit, I've kind of been that way. I don't necessarily have a certain type of golf course that I perform better at than others.

I don't even know if I answered your question actually, but I do look at the stats. I don't think too deeply about them unless there's a real clear outlier where I'm like, I'm leaving some shots on the table here.

I love looking, especially on Twitter when people post some obscure stats about stuff. I love that stuff. I eat it up, unfortunately.

