

Final-Round Notes – Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Course Setup: Sandals Emerald Bay Golf Course – Par 72 / 7,001 yards

Media Contact: Zach Dirlam – ZachDirlam@pgatourhq.com (517-262-5109)

Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Akshay Bhatia	69-72-68-65—274 (-14)
2	Paul Haley II	74-67-67-68—276 (-12)
T3	Michael Gellerman	75-69-68-66—278 (-10)
	Corey Shaun	70-72-64-72—278 (-10)
	Carl Yuan	71-70-66-71—278 (-10)

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- [Tournament Media Site](#) (interviews and other resources available for download)

Teenage phenom Akshay Bhatia wins The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay with riveting back nine

GREAT EXUMA, The Bahamas – Four years ago, a 19-year-old sensation became one of the youngest winners in Korn Ferry Tour history at The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay, with the victory propelling the incredible talent to a multi-win PGA TOUR career and a top-25 Official World Golf Ranking.

Akshay Bhatia, 156 yards out with a pitching wedge in hand in the middle of Sandals Emerald Bay Golf Club’s par-5 18th fairway, knocked his approach inside of a foot and sealed the first PGA TOUR-sanctioned victory of his career, nearly repeating the feat accomplished by Sungjae Im in 2018.

“I reflected back on (2021) U.S. Open (qualifying),” Bhatia said. “I hit a pitching wedge to like three feet, four feet, so I was just trying to do the same thing. For it to hit the flag and have a tap-in was awesome. Golf is crazy.”

Twelve days shy of his 20th birthday, Bhatia became the third-youngest player to win a Korn Ferry Tour event since the Tour’s establishment in 1990. The only players who were younger? Jason Day, who won the 2007 Legend Financial Group Classic at 19 years, 7 months, and 26 days old, and Im, who was 19 years, 9 months, and 17 days old when he won his Korn Ferry Tour debut at the same event Bhatia went from teenage phenom to Korn Ferry Tour champion.

<i>Youngest Winners in Korn Ferry Tour History</i>		
Player	Age	Event Won
Jason Day	19 years, 7 months, 26 days	2007 Legend Financial Group Classic

Sungjae Im	19 years, 9 months, 17 days	2018 The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay
Akshay Bhatia	19 years, 11 months, 19 days	2022 The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay
Si Woo Kim	20 years, 21 days	2015 Stonebrae Classic
Sungjae Im	20 years, 3 months, 25 days	2018 WinCo Foods Portland Open
Zecheng Dou	20 years, 6 months, 8 days	2017 Digital Ally Open
Patrick Cantlay	20 years, 11 months, 15 days	2013 Country Club de Bogota Championship
Aaron Wise	20 years, 11 months, 28 days	2017 Wichita Open Benefitting KU Wichita Pediatrics

Bhatia, a native Californian who plays from Wake Forest, North Carolina, fired a bogey-free 7-under 65 in Wednesday's final round. It was one of three bogey-free scorecards in the final round, and one of three scores of 65 or better posted all week.

The riveting back nine, highlighted by birdies on three of the closing four holes (Nos. 15, 17, and 18), took Bhatia to 14-under par for the tournament. Bhatia began the day three strokes off the lead, but ended it two strokes ahead of runner-up finisher Paul Haley II, who played alongside him all afternoon and carded a bogey-free 4-under 68.

Bhatia's remarkable up-and-down birdie from a sidehill lie behind a greenside bunker at the par-5 15th may have been the key moment of his round, but his field-leading 22nd birdie of the week on the 72nd hole dazzled golf fans around the world.

"I don't know how I managed my emotions, but I did. I felt really calm. (No.) 15 tee, we were waiting a while, so I just sat and looked at the ocean," Bhatia said. "This place is really calm, peaceful... the aura about this place leads into why I'm so calm.

"To play against these guys, guys who have been out here forever, past PGA TOUR winners and players, it's just awesome," Bhatia continued. "For me to be able to mentally and physically compete and win at one of the highest levels in golf, it's something I'll cherish for a while."

Shortly after the 2019 Walker Cup, where Bhatia became the first golfer still in high school to represent the United States, he made an unorthodox choice and passed on collegiate golf opportunities, electing instead to turn professional at 17 years old. Having made his first PGA TOUR start as an amateur at the 2019 Valspar Championship in March, and making his Korn Ferry Tour debut a month later at the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail Championship, Bhatia made six TOUR starts in 2019-20, and 11 last season.

"The first year I turned pro is one of the worst years I've had playing golf," Bhatia said. "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 it was 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."

Bhatia accrued enough non-member FedExCup points last season on the PGA TOUR for a spot in the 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Finals. Although Bhatia missed two cuts and finished T41 in the season-ending Korn Ferry Tour Championship presented by United Leasing & Finance, playing in the Finals gave him an exemption for the Final Stage of the 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament. A T63 finish there left him without guaranteed starts for 2022.

Playing out of the “Finishers 151-200 in the 2020-21 FedExCup Standings” category, Bhatia’s priority number got him in the field this week for his fifth Korn Ferry Tour start.

Bhatia no longer has to worry about whether his number will be enough for him to play. Instead, Bhatia is turning his sights to the fastest route to the PGA TOUR.

“I’ve just climbed the mountain slowly and slowly and slowly,” Bhatia said. “I’m just excited to play next week. I have never had a schedule. To be able to have a schedule and look forward to playing certain events... there’s 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.”

The 2022 Korn Ferry Tour season continues Sunday, January 23 with the opening round of The Bahamas Great Abaco Classic at The Abaco Club.

Final-Round Notes

- **Akshay Bhatia’s** 14-under 274 marked the second-lowest 72-hole score in the event’s five-season history, only behind **Zecheng Dou’s** 18-under 270 from 2019
- **Paul Haley II** (2nd / -12) recorded his third runner-up finish and seventh top-10 in his last 35 Korn Ferry Tour starts; he finished 27th in the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour Regular Season Points Standings, missing a return to the PGA TOUR by just under 26 points
 - Haley won the individual title at the 2011 Atlantic Coast Conference Championships in his final season at Georgia Tech, turned professional in the summer, won his third career Korn Ferry Tour start the following year at the 2012 Chile Classic presented by Pacific Rubiales, and earned a PGA TOUR card as he finished No. 12 on the money list
 - Haley missed 15 of 18 cuts on the PGA TOUR in 2013, then 11 of 15 on the Korn Ferry Tour in 2014, and struggled on the mini-tours before finally regaining Korn Ferry Tour status in 2019
- **Michael Gellerman** (T3 / -10) turned with a 1-over par 37 and birdied seven of the first eight holes of his back nine en route to a 6-under 66 and his first top-10 on the Korn Ferry Tour since a T3 at the 2019 TPC Colorado Championship at Heron Lakes
 - Gellerman, a 2019 Korn Ferry Tour graduate via the Regular Season Points Standings, played primarily on the PGA TOUR the last two seasons (2019-20, 2020-21)
- 54-hole leader **Corey Shaun** (T3 / -10) shot an even-par 72 Wednesday as he sealed a top-three finish in the first Korn Ferry Tour start of his career
- **Carl Yuan** (T3 / -10) recorded his fifth top-10 in his last 12 Korn Ferry Tour starts; his 2020-21 season featured three T2s and another trip of top-10s
 - This week, Yuan made his first Korn Ferry Tour start since the 2021 Wichita Open Benefitting KU Wichita Pediatrics last June, after which he ended his season to represent China in the Olympic Men’s Golf Competition
 - Following the 2021 Wichita Open, Yuan ranked 27th in the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour Regular Season Points Standings, and he finished the regular season ranked 36th

- Three bogey-free rounds were recorded Wednesday, while five bogey-free rounds were posted Tuesday, and six were recorded in the first and second rounds combined
- Weather: Partly cloudy, high of 77 degrees, wind E/NE at 10-14 mph (gusts up to 25 mph)
- This week's purse was \$750,000, with \$135,000 going to the champion, **Akshay Bhatia**; he also received 500 Korn Ferry Tour points
 - All 2022 Korn Ferry Tour regular season events feature a minimum purse of \$750,000, a 25 percent increase from last season, and will boast minimum purses of \$1 million in 2023 for a [total increase of 66.7 percent](#) from 2021 to 2023
- The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay was the first of 23 regular season events on the 26-event 2022 Korn Ferry Tour schedule; the first set of 25 PGA TOUR cards will be awarded at the regular season finale, the Pinnacle Bank Championship presented by Aetna (August 11-14), and an additional 25 TOUR cards will be awarded following the three-event Korn Ferry Tour Finals, which conclude with the Korn Ferry Tour Championship presented by United Leasing & Finance (September 1-4)
- This week was the Korn Ferry Tour's first international event since the 2020 El Bosque Mexico Championship by INNOVA, which concluded with **David Kocher**'s playoff win on March 1, 2020

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