

EXCLUSIVE

He joined SpaceX at 14. At 16, teen prodigy Kairan Quazi is jumping to quant trading giant Citadel Securities.

Alex Morrell

- Teen prodigy Kairan Quazi joins Citadel Securities as a quant developer in New York City.
- Quazi, who graduated college and joined SpaceX at age 14, chose finance over AI and big tech offers.
- He prized the ambitious, meritocratic culture and fast feedback loops offered in quant finance.

A I labs wanted him. Big Tech did too. But in the end, it was quant finance that won over teen prodigy Kairan Quazi. The 16-year-old, who garnered worldwide attention in 2023 for graduating from college and landing a job as a SpaceX engineer at age 14, starts this week as a quant developer at systematic trading giant Citadel Securities in New York City.

“After two years at SpaceX, I felt ready to take on new challenges and expand my skill set into a different high-performance environment,” Quazi told Business Insider in an interview. “Citadel Securities offered a similarly ambitious culture, but also a completely new domain, which is very exciting for me.”

In a time when quant trading firms face heightened competition for talent from AI labs like OpenAI, Anthropic, and xAI, landing the engineering wunderkind is a noteworthy win for Citadel Securities, one of the premier destinations in finance.

The sister company of billionaire Ken Griffin’s hedge



COURTESY OF KAIRAN QUAZI

Kairan Quazi turned down offers in AI and big tech to join Citadel Securities as a quant developer.

fund Citadel, Citadel Securities is one of the world’s top liquidity providers, handling hundreds of billions worth of stocks, options, currencies, and other assets each day. Using state-of-the-art technology and algorithms, the global market-maker executes trades on behalf of other institutions and retail traders — it handles roughly 35% of retail US stock trades. It generated nearly \$10 billion in revenue in 2024 and a record \$3.4 billion in the first quarter of 2025, according to media reports.

In his new role, Quazi will work on the firm’s global trading infrastructure, sitting at the “intersection of engineering and quantitative problem-solving” and working with both traders and engineers, a company spokesperson said.

“It felt like a very natural transition from the high-



CITADEL SECURITIES

Quazi will work in Citadel Securities' Manhattan office. His commute will be a roughly 10-minute walk.

performance culture at SpaceX,” Quazi said.

Why quant finance beat out Silicon Valley

At just 16, Quazi has been amassing accolades and records for most of his life.

Raised in the Bay Area, he jumped from third grade to college at age 9. Quazi interned for Intel Labs at age 10, working on predictive speech generation platforms, and in 2022 interned in machine learning at cyber-intelligence firm Blackbird.AI.

Then, after becoming the youngest ever graduate of Santa Clara University, Quazi took his software engineering degree to the Starlink division at SpaceX.

He wasn't fetching coffee or working on immaterial projects. Quazi worked on production-critical systems, he says, designing and implementing software that determines where Starlink satellites target their beams, helping ensure fast, reliable internet connections to the company's millions of customers.

“I had a very broad scope and a lot of responsibility, especially for a junior engineer,” Quazi said.

He added that he was expected to fully own projects, including “developing ideas and presenting them to other engineers and leadership, ultimately implementing them, and monitoring the rollouts.”

With his background and résumé, a long and successful career in Silicon Valley likely seemed a foregone conclusion. And at a time when many of the world's brightest minds are flocking to AI startups — and courting offers worth hundreds of millions — that would've been an understandable next step.

But Quazi declined offers from top AI Labs and tech firms (he declined to specify which companies), as well as other quant firms, to join Citadel Securities.

His rationale for jumping into quantitative trading mirrors the sales pitch the industry and its recruiters often tout: For highly ambitious researchers and mathematicians, it's a dream scenario with almost instant feedback and responses to your ideas.

“Quant finance offers a pretty rare combination: the complexity and intellectual challenge that AI research also provides, but with a much faster pace,” Quazi said. “At Citadel Securities, I'll be able to see measurable impact in days, not months or years like many research environments.”

Citadel Securities, in particular, is known for its technological prowess and meritocratic culture, a key selling point for someone who was rejected from jobs — and even booted off LinkedIn — not because of his abilities but rather his age.

He felt Citadel Securities valued his “unconventional” background. “They moved very quickly and didn't use my age or years of experience to gate-keep opportunities,” Quazi said, adding that the opportunity to engage directly with senior leadership impressed him.

It also helped that Quazi was exposed to finance from an early age, as his mother was an investment banker working in mergers and acquisitions. Moreover, for math and engineering students, quant trading firms loom large on campus as some of the most sought-after post-graduate jobs.

“It's one of the most prestigious industries you could go into as a computer scientist or mathematician,” Quazi said.

On his own in NYC

Living on your own in New York City as a teenager is nightmare fuel for some kids and their parents.

Quazi isn't too concerned.

The Bangladeshi-American, who in his spare time likes to read, play video games, rock climb, and hang with friends, among other hobbies, grew up visiting family in New York regularly. He said he values the rich culture, diversity, and energy of the city.

“New York has a very special place in my heart,” Quazi said. “My mom grew up in Astoria, Queens, and I have a lot of family there.”

Another perk: Quazi, who still doesn't have a driver's license, will no longer need his mother to drive him to work, as he did for his gig at SpaceX in Redmond, Washington. At least at first, he'll be living about a 10-minute walk away from Citadel Securities' midtown office.

After that, he'll take the subway.