

# U.S. Open Championship 2020

Tuesday, September 15, 2020

Mamaroneck, New York, USA

Winged Foot Golf Club

## Justin Thomas

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to welcome world No. 3 Justin Thomas to the 2020 U.S. Open interview area.

Justin is making his sixth appearance in the championship and was recently named Player of the Year by the PGA of America. Justin, just some initial reaction to the course here at Winged Foot.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's incredible. I absolutely love it. It's probably one of my favorites I've ever played, to be honest. It's hard, so it's a different kind of fun, but it is fun. It's all right in front of you. It's nothing tricky, nothing crazy. Yeah, you need to play well and have control of your golf ball, otherwise you're going to get pretty exposed.

#### **Q. Will you attempt to drive the green on No. 6 this week?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It depends on the wind. Yesterday when I played there was no chance of getting there. It was a pretty stiff north wind like it was today, so I hit a 4-iron and a pitching wedge. I think the closest I could get was 20 yards yesterday. So I won't be going unless I feel like I can confidently easily hit it on the green. Just depends on the wind.

#### **Q. You might be the only person in the world who's called this place "fun." Curious why you used that word.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Like I said, it's a different kind of fun. I'm trying to think of where we played recently. It's not a 20-, 25-under kind of fun. It's a U.S. Open. It's tough. You know it's going to be tough, and you know par is a really, really good score. Maybe it's just because it's Tuesday I'm saying that. I might not think the same at the end of the week.

But it is, it's going to be such a grind. It's going to be really, really difficult, but to me it's fun to see some of those tough pars you can make, some of those really good 4-, 5-, 6-irons you can hit into middle of the greens and really just who can manage everything the best.

#### **Q. What's the line between being really, really difficult and being unfair? When does it cross over?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's all golf course setup. We've never played a course that's gotten away from us because it's too hard of a course tee to green, it's because it's been poorly set up. That's just the fact of the matter.

This place, right now you go play, you put the pins where they should be, the greens are very soft, the fairways aren't that firm, it's beautiful weather. Yeah, there's going to be a lot of high scores, but there will be some good scores, there will be some under-par scores, but if they got firm, they got fast, they got windy, they put pins where they shouldn't be, then, yeah, it would be stupid. So it really just all depends on how the golf course is set up.

#### **Q. Thoughts on Jimmy being back on the bag?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's great to have him back. It seems like it was so long ago and it seems like it was such a short time ago that he was caddying last. He's been ready to go for a little bit, but I just think getting a couple extra weeks' rest and to get ready to go for this week was good for him.

#### **Q. Who wins, someone who hits the most fairways or someone who makes the most eight-foot putts?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Hmm, that's a good question. Hopefully I'll do either one of those and I'll let you know.

I'm going to go most fairways because eight feet is a pretty specific number, so I'm going to go most fairways.

#### **Q. What was the benefit of playing here a couple weeks ago do you think? How different has it gotten?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was just big for me because I came here at least seeing it. I felt like going to Harding Park, I had never seen the golf course. I didn't know it very well. It's not like I -- no offense, but it wasn't like Augusta where I watch it every year, the tournaments that have been there and knew it before I got even there.

I, to be honest, was pretty tired come Wednesday.



Obviously the week before winning didn't help that, but just trying to get to know a golf course for the first time when it's a major is difficult.

I felt like if I had the opportunity to get here, I needed to do so after how I felt in San Fran. I'm very glad I did. Just little things, like I was very, very lucky the two days that I played I had two different winds, so some of the holes that are maybe blind, I know that when it's downwind, 14 is a 3-wood. When it's into the wind, it's a driver. Just little things like that to where when I'm coming out here I'm not stepping on every tee like: All right, what are we doing here? It's more let's just play the golf course, let's hit a bunch of chips and putts and get more comfortable as opposed to learning it.

**Q. The U.S. Open has a reputation of being a demanding test; how do you embrace that type of challenge?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, you just have to embrace it, otherwise it's going to eat you alive. I mean, especially a place like this, you're going to make a lot of bogeys. You're going to be put in some uncomfortable places, and you as a person are going to feel uncomfortable. It's really just how can you manage that.

I'm not going into this week scared of Winged Foot. It is probably the hardest golf course I've ever played, I think. Oakmont is very tough, but I think that can get -- it's just more the speed of the greens than anything. But tee to green, the rough, the greens, everything factored in, I think this is the hardest course I've played.

But that being said, I'm not going into it scared. I can't play tentative. I can't only try to make pars. If I have a scoring club, I need to try to make a birdie. But then if I get in trouble, I just need to get out.

So I think the most important thing is try to take each hole for what it is and not make this place any bigger than it is because it's already big.

**Q. What's the toughest lie you've dealt with this week, and how was it?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Toughest lie? I'm assuming you mean the rough. I don't really know how to describe awful, but awful is how I would describe it. And it didn't go very far.

**Q. You've played a lot with Tiger since 2018, but even like disproportionately so in the majors. Is it easier, better or worse to be playing with him in a major when there's not fans?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: When there's not fans, it's definitely easier because they're definitely not out there to watch me. They're out there to watch one person, and deservedly so. If I was a spectator, I'd want to watch him rather than me anyway.

It's easier just because you don't have all the commotion. It's little things like when he finishes out first, if he makes a putt or chips it close or I maybe have to finish and he finishes first, everyone is gone. You know, there's a lot of stuff going on.

Yeah, you would hope that we or I am focused enough and have a good enough concentration to block that out, but it wears on you eventually. Just a lot of backing off and kind of waiting for everyone to settle down and realize there's a little bit more people on the golf course.

It's just different. I know that's the fewest amount of people he's played in front of since he was about four, so it's probably weirder for him than for me.

**Q. Why do you think your scoring average is so good playing with him?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I'm comfortable around him. He's a really good friend of mine. I think he feels the same way where he's comfortable playing with me.

I just was very, very lucky to get the nerve side out of it with him. I spent -- I grew up idolizing the guy, and I still look at him as a role model in a lot of things that he does, especially with his golf game.

I think I spent enough time around him early before we started competing against each other to where I kind of got the idol out of me, if that makes sense, to where when we go out and play, it's business. It's not like I need to hit this shot good to impress Tiger Woods, it's I want to beat Tiger Woods.

**Q. When do the nerves go away?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. I don't specifically remember a certain time, but it just comes with anything. It's the same thing, the first couple times you're in contention at a tournament, not that you're not nervous anymore, but you're more comfortable. It's good nerves. It's butterflies as opposed to shaking.

**Q. After playing the PGA Championship, did it still feel like a major without the fans --**

JUSTIN THOMAS: No.

**Q. And have you gotten used to it?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, it didn't feel anything remotely close to a major. It is a shame because Harding and here are just two terrific major championship venues, especially here in New York with the very passionate fans that they have here. To not be able to experience that takes away a lot of a championship, let alone a U.S. Open. Especially coming down the last nine and on Sunday, it's going to, I think, have a big impact. At least I know I miss them, and I wish they could have been out here, but yeah, it's night and day different.

**Q. TV probably doesn't do the slopes justice here in terms of the greens. For people at home, how would you describe putting some of these?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: In the last, whatever, the four times I've played, I've never experienced so many times where you could use a backstop on a putt, which is an odd thing to say and probably picture, hearing me say it, but I've hit a lot of lag putts the last few days, and more often than not I'm able to like use a slope past the hole to get to where a pin is going to be, which is very bizarre.

It is, it is hard to tell on TV, but yeah, the viewers at home are going to see some pretty bizarre stuff and probably a lot of putts and chips that make us look pretty bad. If you're into that stuff, then you're going to like this week.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Justin. Good luck this week.

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