

Sentry Tournament of Champions

Wednesday, January 4, 2023

Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA

Plantation Course at Kapalua

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

JOHN BUSH: We're pleased to be joined by Justin Thomas here at the Sentry Tournament of Champions.

Justin, it's a nice feeling when you know that you've been to this tournament eight times. You're a two-time champion, five Top-5's. Just talk a little bit about what this event means to you.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I did not know it was that many times. That is a nice feeling. Yeah, I love this place. It's always a goal of mine every year to want to start the year in Kapalua. I think it's a fun, it's a relaxing, laid back week. The course is very receiving. It's got big fairway, some big greens. It's not like you're coming here and grinding out a couple 73s or 74s. It's a good opportunity to get the competitive juices flowing and try to get in contention to win a tournament like I've been fortunate to do a couple times here. And, yeah, I always enjoy coming back.

JOHN BUSH: How were your holidays and what's the state of your game coming into the week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: The holidays were great. They were cold. I went to Chicago with my wife to see her family. I mean, I thawed out and here we are.

But yeah, I feel pretty good about my game. I've been working hard and now it's just about kind of getting the competitive rust knocked off as quick as possible.

JOHN BUSH: All right. Sounds good. We'll start with questions.

Q. Are you a New Years resolutions guy? And if so, what are they? And then what is the fun stuff that you do here? There's a bunch of fun stuff to do. What's the fun stuff you've done in the past?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I like to -- the resolution, I think it's -- yeah, the only like very, very specific one I have is I want to read one book a month. I like to read, but I'm not



consistent at reading. I'll get into a book, and then I, whether it's sharing a house with some friends that we have for a couple weeks in a row and I don't touch it for a couple weeks or I'm just not disciplined when I'm home to do it. So I really would like to do that.

But in terms of fun stuff here, I'm really boring. I pretty much just kind of stick to my normal stuff. I mean, I would never, I would say go to the pool or the beach in a normal week, which we'll do here obviously, but I'm not going on any kind of crazy excursions or anything like that.

I've enjoyed snorkeling some in the past. But if you get those rough, we've had a couple rough wind years, not last year, but the previous couple years to where it's not too fun being out in the water when it's like that, so you got to pick and choose.

Q. With you being here so many times, is there any different feeling this week with this being the first of the designated events? A lot of really good players here, as usual, 17 of the top 20. But is there any different vibe at all this week for you so far?

JUSTIN THOMAS: So far I haven't noticed. Obviously we have a few more people than normal. So I would say that makes it a little bit different.

But, yeah, I think it's a great start to even better things to come and I know I'm excited. I think once the tournament gets going and maybe come the weekend guys trying to win a golf tournament. And, like you said, 17 of the top 20 in the world, I mean, that's a big deal. So I think it's going to be a very, very exciting great week.

Q. What's the book of January and does it have pictures?

JUSTIN THOMAS: The book of January doesn't have pictures. Thanks for that. Yeah, and it's about Buddhism. It's kind of about meditation and just getting your -- it was recommended to me from a friend. I don't know, I mean, I like self-help books. I can't read too many in a row. But, yeah, so that's the one that we just started.



Q. Was that the title?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. Why Buddhism is True.

Q. As many times as you've been here does it feel any different, given the context of being the first elevated event, the first of a year like we've never seen before, that kind of thing?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Does it, sorry what? I didn't hear the beginning.

Q. As often as you've been here does it feel any different, just given the context of it being the first of the elevated events and going into a year that's different than any other?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It doesn't feel that much different, to be honest. I think it's, maybe come week's end it might, but just so far throughout the week it hasn't felt any different.

Q. Sorry to go back to the book thing, but what's your usual genre? Is it self-help or is it fiction?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. I have a hard time reading something if it's just not true. I have a hard time with that. I like some kind of stories.

But, yeah, like I said, I can't read too many self-help books in a row. But whether it's about athletes or, I read a really good one a couple years ago about the Red Hot Chili Peppers' lead singer. That was wild, fascinating.

Again, I do not read very often. I don't read very many books. When I do it, I have enjoyed it.

Q. We won't beat this horse anymore to death.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you.

Q. Your schedule doesn't maybe include next week, correct?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It does not, no.

Q. How difficult is that, or maybe it's not difficult at all, to not go to a place where you've shot 59 and were many under for the week to say, is it almost like, oh, I beat that course. I don't need to go back?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's definitely not that. A lot of it is the same reason I miss a lot of tournaments that I do. It's just scheduling, and I feel like, once Torrey starts, it's pretty crazy through THE PLAYERS, potentially Tampa. Like, it gets -- it just is a lot of golf. And to me, it's like if I was

going two in a row, went home for, had off for a week, but then it's not really a full week because you're going to the West Coast and it starts a day early, you're losing a day coming home from here. It doesn't necessarily feel like a week off.

I feel like it just would be putting myself behind the eight ball starting a very important stretch that is the beginning of the season and there's no need to be really tired starting a stretch versus coming into it fresh.

And, yeah, I mean, that's the best golf I've ever played in my life was at the Sony in 2017 and it is, it hurts to not go back there, but unfortunately, you have to miss some events that you want to play.

Q. Talking about New Years resolutions and all these different things. You just played Bahamas. It is the start of a new year. When you start a new year, is there something in your golf game you say, I'm going to do this better or I'm going to work on this little aspect better? Is there something like that that every year you do and what might it be this year if there is?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For mean I kind of made this, I don't know if you want to call it a dedication or just more thing with myself, but I just, I really, honestly, just want to practice more. I feel like I practice really hard and I practice a lot, but I think, even if it's the days that I'm off, just going to do something for an hour, going to do something for 30 minutes, using those days when I don't want to practice, when I feel like I can't get anything out of it, use that as a challenge of the days when maybe I get out to the golf course and I don't want to play.

I mean, I get excited to come out here every week, but I'm still human, all of us are human, where we wake up and maybe don't want to do our job as much as other days. And I think those are the days that, Tiger had those days, but he would shoot 67 or 68 on those days. And I think that's, I'm trying to use those days at home as challenge of like, okay, maybe when I'm out on the road and it's Friday of Kapalua and I wake up and I'm just cranky or I'm not like in a mood to play and how can I flip a switch, something in my head, or what I can do to get myself focused.

So it's just little things. I mean, for me, I feel like a lot of it is mental. If I can be in the right frame of mind and the right state of mind, I feel like I can manage my game well enough, no matter how I'm playing, within reason, to at least be in contention somewhat. So just trying to work on that.

Q. Kind of piggybacking off it. Earlier, you mentioned not playing the Sony. Do you kind of maybe worry at

all with the way things are going to be now, the elevated events, where you mentioned you played well there and you had fun there, but the way it's set up you might not be able to play? Do you worry about maybe the long-term future of some of these tournaments you've played in, like the Sony?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It could be. I think at the end of the day a lot of events aren't going to change drastically. They may lose one or two people here or there. But I think it's going to be great opportunity for a lot of other story lines. I think it's, whether it's through a rotation of different events or guys winning for the first time and jump starting their career, I mean, it just, I think these events that are non-elevated are definitely, understand that they're not elevated. I understand that.

But they're still PGA TOUR events. They're still going to have same purses that they have now. They're going to have opportunities for guys to play their way into Augusta, to play their way into the majors, to play their way into the events, whatever it is, and it is unfortunate for both the events and the way they're perceived because they're still great events.

I hope that that's not the case, that they get hurt too bad. But at the end of the day, the guys' schedules, myself included, I don't think are really going to change that much. If Torrey Pines wasn't an elevated even and the purse was \$50, like Jon Rahm's probably going to go play there because he's probably going to finish in the top 5. You know what I mean? You look at a place like Vegas and Patrick Cantlay. Like, he plays really well there. And if it's not an elevated event or whatever, there's a good chance he's going to go play.

So at the end of the day, we feel like, or myself feel like I go to events where I feel like I have a chance to win. And I think that's the majority of the guys out here their way of thinking about it.

Q. When you think of this event now as compared to what it has been, is this event closing in on being near the same kind of thing as maybe THE PLAYERS or is this event a little bit prestigious than it was a year ago?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's definitely more prestigious than it was a year ago. I think just due to the few amount of players, it's not possible to be at the same level of a PLAYERS or a Genesis or a Bay Hill or whatever, Memorial, whatever it is.

But I mean, there's 17 of the top 20 in the world here. I mean, there's not very many tournaments the last five

years other than the majors and THE PLAYERS that can say that. And the tournament deserves all that respect. It's so unique because you do have some unbelievable players in the past, whether they choose to not come or it's just they haven't qualified, maybe they didn't win, but they could still be ranked sixth in the world, and due to the qualifications process in the past that you don't get to play Kapalua.

And yeah, I think it's great for this event. It's very deserving. I think everybody that comes here for the first time understands why -- or maybe I'm the only one that talks this great about it because I love this place, but why everybody talks so great about it, because it is a special event.

Q. You're in favor of the top 30 guys who don't win coming here?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. I like that -- they clearly need to change the name of the tournament because it's not the Tournament of Champions anymore. I guess it's the Sentry Tournament of Champions and TOUR Championship qualifiers. What are they going to say for the people that qualified on the first tee? I didn't think about that.

Q. Two questions: Going into the final round of the PGA last year down six -- I don't know, it was five shots, what was the mindset going into that final round? Like, did you think you could still win or -- I mean, of course you want to have that thought of winning, but what was that mindset?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it was very tough. That's a good question. It just, for me, it was more about staying in the moment and staying in the process and not getting wrapped up with how far back I was, but more so just go play my game. I was quite a ways back, but I didn't have a left people in front of me, so I knew that I could just -- I knew I didn't have a very good chance to win. I know that I didn't. But I also knew it was a major championship and everybody in front of me had never won one and there's going to be a lot of nerves, myself included. So just try to make as many birdies as you can and chip away, and I was fortunate to have everything that happened happen.

Q. My other question was: Favorite moment from The Match?

JUSTIN THOMAS: My favorite moment from The Match was probably on the last green when we beat them. That was probably my favorite one.

Q. I want to go back to his question for a minute. If



you go into that last round knowing it's a really long shot and stay in the process and keep your head down and go play, do you remember, was there a particular leaderboard that you saw that got you excited?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I didn't look at leaderboards on Sunday --

Q. Saturday?

JUSTIN THOMAS: -- which is strange for me. But I had not done well last season or last year looking at leaderboards and seeing where I was at. I felt like I pressed it. So I told Bones, I'm like, I'm not looking at any leaderboards today. Not that he would ever give anything away, but let's just do our thing, stay in our little bubble, and do that.

But I did know when I made the birdie on 12, it was a different, it was a different roar. It just was, it was kind of in that little circle of like coming up on 9 and 10, and I just birdied 11 and then it was, I could just tell from the crowd there that it was like, I don't know where I'm at, but I know that I got a chance.

Q. In moments like that, more noise or more camera activity?

JUSTIN THOMAS: More noise. Definitely more noise. It's a buzz. It's the energy that you can feel from the crowd. You know it's not just like an, oh, you know, a nice birdie clap. It's like an okay, like, let's, nice birdie, this person has a chance to win, like go win kind of -- I don't know, it's hard to explain, but it was different.

Q. Most people or some people, not me of course, would say that's really dumb not to look at a leaderboard in the final round of a major. Do you see the pitfalls of not doing it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I definitely do. It just was at the point that I was at, it kind of goes back to what I was saying earlier about mentally it just, I hadn't handled it well earlier in the season. So I clearly needed to do something different. Because any time that I was chasing or I feel like I had a chance to win and I would look at a leaderboard I would play differently. Or I would try to force the issue as opposed to just playing and trusting my ability and understanding that my good golf is probably going to be good enough or have a good chance.

Q. So are you saying the first one you saw was that big daddy on 18?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Um-hum.

Q. What did you think?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it just confirmed everything that I had could feel energy wise. That I had a chance and I should really make this putt on 18 (laughing.) Which I didn't.

Q. When you met Jill or when you guys went out on your first date what was her level of golf knowledge and where is it now and how did we get there?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I have a lot of funny stories about this. So her level of golf knowledge was very low. So she went to college with all my friends at Kentucky and that's how I met her. Whenever I would go back home I would visit my friends at UK and she was best friends with all my best friends.

So I met her and she tells a funny story of, earlier that year was when I think I had won Malaysia or something like that to where all my friends, being the good friends that they are, had the bar put the golf on. Because of the time change it was 12 o'clock, 1 in the morning, the golf was on. She tells the story of, I was so confused why my friends wanted to put golf on at the bar at like 12 or 1 o'clock. Like it made no sense. Like she didn't really ask, but just was, in her head, was like, that's really weird. And then once we met and we became friends she understood, okay, this makes sense.

And to the level of her golf knowledge I was texting with her today and told her that the pro-am might be a little bit longer because it's cart path only. And she asked what is cart path only. So I had to explain cart path only to her.

But it's -- she's learning. Her golf, her level of golf knowledge is perfect. Absolutely perfect.

Q. By perfect you mean?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Just enough and not too much.

Q. Does she play?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No.

Q. Has she ever had a club in her hand?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes.

Q. Was she chasing you at the time?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No. (Laughing.) Not at the time.

Q. I know you're not playing next week, but you know Waialae quite well. I was wondering if you happened to catch a clip of Hideki's 3-wood on 18 in the playoff that nestled up to sort of a kick-in range and what your estimation of that shot is, just the level of difficulty?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. I mean, I know Doug thought it was the best 3-wood he saw the entire season. He wrote about it. So I know that he saw that one. (Laughing.)

I did. It was unbelievable. Especially late in the day. He couldn't see anything. I can't imagine a much better or more impressive way to win and close out a golf tournament and also make it look so easy from what, 270 or whatever it was. So, yeah, it was very Hideki-like. It was impressive.

Q. Mental health is a much bigger issue than it used to be. I know you've talked about mindset. Is there anything specific that you do to stay mentally healthy? Do you have any rituals or things that you like to do to stay mentally healthy?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Just having your getaways or having people to talk to. I mean, journaling helps me sometimes. Reading helps me sometimes. It's just, it's, it definitely takes time and effort. And I think that's more than anything that I've come to realize. It's not just something that you just can turn a switch and be like, Okay, I just want to feel better. You have to make an effort, for sure. And everybody's rituals or things that make them click are differently, I would say.

Q. On the working harder even when you don't want to and that sort of thing. What brought you to that conclusion that you wanted to do that? Was there something that happened this past year? Was it not winning more than the one time? Was it a feeling of, I could be great. I could be even better than I was when I was No. 1? What spurred you to think that way?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I think it's very clear I'm very hard on myself. I'm not, I expect a lot of myself and I know that I can achieve a lot.

But I'm also one of those people that doesn't really like if people complain about something that they can control. And if I'm, call it not driving it well, and I can look back and say, Well I hit drivers for five minutes last week. Like that's nobody's fault by my own.

It's not my dad's fault for not giving me the correct swing whatever. Like I can't, I can't expect something just because I feel like I deserve it or because I feel like I can do it. It's just something where it's like, Look, if I want to

become better in every aspect of my game then maybe I do need to practice seven, eight hours a day.

Or it's like if I want to get better in that short range putt, short, you know, four, five feet, then like maybe I need to hit 4-, 5-footers.

It's just little things of the difference of one thing that I may do one day could end up making the difference of me being comfortable out on the golf course. And the difference me being comfortable could then equate to me just, you know, executing better and performing better. Which could equal more wins.

It could not be the answer, but it's just, it's something that I know I can't complain about something that I don't like about my own game if I'm not putting in as much effort as I feel like I know I can.

JOHN BUSH: Justin Thomas, thank you, sir.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thanks.

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