

Workday Charity Open

Tuesday, July 7, 2020

Dublin, Ohio, USA

Muirfield Village

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Justin Thomas into our virtual interview room. Justin, thank you for joining us for a few minutes, making your 12th start of the season, No. 2 in the FedExCup and a two-time winner. If we can get you first of all just to recap your season up to this point.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, yeah, I'm glad to be here. Usually it's as close as I can get to a home-field event for me, growing up in Louisville, but the season has been good. This is kind of always a time in the year I'm getting excited to get to. Obviously being a totally different time of year, it's a lot different, but it's been a good year. The wins came a pretty long time ago, so those are in the past now. It's not like I can enjoy those or celebrate those for any reason. I just need to kind of keep my head down and keep practicing, keep getting myself ready, my body ready, my game, because this season is winding down and getting closer and closer to playoff time in Atlanta. Need to keep buckling down.

THE MODERATOR: A couple top-10s to start our return to golf a month ago. You took last week off. Just talk a little bit about your preparations for this week and if you're feeling fresh coming into the week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I felt -- I didn't really have much expectations or many expectations coming into the first three events because I knew I was going to be rusty. I just felt like it was a matter of how rust at this. I had been practicing and putting in a lot of work, but you can't emulate anything taking four months off and trying to do that same exact thing at home and getting into that competitive mind frame. I can go have money games at home with buddies or whatever it might be, but I can't have those nerves of trying to win a golf tournament or having to hit a three-footer that matters. Yeah, we're going to make 99.9 percent of those, but every once in a while you know what happens. But then again, we have to hit them now, so it's just those little things here and there getting used to them. It was good to play some good golf. I just felt like I had just a bit of a bulky putter this couple weeks and I was disappointed to play so poorly at Travelers, but yeah, just had a week off, got a little rest and tried to just enjoy the

time off because I realized pretty quickly how much of a grind golf is, even without fans and all the adrenaline rush. It definitely wears on you, so it's important to get your rest.

Q. A question about the fans. Competitively how does it change? How have you reacted to it? Are you getting used to it? Everything from the rough no longer being trampled to just stuff like that.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, definitely getting used to it. It's weird, but I didn't have as hard a time getting used to it as I thought I would, but to me the biggest difference was those first two weeks when I played well and was around the lead, that was a bummer. I missed that part of it. The Thursday, Friday, yeah, you're going to have a lot of fans out there and you're going to have people cheering you on, but you just don't have that adrenaline rush on Thursday and Friday, sometimes even Saturday.

Sorry, I'm sweating a little bit from how hot it is here.

You don't have that adrenaline rush without the fans here. Obviously still at Colonial I had the nerves. I still wanted to win the tournament. I could still feel it. But I just -- just having a putt and kind of feeling that buzz and knowing that if I make this putt the guys behind me and guys in front of me are going to hear a roar, so it's little stuff like that that's different. But like I said at the beginning, you've got to get used to it.

At the end of the day I didn't play well enough and however many people that beat me played better than I did that day. I can't use it as an excuse. But it is something that I think myself and a lot of guys miss is when you have a chance to win the tournaments or even some of the featured holes on the course, it's kind of fun to create a little noise.

Q. Yeah, specifically at this place, sort of esthetically it is weird without the grandstands? Are you seeing things you've never seen before out there today?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For sure. I haven't been out on the course yet. I will say it was very peaceful practicing. It's nice because you have to do a lot of walking to get from the putting green to the chipping green, so stuff like that was nice. But Travelers was the first course I've played that I'm familiar with that had grandstands, and I saw stuff I've never seen before on the course. I can only imagine



what it's going to be like out there once I go check it out.

I think of holes like 6 where you can never see 7 and all the houses, holes like 9, people sitting all up on the bank there, same with 18. 16, completely surrounded, we're probably going to be able to see up 17 now. Stuff like that is different.

But you know, again, it's not a big deal at all. Hopefully we can manage and do all right.

Q. Justin, what are your expectations this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Kind -- obviously I hope to play well and have a chance to win the tournament, but I have not played this place consistently very well. I've had some good finishes, but it seems to be few and far between. It seems to be a top-10 or a missed cut. There's obviously some things that I need to figure out about this golf course and things I need to do better. Because of that, I'm taking these practice days probably a little bit more seriously and trying to figure out why I haven't done as well those years. Obviously not playing well is a big part to do with it, but I still feel my game is good enough where I should never miss a cut a couple times at a place that I feel fits my game like this one does.

I mean, to answer your question, yeah, I expect to play well and have a chance to win, but that being said, I need to get a little bit more comfortable and execute a lot better for that to happen for what's happened in the past.

Q. This segues into trying to figure out what you're trying to figure out: With these practice rounds this week when you know that there's the chance that the course will play so much drastically different this week as opposed to next week, will you be practicing to certain parts of the areas, of the greens that you've never done, hitting from different tee boxes that you've never hit before from, and just your general thoughts of playing the same course but different ways the next two weeks?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, that's true. I've never really thought of that. I'm sure we'll have some pins and some tees that we've never seen before, but everybody else has done that, and I mean, to be perfectly honest, I'm not going to go out there and spend six hours hitting from different places I've never hit before when -- it becomes unproductive at that point when I need to -- I only have so much time in a day where I can be focused and pay attention and get a lot out of it. If I start hanging out too long or just trying to over-practice or overdo this, then it's just going to come to the point of being unproductive. So I need to go through my normal protocols I do in a practice

round and maybe just when I'm hitting putts hit it to a couple different spots, but the important thing is I've played the course enough and I've hit it a lot of different places on this course before to where I know a lot of it for the most part, but I'll just go check out some of the little changes here and there when I go see it.

Q. This one is not so much about you but Matt Fitzpatrick has got a fill-in caddie that you used as a fill-in, as well, Bones, for the next couple weeks, so I just wanted to get your thoughts on how that went for you that time where you had him in Hawai'i and whatnot and what he can expect having someone like Bones on the bag.

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's nice. I didn't know that. That's cool. Yeah, I mean, Bones is great. I like him just as much as a person as I do as a caddie, which I think is extremely important in terms of a partnership. I mean, you need to enjoy being around the person just as much as you enjoy everything they do on the course because obviously this is a different situation. It's not like they've been together for a while or who knows whatever is going to happen. But for me and Jimmy, like I hang out with him more than I hang out with anybody probably ever. I'm spending however many hours a day with him the next six days. I'm going to do the same exact thing next week, and I'm going to have an off week and then we're going to do the same thing the next week and the next week.

For me he was so good at just kind of asking questions and just understanding what I wanted, and that's something that's really important because at the end of the day I know my rookie year especially and at the beginning especially as a kid being younger, I feel I don't want to disrespect an older caddie and tell them something that I want or that I feel or what I want them to do differently. I just felt like it was disrespectful where I didn't want to make them mad. But at the end of the day, we are the boss in this situation and they also want us to tell them because if they don't get better then things aren't going to get better as a team, which is the most important part. That's something that I thought he was great at doing was just kind of trying to feel out the player.

Q. He'll probably have some experience around this joint, too, to impart I'm guessing.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, there's not too many places he doesn't have experience at. That's another great asset for him.

Q. I have a question that's a little off topic. When you were new to the TOUR, do you remember the first time in the final round you had a putt that might be worth

\$200,000 or \$400,000, and how unsettling was that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: You probably aren't going to believe me, but no. I've never had a putt where I've thought, if I miss this, I cost myself a hundred and whatever or two hundred or four hundred, whatever it is. I've never once been about the money. To me, I would rather finish fourth than ninth than make \$200,000 instead of a hundred or whatever it is. Again, I have no idea. A lot of people could tell you what a three-way tie for sixth is in a \$9 million purse whereas I have no clue. That's just not me.

100 percent the most nervous I've been on a putt that hasn't been to win a golf tournament is the 18th putt -- my putt on the 18th hole the last round in Atlanta last year because that one was the first ever time, I'm like, this is probably a million dollar putt, and it was like a three-footer. That was the only time, but that's something that's not very common. But other than that, or even early in my career, I never had an instance of that.

Q. Kind of an unrelated Bryson question, in your golfing career, have you ever changed your approach to the game based on what you saw from somebody else?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes. I mean, I've changed it. I've tried to hit different shots. I feel like I -- watching guys like Tiger or Phil or people -- or Strick or people that are really good with their wedges, they could get to a back pin a lot easier than I can, and a place like this where sometimes the greens are a little softer, ball spins a lot, whereas I couldn't. It's not like a change in your game like he's doing, but I would more so learn shots. But no, I've never seen anything like what he's done and how successful he's done it.

Q. I ask this as a completely open-ended question: What do you think is the fascination with him right now?

JUSTIN THOMAS: What do you think his fascination is?

Q. No, what do you think the public fascination of him is? Why do you think it is?

JUSTIN THOMAS: He hits it far. People love someone who hits it far. But I mean, my perception is I just was hitting balls next to him at Travelers, and it honestly was frustrating because he's hitting it 350 in the air and you could put a blanket over about half of them. That's what's unbelievable. People don't understand how hard it is to hit it that straight at that high speed. It's really, really hard to hit a ball straight at 110 miles an hour swing speed, let alone 130 miles an hour swing speed and to do it

consistently. Obviously he had some foul balls at a place like last week where it looked like he could hit it anywhere, but for the most part he's driving it on a string really far. Yeah, I mean, it's pretty unbelievable.

But it's obviously working for him. I went from kind of being a little skeptical about it to maybe saying some things to realizing he was beating me every week and I should probably shut up and just start playing better for myself.

Q. Just wanted to get your thoughts on your strategy about playing the week before a major. Do you like to do that, and if so, how did you come up with that? What worked for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I've always taken the weeks off before the majors. I feel like for me, one of the biggest ways to take a lot of energy out of yourself is winning a golf tournament or having a chance to win a golf tournament, and I felt I would never want to go into a major off of that, so why am I going to go play a tournament the week before when I'm going there to try to win, so I'm basically saying I'm going to go here to try to be really tired for the Masters next week. That to me just didn't make sense.

I understand the concept of you playing well and you could figure it out well enough to keep it going, but in my opinion, the Masters, U.S. Open, it takes so much out of you. I liked it before the Open last year because I have struggled in the Open and I felt like getting another week on the time change and the conditions was useful for me. But I have learned I've played well off of off weeks before, so I just kind of transferred that to playing at home, to where I might play money games or I might just go play Thursday to Sunday 18 holes, but I don't have that absolute grind of trying to win a golf tournament and just having a lot of strain on myself and my body and my mind type thing.

Q. How does having a WGC the week before the PGA impact your plans?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it's kind of -- I feel like it's always been like that. I mean, it's just been in that area. I like Memphis. I like that course. I've never been to Harding Park. But I like the idea of -- like I said, you kind of get rolling, but then it's the same sort of thing I said to where you have to try to not be exhausted, and you're going over to the West Coast so it's going to be tough. That being said, I'm not going to miss the opportunity to play in a WGC. If it was another event at a course where maybe I didn't like, I probably wouldn't go play, but I like that tournament, and I like that course. Hopefully we'll just get hot for two weeks.

Q. Regarding the course, as you know, this is a Jack

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Nicklaus-designed course. What is it that you like about a Jack Nicklaus course?

JUSTIN THOMAS: His courses are usually second-shot courses I would say. I'm not very good at picking apart specifics that architects do, like this person is known for their bunkers, this person is known for this. But I could be totally wrong, but I'm pretty sure Jack's courses are second-shot courses. I would say that was a strength of his game, and I do like that aspect of it. You have to hit it well. The fairways are pretty generous out here. The greens are also pretty generous but they have some severity to them, so you need to have control of your ball, putting them in the correct spots. A hole like 1, you're putting the ball above the hole six feet versus below the hole 12, 15 feet is a big difference. He wants to expose someone who maybe doesn't have their game that day, but if they're playing well, driving it well, hitting their irons well, they can go shoot a 65 or 66, and I think that's something that this course really has every time you tee it up.

Q. Justin, I assume you have a memory bank full of what putts do around here. How much is that going to be changed with this week when they're going to be running a little slower on the stimp as opposed to what you've been used to?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, well, kind of like I said earlier, it's not like I have a ton of -- I have some years of good memories, but it will be different. It's very, very similar to playing Augusta when you go, say, play in October or December or something. You have that putt on 9 or 10 where you're just kind of feeding it and just kind of letting it get to the fall line and go, whereas you can kind of -- the hole is here and you're on this line and usually you're going up here, you can take a more direct line. So stuff like that is going to have an impact. But at the end of the day, I would hope that myself and I'm sure the other guys feel the same way can adjust, and that's what these preparation days are for, to get used to the speed of the greens and try to use that a little bit once we get on the course. But I'm sure there will be times many guys and myself maybe from time to time, hopefully not too often, where you're looking at past putts. But hopefully just getting kind of accustomed to that these next couple days.

Q. Trying to do the math, J.T., I think you were probably 12 or 13 when your fellow Kentuckian turned pro and obliterated Phoenix. Do you have any recollection of kind of the reaction of that as a young kid in Kentucky?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, yeah, I did. I would say -- I do remember that just because I remember it was actually funny, I played with him somewhere recently and I was

talking, he's using a driver right now that sounds similar to that Cobra that he used a long time ago. It's very loud, and he hit it so far. He already hit it hard but then it sounded louder because of how hard he hit it, and I remember that drive on 18 just over everything. It was just cool because being from Kentucky and I guess Kenny had probably won a couple times, but -- he has won obviously many times at many different tournaments, but that was kind of the first like new person, I guess. Like for me I'd heard of Kenny Perry, but I may not have heard of J.B. Holmes just because of my young age and hadn't won yet. But yeah, it was quite a buzz. I know it was a lot cooler going to the high school event at Campbellsville Country Club because that's where he grew up, so now it's like, oh, this is the home of J.B. Holmes and stuff like that.

THE MODERATOR: Justin, we appreciate your time. Best of luck this week.

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