

BMW Championship

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Wilmington, Delaware, USA

Wilmington Country Club

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

AMANDA HERRINGTON: We'd like to welcome the 2017 FedExCup champion, 2019 BMW Championship winner Justin Thomas to the interview room here. Justin entering the week No. 10 in the FedExCup. Thoughts on getting started this week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm excited. I played the Palmer Cup here 10-ish years ago. I don't remember the course very well. I remember once I would get to the holes, I would remember the shape of the hole and that part of it, but I did not remember the greens at all. They have a lot of slope. They're very difficult. You need to leave it in the right place. You can't short-side yourself kind of thing.

It feels like it's 50 degrees outside compared to last week, so that's obviously very nice, but it's great conditions to where if we continue to get this, they're going to be able to push the course a little bit and maybe get it firm and fast and play very challenging, especially on some of the longer holes.

I feel like my game is getting close. I'm playing a lot better than the scores, and I feel like the results are showing. But that's how golf is sometimes. I just have to stay patient and hope I get one one of these next two weeks, preferably the second.

Q. Assuming you're not going to provide us with the meeting minutes, but could you at least describe the tenor of the conversation last night?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. I mean, I'm not obviously going to talk about very much. It was a productive meeting. It's just something that the players who are involved just want the best for the TOUR and want what's in the best interest.

I think it's just one of those things where we all want what's best for the players, and we're working to do that.

Q. What was the value of having Tiger in the room and the effort to get here and all that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, that's huge. I think if someone



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like him is passionate about it, no offense to all of us, but that's really all that matters. If he's not behind something, then one, it's probably not a good idea in terms of the betterment of the game, but two, it's just not going to work. He needs to be behind something.

I think he's been a great kind of leading role in a lot of ways in the game for a lot of us.

Q. Tiger could probably join that meeting via Zoom or conference call or what have you. The fact that he made the effort to come, why do you think he did that, and what do you think the impact was?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think he came because it was very important to him. It probably was just not something that he felt was appropriate to do over Zoom or just to call in. I think it shows how passionate he is about golf and wanting to improve it and paving the way for the next generation of young players to come out down the road.

Q. I'm just looking for some more recollections of your Palmer Cup time here. The photos and whatnot, a very young Justin Thomas. As much as you can, could you run through that week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I remember it raining a lot. Like the course was very, very wet. It was a tough week in that regard.

We had an unbelievable team. Coach Seawell was our coach, which was really cool. Mr. Palmer, I think that was his last Palmer Cup that he attended, and seeing him and greeting him on the first tee, it was at this tournament -- I think it was 2013, talking to him, that I learned and he told me to write my signature to make it legible. It was from this tournament at this golf course from him where I learned that. It's little things like that and memories like that that I'll have.

I remember my mom and my aunts getting to meet Mr. Palmer and taking a picture with him. I remember us putting a pretty good whooping on them.

It was a very, very fun week, and I obviously enjoy those team atmospheres, so it was another one of those.

Q. I've heard people say it could be last year, 25 or 27

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under, and others say it will be really hard. Where do you fall?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would say it's quite a bit more challenging than Caves Valley. I think that's going to be one of the easier tests that we have in terms of huge fairways, soft and short kind of thing. But I think that this place, it's bizarre. It has a very huge mixture of holes. I feel like it has a very -- not a good amount, but it has your fair share of -- if you get the right wind conditions, you can drive it in front of the green. You can have 30, 40 yards. But that isn't necessarily great. If the pins are in certain places you can't get it close. Then you have a hole that I'm hitting driver, 4- or driver, 5-iron into. So I think you have a big variety of that, and I think if it continues with this weather and it firms up, these fairways are going to get firm and they're going to start rolling, which obviously the ball is going to go further, but the fairways are then going to be more difficult to hit.

I'm atrocious at guessing the winning score, so I couldn't tell you. I would just -- if I had to, I would say like most tournaments it'll be in the 12 to 15 range, but I also thought Medinah was going to be like 5-under. Just remember that.

Q. Do you remember beating Sebastian Cappelen that day?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't remember specifically remember that match, know, but I guess yes too.

Q. You talk about a legible autograph signature. Anything else you picked up from Mr. Palmer over the years, whether it was here or Bay Hill?

JUSTIN THOMAS: My rookie year he was at Bay Hill. I remember walking up 18 green and I remember him hitting on his cart, and I went over and thanked him. He didn't know me from anybody. He had no reason to. But just felt like it was appropriate to go thank someone like him for everything he'd done in the game and was continuing to do at that time, obviously.

I remember talking to him about my grandpa here. I don't know if he was just humoring me or not, but he said he remembered playing my grandpa. I have an unbelievable picture of him and my grandpa when my grandpa was on TOUR playing together and Arnie putting and grandpa in the background with the cigar in his mouth and the bucket hat. Just stuff like that.

Again, I don't know if he remembered or not, but it made me feel pretty cool at the time as a college player saying that he remembered playing in TOUR events or had heard

of Paul Thomas. Little things like that was pretty inspiring and cool to hear.

Q. Going back to what you said about the future as you related to the meeting with the TOUR and whatnot, how hard is it to identify a can't-miss kid coming out of college?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's extremely difficult, and I don't think -- I just don't think there's such a thing anymore. I think you just look at the paths that people take -- I was looking at the Palmer Cup team last week, and I think -- it's absolutely no offense, and he knows this, to Trey Mullinax whatsoever, but if you were to put Cory Whitsett, Bobby Wyatt and Trey Mullinax in a hat and say which one of these three in order is going to be the most successful, you would have said Cory and Bobby ahead of Trey just because of how good they were. Like Trey was really good, but they were that good, and they haven't played professional golf in a couple years, Cory and Bobby, and Trey is now a winner on TOUR.

They were some of those guys. You know it wasn't just a how are they going to win on TOUR, it was how many times are they going to win on TOUR and how long are they going to play.

You look at Jordan, obviously his path worked out well, but he missed Q-school. There's so many guys I can think of, I don't need to do that, but it's just guys that you see are can't-miss, they're unbelievable, they win everything in junior golf, amateur golf, college golf, No. 1 amateur in the world, whatever, and they're just struggling to find a way.

I think you could argue that's a little bit of the problem, that they can't necessarily get out here right away, but it's just, man, golf is a tough sport. That's just the way that it is, I think.

Q. You didn't get out here right away.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I didn't, and I think that was the best thing that happened to me is having to go through the process I did. I had to earn it. Everyone knows when they sign up for professional golf what they're getting into. They know you have to go earn what's yours and if you don't play well you're not going to get compensated that well. You have to go through Q-school to get to at that time and now the Korn Ferry TOUR and you have to play well here on the Korn Ferry TOUR. I would have loved to be out on the PGA TOUR right away, but I don't think maturity-wise and probably everything else-wise I was ready. I probably could have kept my card and would have been okay, but I don't know if I necessarily would have been the player I am today without going through more and learning about

myself and just putting myself through the ringer kind of thing.

Q. Next year the format of the playoffs is going to change a pretty good amount. Obviously it's not really been something you've had to worry about, but I'm curious what impact you think it will have, only having 70 at the first, this one will only have 50. How do you think it's going to impact schedules or even the thinking of the way you start the year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For someone like me, I don't know if it's going to change a whole lot because I generally try to play a couple times in the fall. My big thing, and it gets me in trouble sometimes, I think it did this summer, is that I feel like if I have a good chance to win on that golf course, I'm going to go play. I feel that I'm young enough, I'm in good enough shape, I can handle it physically enough to where if it's two, three in a row, eight in a 10-week stretch, whatever, then I should be able to handle it.

This summer I think I overdid it a little bit, but my point being there's some of those events in the fall where I feel like I have that opportunity, so I've gone to play those. I don't have a family yet. I'm not in the same position as other people are to where I want to enjoy that time off.

So I think it could be something where it might entice guys to play a little bit more beforehand or play a little bit more early so they're not playing catch-up at the end, because yeah, that is getting enough to the point where you can't necessarily have obviously one great week of winning a tournament or finishing second, but you can't just have one good week and miss all the other cuts and get in.

I think that's a good change. You look at every -- not to compare us to other sports, but there's other teams that miss the playoffs and still get to play next year kind of thing, so I think it puts a little bit more intensity and emphasis on good consistent year-long play and potentially could make the playoffs more exciting.

Q. Just to piggy-back, I'm not sure how much you've thought about gaming this out, but do you have any thoughts on what the solution could be? I would think from a PGA TOUR perspective they'd want to have the young, exciting player out on TOUR as much as possible. The opposite side of that would be you'd like a little bit of seasoning on the Korn Ferry TOUR to get ready, as well. Do you have any thoughts on the solution?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, I've thought about it some. I just think it's something where you can just get -- I don't know what the correct answer is or if it's just

something like a small amount of guys that have the opportunity to come straight out here. I think whether it's through a reshuffle, through one year, through two years, through three reshuffles, that's way beyond my pay grade of knowing how to handle things.

But I think some form of that, of the top amateurs in the world or top college players in the world, whatever it is, to have the opportunity to at some point be able to play in these events, in PGA TOUR events, I think some form of that is a good answer.

But how and when, I don't know.

Q. I just wanted to ask, how different is this golf course compared to the other two golf courses on the playoff schedule, being that it's a northeastern golf course with bentgrass, very long, deep rough, and you're playing two other golf courses that are Bermudagrass? What are some of the changes you go through when it's so quick?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it definitely is a lot different in terms of chipping. Last week you had to pay a lot of attention to the grain and where you were landing it, if the ball was landing into the grain it was going to pop straight up or if it was downgrain it was going to take off, versus now it's kind of what you see is what you get with the slope.

The rough is quite a bit different to chip out of. I feel like you have to use a little bit different technique, and it's very lie-dependent versus Bermuda is pretty generally just going to sit down. It's just a matter of if it's sitting down in the first cut or if it's sitting down in the long rough, whereas you can have a lot out here where you may be able to get ball first, you have to do explosion, you kind of chop, whatever it is. I think you have a little bit of variety and options of how to play shots around the greens versus Bermuda.

But it is, it's totally different golf. It's a lot more position, put the ball in the fairway -- it's still a premium here, but it's so important in Memphis and next week to where if you do that, you can make so many birdies, but if you don't, it's just so hard to control the ball out of Bermuda rough coming into the greens.

I feel like that's the biggest difference.

Q. Given the green size here compared to especially Memphis, the green sizes are double, and then length, do you think this course favors long drivers, someone like yourself?

JUSTIN THOMAS: If I drive it well, it definitely favors me, but long and contradicted still doesn't do you any good like it does at most places.

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The greens are big, but you can't use a lot of them. They're so severe and crazy in some spots to where you can't use -- we had a couple holes today looking at it where like I don't even think they can use the front half of this green just because of the amount of slope. It might be one that's -- I don't know what's the general square footage of a green? 8,000? So it might be an 8,000-square-foot green, but they can't use 3,000 or 4,000 square feet of it. It's just one of those things where -- they are big, don't get me wrong, but they play a lot smaller than they are.

Q. What do you think the outcome of the meeting was? Not so much the purpose, but what do you hope comes out of it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'd just hope for a better product. I think that's the hope in general of anything is just to try to improve ourselves, where we're playing, everything the best that we can.

Q. I've heard that a lot over the last probably month or so, and without -- I'm asking you for like a detail, not from the meeting but in general, what's probably the one thing the TOUR needs to fix? I'm sure you're relatively happy. You look happy.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I am.

Q. What's the one area, and you can generalize it if you want, that needs to be improved?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. I'm probably more on the side of I enjoy playing, and it could be substantially worse and I'm still going to be out here. Yeah, do I hope things would improve like I do now? Yeah, but I still just enjoy winning golf tournaments and trying to do that, and the competition. Whenever I get in conversations with people, whether they're way into it or just a little into it, it's usually more than I am, so it's more kind of sit back and listen for me because I do, I understand that I have a voice from time to time, but I also am on a TOUR that has a lot of people on it, so I can't be selfish and I can't want what's best for me, I have to want what's best for the TOUR as a whole.

I think whatever the solution is for that to be, I know that doesn't answer your question, but that's what the answer is.

THE MODERATOR: Justin, thanks so much for your time. Good luck this week.

