

TOUR Championship

Thursday, September 3, 2020

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

CHRIS REIMER: We want to welcome Justin Thomas to the press conference here at the TOUR Championship. Justin enters the season finale with three victories this season. Last year came into the TOUR Championship at No. 1, now coming in at No. 3 and chasing down Dustin and Jon Rahm.

If you could talk a little bit about just what your feelings are on the strategy this year coming in at No. 3 and how you feel entering the week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I think it's going to be quite a bit different than last year. But it's crazy. It's only three shots, but I feel like it'll feel a lot different when I'm out there. I think it's going to feel more normal. I'm going to be able to go about my normal game a little bit better.

I think I just need to not get as wrapped up in everyone's scores as opposed to just me playing golf and playing this place as well as I can, because it is a place that I have played well and I do really like.

I need to not play defensive, and when I have the opportunity to make some birdies, try and do it.

Q. Take yourself out of the equation for a minute, but for those who are starting 10 shots behind, how would you handicap their chances, and do you find it to be doable?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's doable. It's not very doable, but it is. It would be one thing if they were 10 back of one person, but there's a lot of -- there's 25 people ahead of them, I think, and that's the hard part. I think if you gave me at even par and you gave X player at 10-under par and it was just us two, I think I'd have a better chance of catching him because he's going to be playing to me as opposed to just playing to play; whereas DJ won't be looking at the people at even par because there's people at 1, there's people at 2, there's people at 3, 4, 5, et cetera.

But it's weird because if you don't have a good Friday this week, you don't have a good first round, then realistically



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your chances are probably out. But at the same time, when you come in 25 to 30 on the FedExCup you knew that you had to have a lot of things happen and go your way for you to have a chance.

Q. This is kind of hypothetical, but do you think if we have that year where 1 through 6 just have a pretty middling week and someone down at that spot lights it up for the week and wins the FedExCup, do you think he will be perceived differently as a fluke winner or an undeserving winner compared with one of the top guys?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, you can say what you want, but they definitely will from somebody. That's just the fact of the matter. But at the end of the day there's been plenty of teams that have won Super Bowls and World Series and NBA championships that aren't deserving people would say, or aren't the best team.

Q. Bama, yeah.

JUSTIN THOMAS: What's that?

Q. Nothing.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, you can't really talk about Alabama. I don't know if Oklahoma is really in much of a place to talk, but that's for another time.

Q. Yes, absolutely it is.

JUSTIN THOMAS: But it's just the way that it is, and it would be a bummer. You could have an instance where someone wins nine, ten times in a season and gets sick this week or rolls an ankle and then finishes 20th or 30th and, yeah, that would be unfortunate, and that I don't think is deserving.

But at the end of the day it is what it is, and we know that coming in, and you just need to perform well at the TOUR Championship to win, and that's just the end of it.

Q. What do you like about this golf course? Why do you like it so much?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I just love it because it's right in front of you and it's fair. It's similar to last -- it's very, very different

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to last week but it's similar to last week in terms of if you hit the fairway you can make birdies, but if you don't hit the fairway you're busy trying to make par.

I just absolutely love golf courses like that. I mean, if you hit the fairways out here, especially as soft as it is this week, it's not a very difficult course. It's not overly long, although it is soft and will be playing longer. You have a lot of short scoring clubs in your hands to where you can get it on the green and the greens are so sure you can make a lot of putts and you can shoot 3-, 4-, 5-under.

But if you're not driving it well and you're not hitting it well, it's very, very tough to stay around par and break par. I think that's why you see scores like you do every single year here. You see 65s and 66s and you see 75s and 76s.

I think that's the sign of a great golf course when you see great disparity like that.

Q. What does it say about the PGA TOUR that since the restart after the 13-week break you guys have continued to play week after week after week after week traveling this country, hasn't been a work stoppage, while other leagues have struggled at various times? What does it say about what you guys have done to get from Colonial to here?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't think there's really a word that I could say or really anything I can say to describe how impressive it is. I mean, the TOUR had a great plan in place, but most importantly they stuck to it, and we stuck to it. Everybody did everything that they could. We obviously had some little things kind of go on there at the beginning of the restart, but it was a team effort.

It's not like Commissioner Monahan could just say, All right, guys, everyone needs to do this and then it's done, it's going to happen. Everyone needs to do their part, and that includes the TOUR officials, the staff, the workers on the grounds of the tournaments, the caddies, the players, the people in the bubble, the trainers, the physios.

Everybody needs to do what they are told and what they should be doing because it's a selfless decision. You can't do stuff that's going to benefit you that could jeopardize the entire TOUR, and everyone has done an unbelievable job of that, to make sure that we're here in Atlanta this week, and it really hasn't even been a question if we were going to get here or not since we started.

I think that's extremely impressive, and I know that all of us are very happy and it feels very normal, and hopefully we'll continue to do it.

Q. I was just wondering from tee to green what makes the par-5, 18th, here at East Lake a unique closing hole?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Hitting the fairway is huge. If you hit the fairway, it's a very, very good birdie opportunity. I mean, pretty much everybody can get around the green in two, barring a big headwind.

But yeah, you get the ball in play and you can either get it on the green or around the green, a place where you can get it up-and-down. But if you miss the fairway then you're dealing with do I have a good enough lie to get it over the water, and then, okay, if I can get it over the water can I keep it short of the bunkers, do I have enough control to know where it's going to go to leave myself a good number.

It's very similar to a lot of holes out here where if you get the ball in play, it's in front of you, it's not terribly difficult, but if you get it out of play you just need to be smart to make sure you don't compound any mistakes.

Q. The top three players in the world rankings mirror the FedExCup standings entering the TOUR Championship. How do you feel your game is trending in these Playoffs to see you win another FedExCup title come Monday?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I've had a good couple days of practice this week. I definitely haven't played well in the Playoffs. For my standards, I've struck the ball I would say poorly. Boston was tough because the scores were so low to where if you're not fully on -- you have to shoot 64 or 65 every day just to hang, and shooting a couple under isn't really going to do it at a place like that.

I had a hard time reading the greens in Boston, and then I kind of wasn't hitting it close enough to make anything in Chicago. I really haven't played very well the first two playoff events. I felt like I played a lot better on Sunday and had a nice day's rest on Monday and good work-in Tuesday, good work-in yesterday, to where I feel like I'm getting a little bit better, because I know I don't have to play my absolute best to win this tournament and to have a good chance.

I need to just manage my game better and just get my dispersion tighter and just be a little bit better because I know this golf course you don't have to be perfect to play it well, you just need to manage well. Your bad shots need to be better than bad. Everybody's good is good, but it's just the bad gets magnified out here, if you will.

I think that's a big thing for me this week is just kind of getting those loose shots a little tighter to where I'm not

making as many bogeys, to where maybe instead of going in the left bunker it's on the left side of the green, or instead of going in another fairway it's just kind of maybe just in the edge of the rough.

That's something I've been working on the last couple days to get myself in better shape.

Q. What would it mean to lift another FedExCup title come Monday for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it would mean a lot. It's not really something I could probably put into words, and hopefully I'll be able to tell you on Monday what it feels like. I've got a lot of golf to go between now and then. I know that I have a great opportunity and I'm in a great position to do so, but at the end of the day I just need to go out and execute better than I have been lately.

Because if I play like I have these last two weeks, I just don't think it'll be good enough, to be perfectly honest. I need to really focus in and get everything going.

But it would be a great honor. But again, have a lot of golf to go and a lot of good players to beat to do that.

Q. Take this week out of it; who's your Player of the Year? Who would get your vote?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Me.

Q. Perfect. Secondly, going back to the question about the pandemic, was there ever a point where you wondered that you guys would get to this point as successfully as you did? And secondly, did you ever get a sense that maybe guys stepped up their efforts particularly after the first few weeks and so forth?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think so. I guess, what was it, kind of around Hilton Head, Travelers area is where we had kind of -- I mean, for us it was a spike. It was just a couple, which is just a huge testimony in itself, or testament in itself. I just think that that was kind of an eye opener for everybody. It was like, Okay, we can't just go live our normal lives. We can't just go do what we want. Kind of like what I said to Steve earlier is that it's bigger than you. It's bigger than -- it's the entire TOUR.

Once people I think started realizing it and could grasp the idea of that, I'm making decisions not for myself, I'm making it based for the TOUR so that everybody can continue to play. It's not just so I can continue to play golf, it's so every single person that wants to tee it up on the PGA TOUR the rest of the season.

If everyone wants to do that, then maybe I don't go to this place that has a lot of people. Maybe I don't go on this vacation that I wanted to go on because I know that it could be risking something.

Obviously I don't know what everyone did in their off time, but whatever it was, it was good, and I just -- like I said earlier, I'm very proud of the TOUR and everybody involved to make sure that we've gotten here because it really, really says a lot, and it's quite an accomplishment in itself.

Q. Justin, when you won the FedExCup, in the immediate aftermath of that, obviously in the heat of the moment, your first emotions were to be upset about not winning the actual tournament. That's not a case -- that really can't happen anymore. I'm wondering if from your standpoint that's better, that it's just one winner and you don't have to worry about juggling both?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, no matter what the format is, no matter what it ends up being, what it gets changed to, everything is going to have positives and negatives. I mean, in terms of -- it's not going to get any easier to follow along than it is right now.

I think in that sense you have the opportunity for -- I mean, we don't know how long this format is going to go for. Hopefully for a long time it proves to be successful like it was last year.

I said earlier, I think this format has the opportunity for -- you could potentially have 20, 25 guys have a chance to win this thing on Sunday, the last round, if the top guys don't play well and some of the middle tier or bottom guys play well. You could have 20 to 30 guys -- 20 to 25 guys within four or five of the lead going into Sunday, which is -- you can't really ask for anything better than that; whereas in the past you might have that but only four of them have a chance to win the FedExCup.

That part about it is cool. Would it be nice to win a TOUR Championship, as well, if you don't win the FedExCup? Yeah, but at the end of the day, this is, I think, a great change, and I would think it's a lot better if I'm holding the trophy on Monday, but that is what it is.

Yeah, I mean, you're going to -- you're always going to have positives and negatives from somebody, no matter what the format is or no matter what the changes are. We're only on year two of this, so we definitely need to at least give it a little bit of a chance and time before we make too many comments on it.

But I think last year proved that it's a good change.

Q. You hardly need to give Dustin any advice, but you're the only one with any experience at playing with this lead on Thursday. Now that you've done it, what do you think is the best approach, and any mistakes that you might have made with it last year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, without being disrespectful, I really don't feel like saying that because I don't want to give him any advice or things that I wish I would have done better.

Q. Well, generally, how did you find that experience?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was tough. It was different. That's the best way to describe it is there's nothing that we could simulate or that we've done that is like teeing it up -- when you put your tee in the ground on the first round, you start at 10-under and everyone is behind you. There's nothing that you can replicate that with.

DJ will have to experience it. He's proven that he plays really well with the lead, so I'm sure it won't make much of a difference to him. But yeah, it was tough for me last year, so I hope it is for him a little bit, too.

Q. With what happened with DJ when he sees Jon Rahm knock in that 66-footer and he loses, how do you guys handle seeing that type of thing? You saw Morikawa when you were 10 seconds away from winning. How do you handle that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, in the moment it's hard. Luckily for me he made his putt on top of me and I still had a chance; whereas DJ missed his and then the tournament was over just like that when he was looking like he was in better shape.

It was a ridiculous putt that Jon made, but he was in a scenario -- DJ had to be thinking he's going to -- DJ is probably thinking, If I two-putt this, he's going to probably -- he's going to have a chance to win the tournament, because where Rahm was it was virtually impossible without hitting the hole, virtually impossible to get it within two, three feet.

So he was going to have to mark and he was going to have some kind of putt for par. I think Jon even said in the interview he was really trying to get it to a place where he could make a par and go to another playoff. That's the things that happen, though, when you win.

You saw his drive on 15. It went in the trees and kicked out and he made birdie. It's what happened to me in

Memphis. He pull hooked a 5-wood and it hit the cart path and went over the bridge and I made birdie. That stuff happens when you win. You make putts like that in that playoff when you win.

It's crazy and it's hard to swallow sometimes, but DJ has won enough to know that weird stuff happens like that when you win. And if there's anybody that's going to forget about it and move on it's going to be DJ, because he's been out here long enough that he knows it unfortunately is a part of it, and he's probably just worried about getting himself ready for this week.

CHRIS REIMER: Justin, thanks for giving us your time and hopefully we see you on Monday.

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