

The Sentry

Wednesday, January 1, 2025

Kapalua, Maui, Hawaii, USA
Plantation Course at Kapalua

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas to the interview room here at The Sentry. Two-time Sentry champion. Thank you for coming in today. I want to start off a little bit about some news that came out earlier today, one of the best journalists out there in the golfing media, Steve DiMeglio, passed away, just want to get your thoughts on that.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I was shocked like everybody. It's just, it's awful. You never want to, when you see someone, and I saw him at the Hero, it's not like you -- all of us knew he wasn't doing well, right. It's hard to tell with Steve because his demeanor was still the same. I wouldn't have characterized him as a positive person by any means, so half the time when he was saying of how he felt I'm like, How does he feel or what is going on. But it's just, it sucks, because obviously all of us wish we could have said bye, right? It's awful. Yeah, he's always been so great to me, to my family. The amount of texts he would send me of good luck. I think he was more, he's definitely a more optimistic Alabama fan than I was. It seemed like anything that happened with them in football, it was like a wellness check probably more than anything, making sure I was okay and everything was going to be okay. But that's, you know, the kind of guy he was. Yeah, he'll be missed, and he'll be on all of our minds and hearts, so it's very sad.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. You've been here a lot of times, you won here a couple times, and you've seen kind of some evolution of this tournament. Can you just talk about that, and seems like they have kind of come out on the strong side, but could you just talk about how you have seen this tournament itself evolve.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It has. It's changed a lot. Before in the past it was kind of, it was dependent on how many people won tournaments. Like, I remember I think my first year playing there was maybe only 30 people. And I had years where it was kind of 38 or 39. And then it -- so it always fluctuated, which kind of made it cool and different. It still, obviously it's a tremendous honor and accomplishment to

be here and starting the year here. I've always enjoyed the week. I think it's obviously a totally different golf than we play a lot of the year, but it's fun, you can make a lot of birdies, you can get it going, it's wide fairways, and it can obviously be very windy where you have to kind of be creative and hit shots. But it's very much, once you get here, you figure out how the course is playing and how you're going to attack it and manage everything. But, no, there's no place I want to be starting my year more than Kapalua, so last year watching I was like it sucked pretty honest, so I'm glad to be back.

Q. I remember you won Medinah for your first win of the year I think the only thing that had you over the moon was your spot here. I guess we can't put the toothpaste back in the tube, but is there any part of you that liked the idea that it was winners only or not, because you wouldn't be here now?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes, I'm on both sides. I'm obviously glad to see where I was like a year ago where it couldn't be the Sentry Tournament of Champions, you know what I mean, and it's like the aspect of, yeah, there's only way you know how to get there and you had to win, and I did think that was cool. But at the same time, like, it's a great opportunity to get more players here and more top names here. I did a little junior clinic for Troon yesterday, and there were so many kids that showed up, and it was like it was impressive. But also it's not like, you know, kids that live in Indiana or Kentucky like, oh, you know, maybe fortunate enough to go to Memorial or something, it's, like, they're in Hawaii. I mean, they're not, they're not traveling to any of our tournaments. So they're ecstatic when as many of us can come here as possible. So I think it's better for the tournament, it's just better for everything. And then so -- and it's also better for me, selfishly, because I'm here this year, so I like that part.

Q. Did you appreciate the difficulty of winning any more in the last two years than before when you were winning with some regularity?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I definitely, I underappreciated it then, for sure. I truly felt like I was going to win multiple times every season pretty much, until I lost it a little bit. It is, it's



just so hard to win out here. You definitely need to -- naturally the better player that you are, you can get away with more mistakes, but come the end of the week on Sunday, you have to win the golf tournament. Winning it in different places can happen differently, you can maybe get it given to you a little bit more than other times, but you still have to do a lot of things correctly and hit the shots and make putts when you need to to win. And, yeah, I was fortunate where I was doing it quite often and I mean, I still feel like I'm fully capable and expect to do that more, but I definitely felt like it was, it should have happened regularly kind of thing.

Q. To follow that, are your expectations any different than they were in, pick a year. Not saying you're going to do it, but --

JUSTIN THOMAS: They aren't, to be honest. Like, I still expect the same things. I mean, I understand it's not realistic in the percentages and the likeliness of it, it's probably not, but I still fully believe that I can have a year like Scottie just had. I mean, there's no reason -- I think I would be doing myself a disservice if I didn't think I could at least do that. I mean, I have a lot of faith and capability in my game, and I feel like I'm working on the right things, but it doesn't just happen because you think you can and because you think you deserve it, you have to work harder than everybody else, and you have to do the right things. So, I do think that I'm capable of as much as I am the other years, but that doesn't, like I said, that doesn't mean that it will or it won't happen.

Q. When you are going through what you did a year and a half ago, how much fear is there at that time?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, quite a bit. Everybody's fear is different. I would say it's, that's the root of a lot of struggles, you know, or regret, if you will, you know, like maybe you should have done this, should have done this, whatever it is. I clearly wouldn't, I wasn't doing anything that I tried or did, and anything that I will be doing or trying going forward, I'm not doing it because I think it's going to make me worse, right, at the time I'm doing it because I think it was right. The hard part is accepting that. I think that's what the best do is, it's kind of buying into that process, buying into, my career's going to be however long it is, and I'm going to have ups and downs, and everything I'm doing is a part of that process, if will you. So, and that just wasn't very fortunate that that was in the low point of my process thus far, and I hope to not be in that place for a very, very long time again, but I'm a lot better because of it.

Q. How much more confident do you feel now going into this season, being able to get your form back? We were asking you all these questions last year.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Oh, yeah, for sure, it was quite often. But what's crazy is that statistically it really wasn't that different of a year, last year and the year prior. That's the crazy thing that people don't see or necessarily maybe dissect is that, people see you, it's like, Oh, well this is such a different year than that. It's, like, it really, statistically, like, you look at over the course of a year in rounds, like, it really was not that different. It's just an extremely, extremely fine line out here, and I don't think that's a secret to anybody, but it can maybe look magnified, if you will, at certain times. But, yeah.

Q. Going without a coach these days, how has that been?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's good. I try to, as hard I could, try to remember how -- I never want to look backward, obviously I want like whatever's going to happen to be the new norm, or, if you will, I never want to -- there's certain things in my DNA in my swing that kind of made me, me. But I feel like I can maybe try to better that version, and I feel, I just tried to really look at how I did things in the past, and I'm like, you know, my dad was working at the club, so I would see him a handful of times a year, just because he was busy. So it was like I'd take video, send it to him, talk here and there, whatever it was, but for the most part I could, I knew the answer almost like before I was sending something. And I got to the point where I was relying on somebody else, or relying on him for the answer, and it's just like, I need -- I've always been so good at fixing things on the course and on the run and trying stuff and I just lost that. So I think getting back to that where I have the accountability and ownership to, like, if I'm not hitting it good, I need to be able to figure this out on my own. I don't have somebody to hold my hand and kind of tell me what it is. So it's just been better for me. It's more like what I normally, what I used to be, in a sense of, like, Okay, I'm just going to keep going, keep in check, and if I need something then we'll go from there.

Q. On the putting side how about that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, that's the same thing. I think I've become too reliant on help the last handful of years and, yeah, I'm solo right now. I just want to -- I'm a great putter. I know I am. I made a lot of extremely clutch putts and big putts in my career, and talent doesn't leave your body, it doesn't just go away. It's just getting the confidence back and doing the right things to where the confidence is there when I'm out playing tournaments, and that's what I've been working on to get to a place where I, where that is.

Q. Are you using that mini driver?



JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm not, no.

Q. The list of goals that you never share until you post 'em on Instagram and make fun of 'em at the end of the year, how much do they change year to year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not very much.

Q. Outside of Ryder Cup or Presidents Cup.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, like just the statistical goal? It doesn't change often. Like, I really want to hit 60 percent of my fairways, like I can't seem to do it in my career thus far, but this is going to be my year, I can feel it. But I just, I know that that, as good as my iron game is, hitting a couple more fairways a round, whatever it is, just driving it a little bit better like I feel like I have kind of from TOUR Championship to end of the year on, that is a huge, huge difference and advantage for me. So something like that hasn't changed because I've yet to hit it (laughing). Maybe, maybe that's kind of been my standard, but I just haven't quite got there yet.

Q. Are you saying that whenever you do hit 60 percent the next year you're going to push it to 65?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Knowing me, probably. Maybe like 62, I don't know.

Q. What's the closest you've come?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I've been like 58 a couple times. But I was not -- not this year.

Q. You need more courses like this.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Right.

Q. Wanted to ask you a couple about Lahaina, if I could. Not being here last year, so close after the fire, and then now being here, what are your impressions, what's the vibe on kind of the slow, but coming along recovery for Lahaina?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's awful. I mean, any kind of disaster like that, it's way more than what it does -- I mean, it affects everything so much. It's the first thing everybody thinks of is, like, Oh, my gosh, what's happened to these families and their homes and everything. You think of little things, like we talked to restaurants around here where it's, like, so many people that lived in Lahaina that they were using for work, and then they have to alter things like that. Or it's maybe buildings or restaurants that people went to forever and locally owned. I mean, there's so many things that are involved in it, and it is, it's so sad. I wish that it

was something that you could just speed up, and obviously something that severe doesn't just fix and get solved overnight, and hopefully it will continue to get built back up and people will return to somewhat of normalcy, but, yeah, it's a completely life-altering thing for a city and town.

Q. How heartening is it, and I'm not asking for any specifics, but to see yourself and a lot of your peers, golf guys, golfers, in this field and in last year's field and, you know, past fields kind of helping out and doing what they can as individuals, but on a pretty big scale, you guys as a group?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's great. I think we're very fortunate that places that golf takes us, but, I mean, we just -- so many guys do so much like philanthropy that doesn't even just get shown, right. That's not the reason you do it, naturally, but there is, we have great opportunities at places. Like last year, I do remember seeing a lot of guys were doing whatever birdies or eagles, whatever it may be. I think it's great. There's nothing I enjoy more than like what I did yesterday, like the clinic for juniors, like, that's so much fun. Because any chance that we have to be able to help, whether it's financially or not, I mean, that's, that makes a difference. And if we can make a difference in a positive way, that's a huge bonus, and it's very fortunate that so many guys have been able to impact financially and help out.

Q. Guaranteed some of those kids you saw yesterday were probably displaced at the very least, maybe lost family members, but what did you see in their eyes yesterday, how cool was that for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was great. It was great. A lot of the kids will be at the airport and kind of helping us when we get in. There was a kid that was there, like one of my first years, who is going off to college next year. I mean, he's taller than I am, that's not saying much, but he's taller than me, and he's off, about to be a freshman at UH, which is pretty cool. So, you know, it doesn't feel, now it doesn't feel that long ago I was in similar shoes to them, and it's just funny, I'm asking if they play sports and they're like, I don't know, I'm like, You're 13, like play everything you can, who cares. Your problems aren't problems. Just enjoy it and enjoy being a 13 year old. So it's cool to be around 'em.

Q. I'm sure is wasn't an ideal situation last fall not being on the Presidents Cup team, but was there anything you could gain from that experience watching and for once not playing for a cup?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For sure. I haven't had the opportunity to play pissed off for awhile, so I'm pretty excited to play a

little pissed off this year.

Q. What is pissed off golf?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's just, you know, some people like to -- I didn't -- I mean, I obviously I didn't deserve to be on the team, but mentally inside my mind I always think and know that I'm going to be a good addition to a team. So, sometimes you have to tell yourself some things. But like I said, I just, I'm excited to -- and I love Jim, we talked many times, and our friendship and relationship hasn't changed at all -- but there would be nothing more I would love than about four, five six times this year text him and say, Good call (laughing). But I'm glad that they, obviously glad that they won, and was pulling for 'em like crazy, but luckily we're close enough where I feel like I can do that and he won't get too mad.

Q. You got a call, I assume, what was that like?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it sucked. I was on a trip with Jill, so I felt bad for her because it was in the morning, so it was like, kind of ruined that day. Pretty sure I ordered a beer at lunch. I needed that one. It was fine. I think Jill could see it, like I, if it was my choice, if I was home, I would have gone straight to the range. I was, like, I'm so ready to, like, all right, I didn't make it, it is what it is, but, like, I'm going to prove why I don't think that that was a good decision. Like I said, it was the right decision, but some things you just have to kind of tell yourself.

Q. I assume you're very motivated to make sure you're not in that position again.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's terrible. I've unfortunately been in it for two years, and it is not a fun place to be in. Not only waiting for the phone call, but then not knowing how the phone call is going to go, so it's a lot of anxiety and a lot of stress.

Q. Going back to yesterday at the clinic, is hitting it from your knees is that a go-to trick shot of yours?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I haven't done it in a while. I'm glad that I could use one of their clubs, that makes it significant easier, because obviously mine are longer. But I remember Coach Seawell used to joke my swing is way better on my knees than it is standing up, because I kind of get that thing like this, so on my knees I got to swing around me, so he would jokingly make me do it sometimes, which I would fight against. But yeah, my dad taught me that one pretty young.

Q. You could hit 65 percent of fairways if you just hit them from your knees?

JUSTIN THOMAS: If I hit it like I did yesterday, I definitely could.

Q. You might be too young for this, but what do you think Scottie has to do this year to be looked at by players the way Tiger once was?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Keep breathing?

Q. You were there for the, you saw Tiger winning majors, but not kind of the absolute younger, where there was an intimidation level?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, be like, I can't beat this guy, I'm playing for second, that kind of thing. I mean, he just does it so differently, but I think his demeanor, his demeanor I think could, it could be -- I shouldn't say -- obviously it wouldn't be easier than it was for Tiger, but it could be easy for people to kind of fear or it would be hard to play against him because how even keeled he is. I mean, he does show emotion, he gets pissed off, but he just, you know, he's not, you know, waving to the crowd, doing all this. Like, I watched highlights of him so many times, and I'm so impressed by just how he's like this, he's so focused and just is playing the best that he can, hitting every shot the best that he can so much, and it's like he's not playing anything else or anybody else, and I think he just, yeah, just keep doing what he's doing. Selfishly, hopefully not. Hopefully I can take some wins from him, but he's doing all right.

Q. Lastly, I'm not accusing you of spending all your time watching golf on TV, but what do you think was the coolest win last year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Coolest win?

Q. As a golf fan.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, that's kind of hard to think of. I was trying to think of a lot of tournaments. I mean, as a friend of Xander's it was cool to see him to win the PGA, just for, I think, because obviously it was very suspenseful and a great tournament, but he's been, I mean, he's there, it seems like, every major.

Q. (No Microphone.)

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. I mean, I was there and it's not very fun, you are constantly reminded. And like I said, he has a chance to win it seems like every major. So, apparently it was so easy he went ahead and did it a couple times later, but I obviously can't think of the rest of the season.

Q. (No microphone.)

JUSTIN THOMAS: I was lucky, yeah. It was a win, and then I was like, Oh, great, and then it's, When are you going to get your next one? And I'm like, Damn, it never stops.

Q. Who is the best without a major?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know how to answer that one.

Q. (No Microphone.)

JUSTIN THOMAS: It is.

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