

Valspar Championship

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Palm Harbor, Florida, USA

Innisbrook Resort (Copperhead)

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas to the interview room here at the Valspar Championship. Justin, you're making your fifth start here. I think three top 20s in four previous starts, so obviously a pretty good record here. Have you had a chance to get out and see the course? Just some thoughts on the course this week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. I played nine holes just in the pro-am. I love this course. It's one of my favorite layouts and favorite tracks of the year. In past years I haven't played it, it's just really been a scheduling thing more than anything, like a handful of tournaments.

But very happy to be back at a place that I like and the course is great. It's the same every year because it's all right in front of you. It's old school and hit the fairways and then try to put it in good position on the green kind of place.

THE MODERATOR: I know you're coming off a big week last week. Good start to the calendar season. Three top 10s in three of your last five starts. Just some thoughts on how you're feeling kind of with your game at this point.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. I feel great about my game. I feel like it's very, very close to where I would like it. I feel like I'm close to getting on a good run here. I'm just trying to stay patient and kind of let it happen.

I played some really, really good golf last week, I was obviously on the wrong end of the draw and I feel like I played really well to battle through that and really fought hard on Sunday and Monday there to kind of hang around and really just got a little unfortunate there with the rain coming down when I was on 17 to throw away a long week of fighting.

So the result was not even I felt like close to how I played last week, but I've shown a lot of great signs of improvement in the areas I've been working on and I feel like some wins are coming, so I just need to stay patient, keep letting it happen.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please?

Q. Curious about how quick this seems as a reset. Pretty grueling week last week. You go the extra day. What's it like to reset and do you feel pretty rested for the week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't yet. The 5:30 wake up this morning probably didn't help. Very, very nice to get an afternoon tee time tomorrow. I do like the fact that it wasn't, it's not a lot of sitting around. It was kind of get in late Monday night. I came out and putted for probably two, three hours yesterday just to try to get used to the speed of the greens and then rested and I'll do a little bit of the same here after this and then just go back and rest this afternoon. I feel like I'll be good to go come tomorrow.

But yeah, definitely a little bit of fatigue there. It's not a normal week of prep. But at the same time, I feel like I'm playing pretty well, so hopefully that will just kind of continue the momentum-type thing.

Q. With all the stops and starts I don't know how much you got asked about the 69, I guess, you finished on Saturday, but it got a universal applause for reaction. Were you surprised how much reaction that round of golf got?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes and no. I mean, I think yes because you generally, like you said, don't get that kind of reaction out of a 3-under. But no because I think some of the people that followed it and watched it understood just how hard it was that day. It truly was. I've never had a round of golf that was that difficult when the course is that soft. It's always that difficult because the course is really firm and fast and can get away from you.

But that was one of the softest greens that we'll play all year and it was one of the, probably the hardest rounds that, hopefully the hardest round I'll play all year.

So, yeah, I took a lot of pride in that round. So I was glad to have a lot of people come up -- I have definitely never had so many players come up to me and tell me that either weren't playing or was in the other wave watching on TV



that they enjoyed watching. So I guess I can take a little bit of pride in that.

Q. Was it a different type of pressure trying to defend, become the first one to defend that title?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I didn't feel it. I don't know if the just the weirdness of the week helped with that. It wasn't like it was a normal flow of like everybody's playing and that kind of thing.

But I don't know. I just was trying to go win the golf tournament was all I was trying to do. It wasn't like I was trying any harder because no one had done it. The fact that I'm comfortable and I like the course I think probably helped with that to where I just was trying to stay in my own little world and just go about my business and hopefully find myself around the lead to have a chance, but I didn't feel it particularly too much.

Q. You attended Tiger's induction ceremony. What were your impressions of that night?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it was really cool. I was very pleased, although I wish I would have had a morning tee time, looking back on it now, so I couldn't have gone, but I was happy to get an afternoon tee time so I could go. It was so special, and, I mean, I love Tiger to death, but Sam stole the show, in my eyes. Her speech was unbelievable. And, I mean, it's a lot of pressure for, I think, 13 she is and to be able to go up in front of that big crowd and probably never done any public speaking to that stage was unbelievable. I mean, it was cool.

My parents got to come and just I think the entire world of golf was, obviously it was deserving. It was going to happen. It was just a matter of time kind of thing. But everybody, myself included, was very pleased and felt special to be there to see him get inducted, and not just him, the other recipients as well.

Q. Did you learn anything new about him?

JUSTIN THOMAS: About him? I don't think so. I mean, definitely some of the stories as a kid. I think that was one of the coolest things and very underrated parts to me is his speech was all probably stuff that happened maybe before 2000. It didn't even address really his success and his accolades on the golf course. I mean, all the stuff that he remembers is the stuff growing up, the time with his dad, and now I'm sure what he's kind of going through with Charlie, the same type thing.

But those were his first memories of golf and what got him to where he is now, just like a lot of the same for me. I

mean, all my fondest and greatest memories are, some of them are just hanging out with my dad and going out and practicing and chipping contests and those little things and habits that we created just like he did. So I thought that was really cool.

Q. What would you highlight as something that, from your early days, got you to this point in your career?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Definitely the amount of practice. I mean, my dad would teach all day and I didn't really, I wasn't like a normal kid to where I wanted to go do other things that middle schoolers wanted to do. I would play your backyard baseball and basketball every once in awhile, but I wanted to spend the whole day playing golf.

And I would just practice all day while my dad taught and I would just wait for him to get done teaching 6 or 7 o'clock and kind of wrap up in the pro shop, and then we would get on a cart and go play nine holes for a dollar. Those are kind of my first just memories and just getting into the game of golf and probably what started my competitiveness.

Q. If Tiger invited you to go to Comic Con with him what superhero would you go as?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think I would let him do that one solo. (Laughing).

Q. There's an age difference, but do you have much experience playing with Sam Burns or impressions of his game?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. We played, I forget where we played together last. We played a practice round at Sawgrass last year. It was just nine holes. But I forget what tournament we first played in. But I remember watching on TV a good bit when he had chances to win. I know here and Bay Hill, I think.

But I was very, very impressed. I thought he, I love his putting stroke. I think he just has, he looks so natural and so comfortable and athletic over the ball, but also relaxed. He's got just a great fluid, his putter stays low to the ground. It's very on plain. It rolls nice. And I like his ball flight. He likes to fade the ball like I do, and it's just, I was very impressed when I played with him and I think he came out with no fear kind of thing and expected a lot of himself and probably felt like he could prove some people wrong and he's clearly done that.

Q. As you look at the World Rankings, it seems like we're seeing more and more 20-somethings push their way in there. Do you think as a group the

20-somethings are kind of pushing each other, kind of driving each other to bigger heights?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For sure. To be perfectly honest, it pisses me off where I am in the World Ranking. But it just goes to show the level of golf that's being played. I clearly have not won very many golf tournaments in the last two years, year and a half, at least, from other parts of my career, but I've played some pretty damn good golf and it's just, if you're not winning tournaments you're getting lapped right now and that's just the way that it is.

And that's a good thing for the game of golf. Having Patrick Cantlay do what he did last year pushes me to become better and having Collin Morikawa and Jon Rahm and Viktor Hovland play as good as they are and be in contention in all the majors and win the biggest golf tournaments, I mean, yeah, selfishly and the jealous side of me wants that to be me.

So it gets me working harder because your main goal is to have no names above you in the World Ranking and I definitely have more ahead of me than I would like.

Q. (No Microphone.)

JUSTIN THOMAS: (Audio cut out)... putt looking at the hole or a very situational-type thing. The only person I've ever physically played with is Jordan and he only did that on short putts. I've never played with somebody on the PGA TOUR that's done it. So I think it gets, it's tough. I understand what you're saying and I think a lot of it goes into the freedom. You're not looking, you're looking and reacting at things. So I definitely understand the concept, but I definitely would be curious on that.

Q. Some people tried it here and there, and they thought trying it, there would be a stigma to trying it in the tournament, that people would look at you a little bit odd.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, definitely. I mean, there's certain shots that I feel like I have that have like very unique and odd stances or setups, and a part of me is like I can't hit a bunker shot with a setup like that, but then it's like well I hit it better than I do when I'm setting up normally, so why wouldn't I do it kind of thing.

And that's kind of where I've gotten to the point like I don't really care what it looks like. That's honestly where I've gotten to with that little kind of draw with my driver is I've never driven, or drawn the ball consistently with a driver. I mean, I can fade it pretty consistently, but, and I can hook it, but in terms of setting up like I'm going to start it at that tree and it's going to draw to that, I can't do that as

consistently right to left as I can left to right, and for some reason when I just shut the face down I can do it better.

It's definitely not conventional or how a lot of guys out here hit draws, but that's what works the best for me. So I've kind of gotten to the point where I'm like screw it I'm just going to do whatever works the best.

Q. Have you come to appreciate how impressive an accomplishment it was to reach world No. 1 now that it's been a little while since you've been there?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. I think a lot of it is just the timing too. I mean, if D.J. and Rosie weren't playing as well as they were at the same time, I could have been on a No. 1 streak like Jon's been. I've looked at it before, especially in terms of the points that I've had. There's a lot of years and a lot of months and weeks where I would have had the No. 1 in the World Ranking at other times. But that's unfortunate, that's not, it doesn't matter. It's an irrelevant kind of thing.

So I just think it's really, it is a huge accomplishment and it is very hard to get to. I don't think I under-appreciated how hard it was to get there. I think I may have under-appreciated how hard it is to stay there. I think that's probably the hardest part is to do what Jon's done, what D.J. did for so long. I mean, I'm not even going to bring up Tiger because that's in a different category.

But to just consistently be that consistent, that good, all the time is something that is very, very hard to do.

Q. How high in regard is that world No. 1 held out here by players?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, very high. The thing about that is that a lot of other things that I want to accomplish and do kind of would fall under the umbrella if I was No. 1 in the world. I mean, winning majors and winning tournaments and having chances to win the biggest tournaments. You don't get to No. 1 in the world without doing those things.

So, yeah, at the end of the day, if I could choose one I probably would choose something like that because a lot of the other things that I want to accomplish would probably be accomplished if I were to achieve that kind of thing.

Q. Does it feel to you like it's been awhile since you won?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. It feels like a really long time.

Q. One completely off-the-topic question. March



Madness starts tomorrow. Who are you picking and why?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I haven't even looked at a bracket or filled one out. I think my frustration with Alabama hoops has probably been there. But I don't know. I mean, I really don't know. I don't know enough about enough teams to make a legitimate argument for anybody. I mean, I know Gonzaga's been a pretty dominant team all year in terms of consistency, but, I mean, I'm rooting for Tide pretty much, Tide hoops and against Kansas, so I don't have to hear Gary talk all the time.

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