

PNC Championship

Thursday, December 16, 2021

Orlando, Florida, USA

The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club

Justin Thomas

Mike Thomas

Quick Quotes

Q. Okay, Justin Thomas and Mike Thomas, welcome back to the PNC Championship, defending champions. You've had some experience defending titles. Mike, I'm not sure about you?

MIKE THOMAS: Long, long, time ago, 30 years ago.

Q. So what's the feeling like for you guys coming back here and defending after winning last year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, we're excited. And I'd like to think that we're not looking at it any differently. I mean, we're just here to have a good time and enjoy each other's company. And playing good golf is always a bonus. It's a fun, relaxing, laid-back week, and we're both excited for it.

Q. Mike, comments?

MIKE THOMAS: Yeah, just to get to play a couple days with Justin, I mean, we don't get to play together very often anymore. So that's just a treat in itself.

Q. Do you recall the last time you within a tournament and had to go back and defend?

MIKE THOMAS: I won eight or ten tournaments in Kentucky, but they were a long, long time ago. It was I would say 20, 20-plus years ago, yeah. I did have as good a partner then as I do now.

Q. Was Justin born the last time you defended?

MIKE THOMAS: Yes, yes, he was.

Q. Mike, how much have you gotten to practice over the last couple weeks?

A. My intention was like start scrambling about three or four days ago. That's usually my game plan. I've been busy teaching. But right along when my cram session came up, just hobbling around with some back issues. So



I'm cramming on site. On-site cramming.

Q. J.T., since last year, has the trash talking between you and Charlie Woods gone up or down?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it's probably down for him. I mean, I think he's starting to get old enough that you need to back up your trash talk a little bit better if you're going to be saying it. We'd obviously had a lot of putting contests and fun rounds here and there, but obviously never in competition. But until they get that belt and we don't, I know that we have the forever bragging rights for the time being.

Q. When was the last time you played a round of golf with Tiger?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Hmm. Probably, yeah, wouldn't have been this year. Hmm-mm.

Q. Here like Saturday last year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, yeah, it probably was.

MIKE THOMAS: I played with him last week a couple days, one day, and Charlie.

Q. How'd he look?

MIKE THOMAS: Good. Yeah, good. It's crazy how good he's hitting it and far he's hitting for what he's been through.

Q. Charlie or Tiger, crazy how far he's hitting it?

MIKE THOMAS: Both. But Tiger has been through a lot more than Charlie. It's impressive where he's at.

Q. What's your excitement level just to see him compete again?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, my excitement level is high just for him being out here and being somewhere other than his house and getting to see a lot of familiar faces. And I know spending time with Charlie is a huge deal to him. So I know he's excited for that part.

In terms of the competing, I think his expectations are very



low. But at the same time, he is who he is for a reason, so I'm sure he'll be pissed off if he didn't play well.

Q. What was the occasion of you guys playing? Are you an occasional second set of eyes?

MIKE THOMAS: Yeah, just hang out with Charlie quite a bit. He likes to play golf. We'll go out and play and work on his game a little bit. They were just going to another facility and invited me along to start my cram session. Then it just got interrupted.

Q. What changes have you seen in Charlie's game in the last year? Anything dramatic that's a bit of growth, I guess?

MIKE THOMAS: I mean, he's pretty solid. He hadn't gotten any taller. He's a little stronger. He hits it very far for his size.

I think, just like a lot of those kids that age, it was the same for him, you've just got to get your maturity level up to your skill level. And when you're in that age group, some of them don't do it until they're 15 or 16. Some of them at 12 years old are way ahead of the maturity schedule on the golf course.

And that's just a big part of his improvement, is just going to be as he gets better and course management and things like that.

Q. What do you think Saturday will be like? Will it revert to trash talking, or is it different at all?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it's going to be the same as if us four were just playing at home. It really is. I mean, we're all rooting for each other. I mean, we want to go out there and have fun. It's the same thing for all of us, is that I'm here to spend time with my dad, and Tiger is here to spend time with Charlie, and vice versa. And it just so happens we're playing in a televised tournament.

That's really -- at least for me personally, that's how I'm looking at it. I'm sure we'll have our needling here and there. But at the end of the day, we're all pulling for each other and we just want to have a good time and see each other do well.

Q. There's talk that he's using a new ball, a new driver. What does it say about his golf obsession that it's not just the father/son, but he's also testing equipment his first tournament in ten months?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's -- I mean, it's about right. Right on par, I'd say (chuckling).

Q. Justin, you said you would debate maybe who it meant more to last year, the win here. What did winning with each other mean, and where do you guys keep your belts?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, well, we had a lot of fun with those belts. I would say other than that night when we got home and we had some beers together and both had them on the whole time, it was definitely the first place we first wore them, was over to Tiger's. So we enjoyed that.

But I don't know. I mean, it means so much to both of us for different reasons. I think eventually down the road, when I have children, like I'll understand the side that my dad's coming from. But just for me, I spent so much time with my dad and so many different phases of my life. Like he said, we don't really get the opportunity to play a lot of golf together, when we do, it's just kind of random here or there or when we're trying to fetch balls for our family at holidays or whatever it is. So it's very, very enjoyable for us.

Q. Justin, you probably saw this coming with Tiger well before we did, but given what all has transpired, are you even surprised how fast this is, even just to get to this?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, of course, I'm just happy for him more than anything. I mean, it's something that obviously -- I get asked a lot of questions, but at the end of the day, it's just like, look, it's like any freak injury or accident, everybody's recovery is different. And it's all just going to be kind of based on what you do in rehab and stuff like that.

But also at the same time, it just -- just like my dad and his back, like he has days where it's good, then he has days where it's not. And just like some days when I wake up, feel better than I do others.

So when he's going through something like that, I'm sure some days he's like, oh, wow, I can do this, and there's some days where it's like, oh, I'm not really sure. But it is, it's very impressive and unbelievable. But I know that he somewhere deep down in there had this circled on the calendar of wanting to come back here.

Q. Curious, growing up watching Tiger, how did that influence how you play the game?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It influenced a lot. I mean, just watching him, how he handled the pressure moments, the adversity, just I felt like he -- any time the occasion rose, he did at well. And I think that was something that was -- that

was very impressive to watch and something that I'm trying to emulate, and not only in my game when I started out but now.

And, yeah, he's a massive reason. I mean, I don't like to give him that much credit, but he definitely is a massive reason of why I loved golf as much as I did as a kid.

But it's not just me. It's a lot of people in my age group. I think it's no surprise to anybody that he got a lot of kids going that way.

Q. Mike, can you talk a little bit about being surprised that Tiger's length when you played with him? How close is he to what he normally would do?

MIKE THOMAS: I don't know, I mean, we all know him well enough to know that he's never going to admit to be close to being where he'd like to be. I mean, more importantly, where he normally would be compared to now, I think more importantly is his shot, that whatever he has right now is, I mean, he's still -- he's got some speed. He's got some length. Hits a lot of really, really flush shots. I mean, I was surprised.

Q. Justin, when you look at your dad's game, what part of your game makes you go apple, tree? And, Mike, what part of Justin's game makes you look at him and go that didn't come from me?

MIKE THOMAS: None of the distance came from me, I can tell you that.

JUSTIN THOMAS: The length in the backswing definitely didn't come from Dad.

MIKE THOMAS: Yeah, length in the backswing. There's more differences than similarities for sure.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Very different eras. You know what I mean? There was a lot of -- my dad was playing, there probably weren't very many people that were working on their fitness and before and after rounds -- well, no, no, just more rotation, stuff like that. It's like you get done, like, oh, let's go have a couple beers in the pro shop. And, you know, I mean, that's how it was even on Tour back in the day from what I've heard.

So, I mean, I definitely see now, I mean, when my dad was playing, his short game was really, really good. So I can see some of that. I mean, we had a lot of chipping and putting contests when I was a kid, when we were able to spend more time together. And he was playing a lot more. So I could definitely see that aspect of it.

Q. Do you see your short game in him?

MIKE THOMAS: My short game used to be really good. It was never, you know -- when you're around that level of a player, you realize, wow, I thought it was pretty good, it's not all that good, just better than my peers. You know?

Q. Didn't watching him chip screw up your own game at one point?

MIKE THOMAS: Yeah, trying to do some of the stuff that he did versus what I was capable of doing. Yeah, still working my way back from that.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's all that practice he's putting in, it's really crazy it hasn't turned around.

Q. What are you like as a mentor, and do you take that seriously? Tiger talked about you being a big brother to Charlie.

JUSTIN THOMAS: What do I like?

Q. What are you like as a mentor?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Like someone looking up to me?

Q. Yeah.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't think I can answer that question. Yeah, I don't know. I've never had someone sit me down and say "you're my mentor because" kind of thing. I mean, I -- I'd like to hear that just because obviously there's enough decent qualities in there to make it worth this person's time. But I can't unfortunately tell you why somebody would want to look up to me.

MIKE THOMAS: I think Charlie looks up to him a lot. But like all four of our relationships together, the first thing we're going to do is noodle each other. So it's probably less sage advice that he's passing on and more of verbal comedic abuse just because that's what we do.

Q. You consider Tiger a mentor? And if so, what makes him a good one?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Probably, yeah, I guess I could answer it that way. I definitely do. His willingness to help I think is the biggest reason or the biggest thing.

And, I mean, after asking that question, Charlie could ask me anything he wants, and I would answer him as fully and honestly and helpful as I possibly can, and I feel the same with Tiger.

I mean, there's a lot of things that he shared with me, not only my game, but just the game of golf in general that I'd never tell anybody just because, to be perfectly honest, I think it's an advantage and I take a lot of pride and honor that he's been willing to share some stuff with me.

Are there a lot of other things he probably hasn't told me? Yeah, because he knows that he still likes golf and wants to beat me when we're playing. But I think just being there as a friend is most important as a mentor, but, yeah, kind of pushing each other along the way type thing.

Q. Has he ever told you something that you didn't want to hear in terms of -- can you give an example of what?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I remember the first -- I mean, we played -- we played a decent amount of golf at home. But the first time we played in a tournament together, I think was Bahamas maybe, his event, I don't know, would that have been maybe '17 or --

MIKE THOMAS: '16 or '17.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, one of those. It was either that or Riviera. It was one of those two. I played with him for the first time in a tournament. And I got done, and I just called him. I'm like, hey, we played a lot at home, but now we played in a tournament, you know, what do you see in what do I need to get better at?

And he just -- immediately he's like you don't have near enough shots. It was like -- it's like you can work it, he's like, but you don't have enough shots to be, you know, as dominant as I was kind of thing. He's like, you can -- you're -- like I said, you have some that you can hit, but you don't have all of them and you don't have enough. It's like, all right.

Q. If you're being honest with yourself, Justin, were you expecting to hear something different?

A. No, but I wanted --

Q. (Indiscernible)?

A. No, no, but I definitely see it because I see it in a lot of rookies or even players that have been out here that are kind of like on that edge. It's very, very similar to a lot of stuff that I see, and I can see why he saw it in me now.

But I also wouldn't want it to be like no, man, everything is great, like you're doing awesome. You know, it's like, that would have been like now you're lying to me. I mean, you want to hear the harsh stuff. I think that also makes a good

mentor.

Q. When is the last time you asked him a question like that, and how much different was the answer?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I know to take advantage of him, unfortunately, and I'm sorry if you hear this when he's hurt because he's -- because he's more willing to answer because he's not playing at that moment. So I try to take advantage of those moments.

Q. Just curious, after he tells you about the shots, what was the follow-up to that, then? How did you change what you were doing?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Just go figure it out. Go to the range. Go on the course. I mean, I think you see it a lot from -- I mean, I'm not like -- if it's a 9-iron, 160 yards to a middle pin, like I'm not going to -- I'm going to hit a 9-iron. I'm not going to feel like I need to hook it or hit a big slice.

But at the end of the day, there's definitely a lot of shots throughout the year that I'm able to use that to help me. Or there's pins that I can maybe get close to that the person I'm playing with can't. So it's helped.

Q. You talked length that you don't have. Can you share like one story of some of his more significant growth spurts from junior to where he is now? Is there one time frame that stood out?

MIKE THOMAS: I do remember -- I mean, he was always the shortest, smallest in every field that he played in. Shortest distance-wise, smallest kid, whether he was 11-year-olds or 14-year-olds.

I remember one summer he was gone for like three weeks, and he came home, like he always would, get home at 6:00 that evening from a tournament, want to go out and play nine. And I remember him hitting some tee shots, like literally I hadn't seen in the three weeks. I'm like you're like 20 yards longer than before you left. It was crazy. His ball was making a different noise.

I would say he was maybe 15, 16, something. But he was still pretty small. And he grew after that. So he started hitting it farther and then grew after that. Kind of like Charlie, where Charlie is a lot stronger than his size. So when he gets a little bit bigger, along with that strength.

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