

The Ryder Cup

Tuesday, 26 September, 2023

Rome, Italy

Marco Simone

U.S. Team

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

TOM CARLISLE: Thanks, everyone. We are now joined by Justin Thomas here in the interview area here at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club.

Justin, the Ryder Cup is clearly an environment you thrive in, 6 1/2 points from nine sessions. How much are you looking forward to bringing that here this week at Marco Simone?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm very excited. The Ryder Cup is as good as it gets. It's something that's hard to put into words whether trying to explain it to friends, media, family, whatever it may be. It's just something that the feelings that go through your body and your head when you're out trying to compete and win points in a Ryder Cup, it's something you don't -- at least me personally, I don't and haven't felt anywhere else.

You just try to use it the best possible way that you can to your advantage, and it's one of those things that it's not necessarily -- it's done over the course of the three days and who has the lowest score. The only thing that matters is beating the person you're playing against and just grinding it out and battling with your partner, whoever that may be, and just making the most of it.

Q. There's been a lot of chatter obviously about your pick to the team. What's been your approach to deal with that? Have you blocked it out mostly or have you kept the receipts?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I definitely haven't kept the receipts. I don't feel like there is any good that can come from that. After I was picked from the team, doesn't matter what it is, especially when it comes to people and stuff online, everybody's got an opinion and theirs is right and everybody else's is wrong, at least that's what generally seems to be. So for that exact reason, I stayed away from social media and stayed away from stuff online because I knew nothing good was going to come from it.



MARCO SIMONE
ROME, ITALY

The only thing that mattered to me was that Zach and the vice captains and the, I guess, at that time, other six guys on the team wanted me on the team. Zach and I had had discussions whenever it was before the picks, and that was kind of my -- what I told him, is I'm like, look, obviously, of course, I want to be on the team, yeah. I think that I can compete and that I can go out there and I can do great for the team. But at the end of the day, if the six guys in that room don't think that I'm what's best for the team, then I don't deserve to go.

That's been my thought the whole time, and I'm very glad that they did and do have faith in me. And now that I'm here, all of us hold the same weight as the other one. We are all one, and it's just our job to go out there and try to win points.

Q. It's rare that at a golf tournament you have guys openly cheering against you. You were the lone bright spot I think for the U.S. in Paris, and you seem to sort of be the type of guy who relishes that and sort of converting that into fuel. Is that true, and how do you take that and approach it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I do enjoy it, and I think the Ryder -- I shouldn't say the Ryder Cups, I've only played one over here, but Paris was -- I don't know, just it was -- I thought it was similar -- I shouldn't say similar. It was somewhat similar to like Australia for the Presidents Cup where it's like, of course, everybody there is cheering for the International Team, and the Aussies were maybe a little more vocal than the Europeans in Paris.

But as soon as the Presidents Cup was over, they are the first ones to congratulate you and say well played and they enjoyed watching you play. That's the same type of vibes that I got in Paris. Obviously we got our butts kicked so that wasn't the case there, so maybe they were just being nice.

But no, I think fans over here, for the majority, are very, very respectful. Obviously they are going to cheer for the Europeans over the Americans. But they respect good golf. They want to see good golf, and they are here to watch one of the greatest sporting events in the world.



To me, it's pretty cool to be able to play in front of that, and I just try to embrace -- I don't necessarily try to hold any grudges or try to point fingers at like "This guy said this so I'm really going to show him" kind of thing. It's like, look, I want to win my match bad enough. I don't need anything to make it worse, kind of thing.

Q. I realise it's probably a little bit more complicated than this, but the struggles that you had this summer, would you say they are worked out? Have you thought your way through them to this point and feel good or somewhere in the middle somewhere still?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I clearly am in a lot better place than I was in certain times in the summer. But I mean, it's golf. That doesn't mean that, you know, something -- you just never know. I had plenty of signs of great golf this summer as well. It was just I had quite a few less of them and I had more signs of the other.

But more than anything, I'm just in a good head space, and that's -- for me, that's what's most important. I've said it in other times in the media. I've won golf tournaments without my best stuff, and I take a lot of pride in that and I have taken a lot of pride in that in the past.

I did not feel like I could win golf tournaments this past year with the state that I was in mentally. Yeah, a lot of that has to do with how I was playing, and one does generally feed off of the other, but I just I feel like I'm in a lot better place to where -- I mean, Napa is great example, where I can just kind of get it around, if I'm maybe not extremely sharp to where I just I feel like I can keep building and keep building and keep building like I did there for four, five, six years and just try to be better.

Q. When it's head-to-head like this and so many emotions involved, how do you keep from taking things personally and letting it leak into the other 51 weeks of the year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would say I would just kind of channel, honestly, the things that I feel because I don't -- Rory is a great example. I love Rory. We get along extremely well. He's been a role model of mine. He was super nice to me when I was first starting up. He still is. We see each other a bunch.

Yeah, we played each other in the Ryder Cup and, yeah, we hated each other for 18 holes. Again, it's nothing personal. It's not a dislike as a person. It's just my wife knows, if Jill teed it up in the Ryder Cup for the other team, I'm going to try to beat her pretty bad.

It's nothing personal. So for me, I know how I feel about like -- there's nothing personally that I dislike of any of those guys on the team. But of course, when you're playing them, you want to win the match. So I try to, I don't know, maybe some guys on the team don't like me. That's not really my business nor is it my decision, but I look at it that way as like, no, I'm not going to keep making something personal that someone does competitively against me because, you know, I'm essentially the same way.

Q. When Zach picked you, he called you the heart and soul of the team and the emotional leader. What do you feel you bring to the team more than points on the board? Is it like Ian Poulter where Ryder Cup just brings out the best in you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I hope so. I'd like to think. So I enjoy it and I kind of relish the opportunity. It's so unique because you genuinely have no idea how the other team is going to play; if it's singles, the other person is going to play, and you can go out there -- I remember Jordan and I, we didn't play great. We just didn't really make any putts. But we played a really solid alternate-shot round of golf at Whistling Straits against Sergio and Jon Rahm. Rahm was making so many putts and Sergio was hitting -- vintage Ryder Cup Sergio was hitting great shots, and we were playing really good and we lost.

We've also not played very well and won matches. I think that's just some of the uniqueness of it. It doesn't matter what happened before. It doesn't matter what happened after. Doesn't matter what happens in the other matches. It literally just matters what's happening in those, the two guys you're playing against or the other one. And you just have to beat them, and that is the only thing that matters. Something about that, I don't know if it just helps me reset or wire differently of a concentration standpoint or what.

Like I've told Zach and I've told other captains, my role on the team is whatever it needs to be. I'm happy to help Rookies, I'm happy to talk to certain people, you need me four, you need me five, you need me one, whatever is best for this team is the only thing that matters.

Q. What is one aspect of Jordan's personality that you would consider different from yours but that you like and that helps your chemistry?

JUSTIN THOMAS: We're eerily similar. What makes us different? It's a good question. I just I think we view some things differently. I don't -- like we can -- I feel like you ask us the same question, it's one of those things, hey, how do you get here, we could tell you how to get there but we are going to tell you how to get there different ways. That

could be it.

It's something of -- sometimes when you're out there and you're playing with your partner and then maybe things aren't working out, maybe it's watching how the other one does it and then that helps something trigger something to like, oh, okay, here. Or it's like, I'm not reading this putt, and it's like, well, look at it from over here. We read putts differently, and it's all of a sudden, okay, there you go.

So I think we are eerily and scary similar in a lot of ways. But maybe that's -- I don't know. That could be it. I'm not sure.

Q. You said you were in a good head space now. Just wondering what got you there to this point, and what will keep you there in the heat of battle Friday, Saturday, Sunday when things maybe aren't going well?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, I found it's like anything. I mean, you have to work on what's going on between your ears just like I do my yardages with my wedges.

I mean, Julie, who I've been talking to since January-ish, has been extremely helpful for me. Just, I mean, she'll tell you, I mean, not that anybody wouldn't, I'm very honest, but I say everything that's on my mind, and sometimes getting some stuff off just helps.

But I think she's done a great job of everything that I've -- every place that I've gotten to, it's my way of getting there. It's not -- she's not kind of a -- this is how you have to feel to get there because what works for me may not work for you or work for you and so on and so forth. This is kind of our end goal. Now let's kind of keep working different ways to see what's best for you or what makes sense for you to get there.

Because especially when it comes to that mental head space, you know, you can read 15 different things that mean the exact same thing but they are worded differently, and it's just what works for you.

I just feel like that we've found a place that I'm able to just kind of look at things a little bit differently as they are happening and maybe not put as much emphasis on negative things that happened, or if bad things do happen, trying to turn them into a positive kind of thing.

And also, like I said earlier, playing better does help with that.

Q. How does it work on the course when you haven't got that person to talk to that you've been talking to for

so long?

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's the goal, right. It's the same thing as working on your swing. You don't necessarily -- you don't have a swing coach out there with you. It's just the work that you do, you have that trust and you almost have that, you know, she calls it like a toolkit of things that we've worked on of like, okay, these are the handful of things that are going on in my head that I can use for this week.

Every week is different. Maybe I'm hitting it really well and I just need to focus on these three things to be more successful. Okay, great. Maybe I'm not hitting it good and these are the things I need to focus on to be more successful, and we'll focus on those and so on and so forth. It's only Tuesday, so who knows what my bag of tricks will hold for this week.

Q. You played today with Xander and Patrick. What makes them such a winning pair?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, they are both extremely talented and complete golfers, first and foremost. They don't really have a weakness.

You know, I was talking to Joe LaCava walking up 18, just you know, how it's been, how he's enjoyed it. Obviously everything has been great. I said, "Yeah, there's not really a bad course for Patrick Cantlay, is there?"

He's like, "No."

I mean, he drives it really far and he drives it really straight. He has a good iron game and his short game is ridiculous. He wants the big moment. That pretty much checks it all.

And then Xander, you look at his game, he's somebody that has played so solid and played so well, it's kind of crazy how he hasn't won more. Just like Jordan and I, I think those two bring the best out in each other and also Xander knows how to deal with Patrick and Patrick knows how to deal with Xander, and they just keep winning points. That's all that matters.

Q. During the summer, you spoke of some of the lows. What was the lowest for you and did it get to a point where you had almost written off coming to Rome?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I fully -- in terms of the second part of your question, it was probably like three or four or five days after Wyndham, I had just fully accepted that whatever was going to happen was going to happen.

I mean, obviously I was going to be happy or upset one

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

way or the other but I just had gotten to a point I couldn't -- I mean, for months, I would say, really, the U.S. Open was a really, really low place for me. I was playing arguably the best golf I've played in years going into there and I shot a thousand and almost finished last. So that's a pretty bad feeling to be perfectly honest.

But then I played well the next week, so it just was weird. I was putting so much emphasis and so much pressure on trying to play well to make the Ryder Cup, as opposed to trying to make the Playoffs, which is a wild concept, but unfortunately just the way my mind was working. I don't know what it was.

I just, for some reason, that next week after the Wyndham, when those the guys were in Memphis, I was off. I was just kind like, all right, I've accepted whatever was going to happen was going to happen.

I wasn't losing sleep at night thinking, Oh, if I had done this differently or I could have done that differently and so on and so forth. Just glad it worked out the way it did for me to be here.

Q. What was the worst part of the loss in Paris back in 2018? Was there a singular moment that sticks out and makes you not want to experience that ever again?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For sure watching the team celebrate in front of you. I mean, it's nothing in terms of like an arrogance of the other team. It's not disrespectful. It's not rude. It's just, you know, the way the matches pan out and the way the timing works out, come the last couple matches, everybody on the team is watching the last match or two. And by then, they had won it quite a bit ago. And naturally after that last putt falls, whether it's win or lose for them, they already won the Cup and they all start celebrating together and we are all just standing there.

Yeah, it's a pretty crappy feeling but it's definitely motivating, and I think you see that a lot in other team sports. You know, whether college basketball, Super Bowl, NBA Finals, you'll hear of guys that come back out of the tunnel and watch the other team celebrate because they are like, I don't want to experience this again, kind of thing.

Fortunately and unfortunately for us, that's not something we go through every year like they do. But yeah, you're just kind of sitting there and watching the joy, the champagne, everybody cheering, like yeah, it's not fun to be on the other side. I would prefer to not be again.

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