

# The 150th Open

Press Conference

Tuesday, 12 July 2022

**Justin Thomas**



STUART MOFFATT: Good afternoon, everyone. It's my pleasure to welcome the two-time PGA champion, Justin Thomas, to the interview room.

You're a first-time player in The Open at St Andrews. What are your first impressions?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's incredible. I played here before. I played the Dunhill in '13. Although it doesn't feel like the same golf course as it obviously it was in October, I think it was, but this is one of those places I think it's kind of like an Augusta National or Pebble Beach. There's a handful of places, if you're a golf fan, when you go to the holes, you kind of know them before you get there.

But how different and firm and fast this place can play, it can be very different day to day, I would say.

STUART MOFFATT: It's been a very successful year for you so far. Are you feeling in good shape about contending at St Andrews?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm excited. I love links golf. I love this golf course. I'm excited for the week. I just think it's one of those weeks where I just kind of need to get lost in my own little world and really just try to execute each shot and each hole, each round for what they are and see where it puts me kind of thing.

**Q. Justin, what have you learned during the practise rounds that maybe has caused you to adjust your thinking or even your clubs? Just anything in particular that's maybe surprised you, too.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would say what's surprised me the most is these are definitely the most penal bunkers of any Open Championship I've played in. I think for the most part we all understand and know that the bunkers over here are penalty, but these are the biggest penalty that I've seen of any bunkers.

I haven't really seen but maybe one or two that if you get in, it's not truly just a chip-out or just hitting it sideways out in the fairway.

And even some of the greenside ones because of the -- the

banks on them are essentially like this glass of water, where if it's going at the right speed, it's just going to drop straight down, versus in the States where it's like this, it will kind of roll to the middle or at least roll a little bit away from the bank where you can get it out.

Bones explained it to me or showed me a couple, I think it was maybe Sunday, and kind of showed what it can do. I tried to hit it like five or six times, and I couldn't get it out.

So, to me, that's been a big learning experience, but also just how differently you can play this golf course in terms of clubs off the tees and just the bizarre and crazy different lines you can take, depending on different wind conditions.

So I just truly feel like it's going to be a see what the conditions give you when you're playing kind of thing and just take that hole for what it is versus I'm not just necessarily standing up and saying, okay, I'm going to hit a 2-iron off No. 2 every single day. I might get help and say, OK, I'll send a driver up there or I might get a little wind switch and think it's a 4-iron, you know what I mean?

I think it's a place, at least me personally, I'm going to -- I was surprised by the amount of ways you could play it.

**Q. Is there anything you picked up watching Tiger play it?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Probably not watching him. More just kind of listening to him. It was the stories to me were probably more enjoyable of just talking about on 14 how he's gotten it so in and off the left or in and off the right that you can't get it past those bunkers.

And because -- then you can't get over to Hell Bunker, he was talking about, I think he was playing with Langer, he would just send it over short left of the bunkers and then hit a 2- or 3-iron up the fairway and then a 4-iron onto the green.

It's stuff like that or hitting -- he said he's hit 3-wood on 11 before, a hole where, if it's downwind, we're probably hitting an 8 or 9-iron, different places the ball can go to. Just maybe opened my eyes a little bit to what can happen.

I think sometimes -- it's nice to be playing well and hit good shots, but in the practise rounds I think you sometimes almost



want to hit some bad ones, whether it's on purpose or not, just to kind of see where the ball can truly go -- see how those ones that are maybe a little offline that can ride the wind that maybe hit a slope that kind of keep going, where can it go, especially around the greens.

Probably hearing, I probably learned more just hearing where he hit it and others in the past more so than just watching, if that makes sense.

**Q. How possible do you think it's going to be when it's playing hard and fast to stay out of the bunkers? Because one guy's done it before, didn't go in a single bunker over four days. Do you think that's possible?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's definitely possible, but it's just difficult. Again, it's one of those things where -- I mean, I feel pretty confident that if that was my only goal this week that I could do it. Would I shoot the best score? Probably not or possibly not.

But there's just going to be certain times where you have the opportunity to challenge it and take it on knowing that the reward could be quite high. And I think there's going to be other times where it's not necessarily worth it.

But everybody plays -- I think that's what's so cool about golf over here, I think every Open Championship, everybody plays it so differently.

It's am I just going to ship driver around everywhere and hope for the best, or am I going to play super conservative? But then again, if it gets really firm like this, you're just going to have a lot of holes where you physically can't get the ball close to the hole. Then is your patience and just your discipline going to step in to say, I can't challenge this kind of thing.

So it's just what makes St Andrews and links golf what it is, I'd say.

**Q. Justin, Tiger was in here earlier. He was saying that when he was thinking that maybe he could play again, he really had his focus on this week. He was thinking about that. When you would visit him last year, did he talk about this week, and what did he say?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes. Quite often. Yeah, he reminded me many times that he planned on beating me here at this tournament for quite a while.

**Q. Even before he was playing?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Uh-huh.

**Q. And more than the Masters or anything like that?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: For sure. I just think it was the most realistic timetable that he had, but it just so happened to be that he was ready earlier. But I know that if you could have told him at the beginning of the year you had one event to play and one event only, I think -- which it sounds like he made apparent in his press conference -- and I would also say that it would have been here.

**Q. Justin, what are you thinking on the 17th tee? And from tee to green, can you talk about how difficult that hole is or can be, and the uniqueness to it?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's very unique. Due to missing the cut at the Scottish -- which is probably the most happy I've ever been to miss a cut so I could come here early and truly get ready.

But trying to explain that hole and that tee shot to my fiancée was a little bit difficult. So I had to take her out there myself. I'm like, No, you hit it over the hotel. It's like, Okay, but not really. I'm like, Oh, no, really. You have to hit it over this hotel.

So it's so unique and it's so cool. And, again, it's one of the 18 holes out here, I would say 16 -- no, 18 holes out here that can totally change your line, your strategy and thinking overall based on the wind direction. You know, with looking like it will predominantly down off the right, it's going to be an extremely difficult fairway to hit just because of the balls are going to be coming in and probably running through in the rough, which then means the green is going to be almost impossible to hit.

So it's going to be a hole where you're going to see a lot of 4s and 5s this week and the potential of someone trying to take it on and make a birdie that could turn into a 6 or 7.

So that's one of the things I kind of said earlier just about discipline. I think that hole, it requires a lot of it. And understanding that playing the hole and maybe 1 or 2-over for the week isn't necessarily going to kill you, but playing it 5 or 6 is.

**Q. For those in the United States, the majority of them who have never been in a pot bunker, how tough is that Road Hole bunker?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's very difficult. It's not necessarily any more difficult than other pot bunkers out here. I mean, it is in the grand scheme of things, but it's the location of it and the placement of it and the way that the green sits and just how it swallows golf balls. I mean, anything that's kind of around it that's running, it's just going to go right into it.

Yeah, it's one of those that if that bunker wasn't there, that hole, it would probably play I'd say half a shot to three-quarters



of a shot easier because you just would be able to run it up there short left of the green or onto the green and one or two putt for birdie or par and move on to the 18th hole. But because it's there, it just totally changes your mindset of how and where you're going to hit your second shot kind of thing.

**Q. Sorry, another Tiger question, but he said earlier that it feels like you are his little brother. How does that make you feel?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Good, I guess. I don't know.

**Q. It's pretty cool, I guess, to be his little brother.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's very cool. No, I cherish our friendship and our relationship, and I've been very lucky to learn the amount of stuff that I have from him. But just like myself and any of us out here or him and any of his buddies, we're just friends who happen to play golf, and we're very competitive once we put that tee in the ground Thursday, whenever our tee time is.

Although we have a lot of fun and needle each other quite a bit, it's game time once Thursday comes around.

**Q. Justin, LIV, I'm afraid, how much are you talking about this? And do you understand why we want to talk about it so much? Because we often get the impression that you feel you're fed up with us asking you about it. Do you understand why we want to know?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I do and I don't. It's a very, very tough thing because it is, it truly is one of those things that the more you talk about it, the more traction it gets. But obviously y'all want to know how we feel, and we want to know how other people feel, other players.

But I think it's very obvious why we're sick of talking about it because it is, it's taking away from a lot of -- whether it's great storylines or just great things happening in the game of golf.

I mean, the U.S. Open was such a shame in the beginning of that week because there were so many other great storylines that should have been going on, but instead it wasn't. And I think that's probably what some of the frustration is from guys, answering a lot of the same questions.

But at the end of the day, I know myself -- I understand why y'all ask, like you have to. It's a part of your job. And you just genuinely want to know. Just like we want to know when we ask our friends, our peers, any of y'all what you think.

It's just a part of it. And it's the unfortunate spot and time that we're at right now. But hopefully there will be a time and a place where we can just focus on and talk about the event going

on and not some other stuff elsewhere.

**Q. How much are you talking about it amongst yourselves?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm trying to not talk about it very much because I personally have had enough of it, I would say. But I very rarely am bringing anything up. It's just more whoever brings it up to me, I will discuss it as little as I have to.

But I have a lot bigger and better things to worry about than what's going on in another tour, if that makes sense.

**Q. When folks look at your shot-shaping ability and your skill set, links golf seems to be a perfect match. Why do you think it hasn't been quite a great fit yet?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Like I said, I love links golf. I get so excited and have fun every time I play it. But yeah, I mean, my links golf record speaks for itself. I've played terribly over here. It's not hidden. I can't fake it.

I played really, really well at Portrush. I just had a bad finish. I got kind of caught in a little squall there on probably the worst hole on the course to be in and tripled to where it kept me from a top-five kind of thing. I've played well at the Scottish Open, obviously didn't last week.

But I mean a lot of it is just me understanding and getting used to, I think, just the conditions and understanding that it's not, like I said earlier, it's not the same as the States to where it's like I'm going to hit this or this off this tee pretty much no matter what. It's, like, if it's into the wind, it's this; if it's downwind, it's that.

And wrapping my head around like the 1st hole might be a 6-iron come Sunday afternoon if it gets firm and gets downwind. Or if it gets into the wind, it might be a driver. Or this is a birdie hole most of the days, but some days it's not.

I think to me that's been something I've realised, and something that's hindered me in the past is that I just kind of -- I see par-5 on the -- I see a 5 on the scorecard, it's a par-5, and my mind immediately thinks let's try to make 3 or 4 where 5 is going to end up beating the field in terms of an average.

I think that's a lot of it. I think it's harder to chip over here. It's harder to create that consistent contact and spin to get a lot of those chips that maybe go to 1, 2, 3 feet go to 7, 8, 9. And statistically it goes from all up-and-downs to not getting them all up-and-down.

It's little things here and there. I feel confident that I will have more success in the future. And hopefully it just starts this week.

**Q. Will Zalatoris was in here and said he's written down more in his yardage book over the past couple of days than he has in his entire career. Are you along the same line of thinking with that?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not the most I ever have, but I'm writing a good bit. I'm relying on Bones a lot, to be perfectly honest. He's been here a lot. He knows this golf course. He knows the lines. He understands different places to hit it. He's seen it in different conditions that I haven't.

I've told him before, I'm like, I'm not putting pressure on him when I tell him this, but I'm just being up front like, hey, dude, I'm going to rely on you a lot this week. I'm asking you because I either don't know or I just want your genuine and honest opinion. It's not a you-have-to-be-right kind of situation. If I felt confident and I knew it was right, I wouldn't be asking you.

I think he's going to be a big help for me this week, and I'm just excited for what we can do around here.

**Q. You've spoken a bit about the bunkers. Have you had a particular horror story out there this week?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: In bunkers?

**Q. Yes.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I just had that, I think it was Sunday, Bones dropped some balls in a bunker just really close to a lip, where a ball could go, to see how it was. And I think like three or four times in a row I didn't get it out. But no specific bunkers or anything else other than that.

**Q. You mentioned Bones there and relying on him a bit more. Is this a week when he earns his money more than ever? And based on the weather conditions you've seen and hopefully what's coming over the weekend, where do you see the winning score falling?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm terrible at guessing winning scores. I wouldn't ask me. I think you look in the history in this event, and I would say it's going to be somewhere in the 12- to 16-under range.

I mean, yeah, it has the potential with it being -- it looks like hopefully sunny-ish and warm, knock on wood. But you just never know. Although it could play shorter if it's firmer, it's going to be a lot more difficult to keep the ball in the fairway, which will make it more difficult to control it into the greens and get the ball closer to the hole.

I think scores, over time, they've held their own at a lot of golf courses. Now, yes, if we got this place very soft and no wind for four days, just like the TOUR would have 15 years ago, we're

going to shoot low, mid-20s. But I would guess somewhere in 12- to 16-ish under par.

In terms of your first question, I would like to not think or hope that I'm going to rely on Bones more than other weeks. I would like to think that I rely on him the same every week, but I just might ask more of him than other weeks, if that makes sense.

**Q. Being a kid who has honed his skills in the American South, obviously such a different world of golf, what were your first thoughts and impressions when you came here for the first time and first time you laid eyes on there on 18 in the Road Hole and everything that makes this place so magical, what was that feeling like, what were your thoughts if you can recall?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't recall a lot. But I just -- I remember thinking how cool it was. It's just one of those places I've seen on TV so many times and seeing the golf shots, seeing the tournaments, woken up at 4:00 in the morning so I could watch it on TV.

Like I said, I don't remember any specifics of like getting here, like, wow, I can't believe that this was like that or this was like that. But I just remember having so much fun playing here.

The first time I played, it was terrible conditions. My dad and I came out in a practise round for the Dunhill just because, if it was a day like that at home, we would never dream of playing golf but over here that's very possible. So we figured it would be good to go check it out.

So my first experience of St Andrews was in very, very difficult, brutal conditions, but it was still fun to get out there and go see it.

**Q. What year was that and how old were you at the time?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: 2013. The Dunhill Links was my first time playing. I mean, I hit driver, 6-iron into the first hole. So that's how long it was playing.

**Q. Just looking at social feeds over the last couple of weeks, you, Jordan and some other guys have played a lot of golf in the UK and Ireland, obviously courses that aren't necessarily going to host Opens but popular courses. How much of that is prep for the links golf, and how much of that is just buddies trip, taking advantage of courses out here? And do you have any favourites?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I only played one extra course in Tralee. I would have loved to play a bunch more, but just when the timing and when we're here and whatnot didn't have the opportunity.

To be perfectly honest, if we couldn't get into our hotel room here early this week I was going to go try to play a bunch of -- not a bunch -- but I never played Gullane, or I've never played Muirfield. I've played North Berwick. Just any of those places where it's not like I can -- if I want to go play a cool place in the states, it's a couple hours. Like I'm never going to come over here just on a couple of days off to go play those golf courses. So try to take advantage of it.

I would say it's more so trying to experience it and do it while we're here than it was necessarily Open prep. I think just the more you play, the more preparation it is, without going into it with that mindset, if that makes sense.

It's not something we're going out, like, oh, yeah, we want to play to really get ready for the British Open, but it's let's go play a links golf course and let's check this place out, this will be cool and fun, but we're also going to get more comfortable with the style of golf while we're doing it.

STUART MOFFATT: Justin, thank you for your time and best of luck this week.

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