

PGA Championship

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Quail Hollow Club

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Justin Thomas into the interview room. Justin, welcome to your 10th PGA Championship. This week marks the first PGA here since 2017 when you won your first Wanamaker Trophy. What do you remember about that week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Obviously a lot of great memories. I'd say it's a little different than other majors considering it's a venue and a course that we play yearly, for the Wells Fargo and now the Truist. I would say it's a course that a lot of us have had a lot of rounds on.

There's definitely different parts of that week, and especially Sunday, that I'll always remember. It's always very, very special to -- a first of anything, a first win and obviously a first major. So it was a very, very special week.

Q. You've had a chance to win three of your last four starts. I know that it didn't go how you wanted toward the back end of Sunday, but is it starting to feel more -- I know you've won so many times, but recently is it starting to feel more comfortable being in that position?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Definitely. I feel -- especially Hilton Head, and Tampa too, I'm just more patient, I'd say. I don't feel like I'm forcing the issue as much. Just trying to trust my game and myself quite a bit more.

I feel like some of the events maybe earlier this year or last year where I had a chance to win, I just felt like maybe I pressed a little too much.

We all want to win, and I'm no different; I just think sometimes you're in a better head space than others to try to capitalize or give yourself a chance. I feel like that's kind of how it's been the last couple of events.

Q. Is there something to not winning the Sunday before and having all those requirements that come after? Like you were in contention, your game was there, but you got to come here on your own

schedule?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'd say so, but I'd sure as hell take the alternative. I'd much rather have won and have to deal with being tired, if you will. I will always take that.

Yeah, I do think there's -- you could argue that for sure, but like I said, I would have much rather have been in Sepp's shoes and had a forced day off with that rain yesterday.

Q. Looking back to 2017, that was a special event for you with your dad out there. What do you remember from that just coming down the stretch on 18? Then does that carry over to this year, having won the last time it was here?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I hope so. It was eight years ago. It was a completely different golf course. It was Bermuda in August versus overseed in May. As much as I'd like to say yes, I think that's a bit of a stretch.

But the fact that I know the golf course and have had, I feel like, some success on it is definitely helpful.

In terms of 2017 and remembering Sunday, yeah, it was a lot of great memories. I'll never forget walking up 18 after I'd hit my second shot in the right rough. I think Kis had just bogeyed 17 to have a three-shot lead. I felt pretty comfortable I could get it in the house at that point.

Yeah, just walking up that 18th to people chanting my name and looking at the leaderboard and kind of realizing that I was about to win this, it was a really, really cool feeling.

Q. JT, you've been so good with your scoring wedges for so long. I'm just wondering what your process is for dialing in a 50-yard shot versus a 60-yard shot. How are you doing it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I do it on feel. I'm not a clock system guy. I've never necessarily been that. It's really just a lot of practice and muscle memory.

Obviously I've been doing it my whole life, let alone the last



five, ten years and a lot of work with TrackMan. My thought with feel has been to just feel like I'm almost taking it back as short as I can to hit it that distance, so I feel like I have that same type of acceleration through all of my shots.

Really that just comes with a lot of time and practice and repetition to just kind of trust that I know, if I'm hitting it 80 yards, I couldn't tell you where it is, but I just try and do it and feel that. That's really it.

Q. How much time are you like devoting to practicing that specific area, like this week for instance?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Quite a bit. I'd say -- this week's a little different, I would say, than like last week. The majority of my warmup most weeks is wedges. When I'm home, definitely more wedges if I'm not working on technical stuff.

This week's going to be a lot more mid-irons on the course and long irons. I won't necessarily grind a lot on wedges in my warmup and trying to hit numbers, like last week where on a day like Thursday, we're hitting a wedge into arguably every hole.

But it is, it's just something that's important because of the stress it takes off your game if it's in a good place. If I don't hit a good drive or if I need to lay up on a par-5, something where I don't feel like I need to force the issue on my second shot because I know if I get it to a decent number, I can get it up-and-down and move on.

Q. The easy wisdom is that, if you've won at a place before, you're going to be more automatically comfortable at it, whether it's you here or Rory here. For you specifically, do you feel more comfortable at a location where you've had a victory before? What does that do for your mental state coming in?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Definitely. I've been fortunate enough to have success at courses multiple times in my career. I won a couple times at Kapalua, CIMB, CJ Cup, just at places where I feel like there's something about it. I think if you're able to get yourself in contention again, obviously it's going to differ of who is there, but I will always be able to say, if I'm coming down the stretch and trying to win the tournament, I can tell myself I've literally done this before here.

I know it's something that it's kind of bizarre to -- just saying something like that, or something like that in your mind can be very helpful, but it is. I've hit the shots. I've made the putts. I've handled all of that mentally on this exact golf course in this exact tournament. So I think it's something that can be helpful and able to fall back on if I need type

thing.

Q. Just curious, for the success you had, as successful as you were and to go through that stretch those couple years where you're searching and whatnot and you're not getting the results out of it, how difficult was that run for you, and how gratifying is it that you have these feels back again where you're in contention and you feel like you can do it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Obviously it was frustrating. I wouldn't say -- it probably wasn't quite as long as maybe it appeared. I felt like there at the end of -- was it '23? My year when I didn't play very well, I felt like at the end of that year, I started to play some decent golf and I was working on the right track. It wasn't like it was something that was a couple-year process.

I think it's good for you in the long term. It doesn't seem like it when it's happening, and I obviously would have much rather not had a poor year than have one, but I learned a lot from it. I feel like it's something that you unfortunately have to go through some stuff like that and maybe make some wrong decisions or chase some things that you don't need to figure out down the road that you don't need to do that anymore or again.

Yeah, there is something satisfying of, yeah, kind of -- I guess figuring it out, if you will, but just a part of this game.

Q. As a quick follow, do you feel better now than you were with your game and everything around you than you did even when you were winning earlier?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's tough to say. I think the thing you have when you're young is -- not that I don't have any fear now, but you just -- I mean, I was very fortunate to have success at a young age. But when you're 23, 24 years old, it's just like you don't have anything else to think about or to have to worry about. You don't have any scar tissue. You don't have any experience.

It's just like, hey, you know, the PGA that I played here in '17, it was like my third PGA I ever played in. The only real time I had a chance to win, I was in the final group at Erin Hills earlier that year. Just earlier in your career, it's different -- it's a similar mindset in that obviously we want to win and have a lot of fire and we work hard, but it's a different kind of thing.

Yeah, I feel great about my game. I would like to think and hope I'm a more mature person and golfer. But I don't think it's fair to play the comparison game. I hope but firmly believe that some of my best is still ahead of me, and I know that I have that in there. I just have to kind of go



find it and prove it.

Q. I know you're a big iPhone Notes app guy regarding your annual goals specifically. With a course you've been to several times and have a lot of history at and success, do you actually have a physical note in your phone for Quail Hollow or just going off great memories here?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For this event? No, I don't do anything for specific events, just kind of a year as a whole type thing.

Q. And what's your early impressions of what you've seen of the course and how it's changed over the years so far?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I haven't been out yet, so I'm not sure. Knowing this place -- I mean, the Wells Fargo in the past has always been the week prior to this, so it will be very, very similar. I'm sure the rough will just be longer, and the greens will be a little firmer and faster.

That's the one thing about this place. I feel like you kind of always know relatively what you're going to get. It's just figuring out how the golf course is playing and then going from there type thing.

By the looks of it, it's pristine as always, and it will be a great test.

Q. Justin, Rory has played extremely well here over the years. I'm not sure how many times you've had a chance to play with him here. What is it about this course, this setup that you feel he plays well here?

JUSTIN THOMAS: First and foremost, he's really, really good at golf, so that definitely helps. I would argue he's the best driver of the ball I've ever seen, and that is extremely important here.

But I think his shot shape, I think this golf course fits a high draw really, really well. There's a lot of tee shots, whether it's holding fairways or fitting doglegs, taking bunkers out of play, whatever it is. He just has -- when he's on, he has such control of that driver, it seems like he can hit it in a window and an area that some guys are trying to hit short irons.

That's a tremendous advantage or threat at any golf course, but I feel like a place like this, where it doesn't necessarily require a lot of thought or strategy off the tee, it's generally pulling out driver and just I need to hit this as far and straight as possible, and he's really, really good at that.

That's something, like I said, that is an advantage at any golf course, but I think just the shot shape and that is a good combination.

Q. On Sunday night we get your very, very immediate thoughts on how the tournament finished, but is there any element to the last two days of going back and watching like the game tape to have some different takeaway arise from kind of how it went down?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Of this past week?

Q. Yeah.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'd say so. I mean, I like to -- I watch highlights of myself, of that round basically after every single day. I want to -- if I can just pick up on one little thing and learn one little thing, or maybe there's, man, I really hit that drive well on No. 7. I'd love to see if I could go back and pick up anything on that. Or maybe I hit this shot bad on this one.

You're not always going to see the camera angles you want or maybe it's not going to get everything you want, but it is helpful for me. More of like my -- I feel like I can kind of -- if I see, if I'm watching golf, a replay that I'm in, I can kind of see my body language and kind of see how I look, and that's generally a pretty telltale sign for me.

That's something that I'll watch sometimes. I'm not necessarily going to fret over it or try to dive into it as much as humanly possible, but it is something, if I could choose, I would like to see, yeah.

Q. Did you learn anything from Sunday from what you watched?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I didn't necessarily need to see anything. I was very, very comfortable and felt like I did a great job all day. 16 was the only thing I was a little upset with myself. After not birdieing 15 and I felt like they were both going to birdie 15, I felt like I pushed that a little. Mentally I was like, I need to make birdie here on 16.

Unfortunately, those last three holes were all very difficult. I couldn't make 4, that was the thing. Yeah, a birdie would have been helpful, but I absolutely couldn't make 4. I don't know if you could have walked up there and put it really in a worse place than I hit it.

That was the only thing I was upset with myself is that I was so patient and kind of stuck to my game plan and picked my spots all day, then I made just a little bit of an emotional decision of trying to take on a tough pin from 220



yards because I felt like I needed to as opposed to just kind of letting it play out type of thing.

Q. Looking at the major parts of the game -- driving, approach, putting, around the green -- if you were forced to trade one of those parts of the game with anyone who's playing, what part would it be, and who would you trade it with?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'd probably -- I'd go with either Rory or Scottie and their driver.

Q. Driving?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah.

Q. Just curious, how much are you fueled by competitive jealousy? Whether it's Scottie last year, Rory ticking off the slam, like a desire to want to remind folks that you're one of the best of your generation too?

JUSTIN THOMAS: A lot. I just remember that a lot from my first couple years on Tour and Jordan having a lot of success and playing well. It is, over the course of your career, you're obviously -- it's not like, you know, when you're in college and someone turns pro early and they're winning Tour events and you're like, I've beaten him before, that kind of thing. We all obviously beat each other quite often.

But I have a lot of faith and a lot of ability -- or trust in my ability and feel like I can -- I have confidence in I feel like what I can do.

I told Jill, after watching the Masters, it was like, of course -- obviously I knew I always wanted to win the Grand Slam, wanted to win all the majors. But for some reason watching somebody do it firsthand, it reminded me almost of, damn, I forgot, I really do want to do that. It's weird. It's something I think all of us -- some certain people maybe hit us different ways in terms of jealousy or drive or whatever you want to call it.

Yeah, any time someone wins that isn't me, if it's a friend, I'm obviously happy for them, but there's always going to be a part of me that's jealous and wishes it was me. I think you'd be crazy to say otherwise.

Q. Justin, when you think of places like Oakmont next month or Winged Foot, kind of those classic U.S. Open courses, what do you think of for the PGA Championship? Is there a typical -- is there one course that would be described as a typical PGA Championship course, quintessential one, or is there

not?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's a good question. I don't think that there is, and I think that's what's kind of cool and unique about this event. I think that all the tournaments have an identity, and I think for at least the U.S. Open has seemed to -- I shouldn't say that before Oakmont -- has seemed to change a little bit, like don't-want-anybody-under-par type thing. I think Oakmont will take care of that in itself.

I think Kerry Haigh does an unbelievable job of setting up golf courses in the sense that he doesn't try to do anything more than what he has. He's going to obviously give us a good test. He understands that we're going to have years like Bellerive that are very soft, and it's going to be a birdie fest. Then we're going to go to places like Bethpage where it's difficult, or we're going to go to places like Oak Hill or here.

It's just he's treating each of them individually, and the goal isn't to try to set up a golf course to produce something in particular. It's just, look, I want to set up a fair golf course and test to show who the best golfer is this week. I think it's something that's very underrated, but I really do think he does an unbelievable job, and it's kind of unique and cool that the PGA seems to do that.

People can say what they want about Valhalla - obviously I'm biased being from Louisville - but they've produced some pretty damn good championships over the years, and they did the same last year. It's just all about getting a deserving, fitting winner. I feel like this tournament seems to do that for the most part.

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