

PGA Championship

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Oak Hill Country Club

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the 105th PGA Championship. Defending and two-time PGA champion Justin Thomas is with us, and he is playing in his eighth PGA Championship this week. Welcome to Oak Hill, Justin. Have you had a chance to experience the golf course yet?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes, I just played 18 holes. I came out yesterday, just with wedges and putter and walked all 18 holes and just hit chips and putts around the greens.

I actually played the golf course today in its entirety, and it's everything that I'd heard about. It's a tough test.

Q. I want to ask you, what music do you listen to to get you inspired and in the mood to play a major?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm a big hip-hop guy. I like to listen to a lot of rap. I love music, and I think what's unique about it is you can listen to different genres to get you in different moods. Stuff that I'm going to listen to to maybe get in a zone or working out isn't necessarily the same thing I'm going to listen to drinking a beer on a boat out on a lake or something. It's very unique in that sense. So it would definitely be some kind of hip hop, rap to almost make me feel like I have blinders on and no one else is there.

Q. I know you said recently that you feel you haven't been -- you've been playing your worst rounds possible I think was one of your quotes, you're not getting the best out of it. Where do you think the problems have arisen?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, I felt like I showed a lot of really good signs in Charlotte. I think Saturday was a great example. It just was a round where I didn't really have very much. I felt like I left a couple shots out there putting-wise and just wasn't sharp.

I was hitting a lot of very poor wedges and irons. I birdied two of the last four holes and salvaged an under par round on a tough golf course. Bones and I said on 18 green, this is the stuff that we haven't been doing this year. I felt like



that 70 that I shot that day or the rounds that I've been shooting 73 and 74, which then gave me an opportunity to play myself into contention with nine holes left, whereas I wouldn't have been that way beforehand.

So I feel like it was way more so beforehand, it just wasn't scoring properly. It wasn't making that putt to keep or get some momentum or wasn't hitting wedges in there close, making those two, three, four birdies in a row. Like I said, I felt like in Charlotte I really, like, turned a little bit of a corner of seeing more of scoring better.

Q. As you look at last year's victory, it's pretty well-documented you weren't real happy Saturday night. What was the biggest key in getting things turned around for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think the biggest thing for me was honestly just getting it out of my system Saturday before I left the golf course, and I think that was something Bones did a great job with. You all know it was cold that Saturday. Like, it was late in the day. It was not -- I wasn't necessarily going to go have an unbelievable practice session just with the conditions and weather and everything.

It was more just like I couldn't leave the property or the golf course in that frame of mind. It's not healthy.

Whether it was I'm trying to win the golf tournament or shoot a couple under and finish third or fourth, whatever it is, it's just I needed to be leaving on a lot more positive note and almost just go down there and just vent and just kind of get it out of me.

That's kind of when Bones told me, we're doing a lot of great things, playing some really good golf, and you're still a great player. Let's not let one round change that. Yeah, it worked out well.

Q. Regarding the golf course, there's a lot of really, really tight turf around some of the greens. Do you know yet what you'll be doing putting, chipping? Is that something that might even lead to an adjustment in the bag?



JUSTIN THOMAS: I won't change anything that I would normally use. I generally travel with two different 60-degrees, one T-grind, one K-grind. It just is basically based on the turf. I feel like a T is just going to -- it's just better to chip off of, which is what I use 85 percent of the time anyway.

A lot of it is very situational around the greens. It's kind of unique because a lot of the run-offs behind the greens and side of the greens, they don't really run off to the fairway. They run off to the rough, and they run off to the first cut unless you're flying it on the flat areas, which you hopefully wouldn't be doing in those situations.

So it's one of those weeks where I think you'll be out watching people hitting chips and shots around the greens, and they're going to be maybe hitting shots from fairways around the greens when the balls aren't really going to stay there. I think it's just one of those things you adjust. All of us are gamers enough to where we assess the lie and then from there, the pin, the wind, and go from there.

But you definitely have an option of a wide variety of shots around the greens.

Q. You said it was everything you had heard. What had you heard about Oak Hill? And since it's been 10 years since the tournament has been here with so many younger guys on the Tour, how does that impact an event of a course that a lot of you had never played before?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's very similar to Southern Hills. Last year everyone is like, oh, I haven't played since the redo. And I'm, like, I've never played period. So it's kind of nice for them in that sense.

I'm sure some of the holes are similar for the guys that have played it, but people that are trying to learn the redesign, I'm trying to learn the golf course, so I think a lot of people are in very similar circumstance.

Just what I'd heard about the course is that it's a tough golf course. It's northeast; it's got the -- I love the way the courses look up here, just the definition of the fairway to the rough and the cutting of the bunkers, and I love the square -- the kind of sharp edges on the greens.

This place reminds me a little bit of a Winged Foot just in terms of the green -- not the severity of the greens. They're not like Winged Foot; nothing is. But just the designs of them and some of the pin locations and how the fairways kind of canter against the slopes or whatever you want to call it.

Yeah, it's a really good golf course.

Q. And the rough itself, it looks like it's going to thicken up even more.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's tough. The thickest blades of grass, it's almost like -- what's it like, the St. Augustine or something? It's very, very thick.

I felt like I had a lot of lies chipping and putting that I felt like -- sorry, chipping and hitting irons that I had a pretty good idea how it was going to come out, and I didn't. So I think that's going to be something that a lot of people will have to guess correctly or adjust to as the week goes on.

Q. Trees seem to engender strong opinions in people. How do you feel about old-school tree-lined golf courses, and what impact do you think they'll have this week and especially recoveries with the thick rough?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I like it. I love old-school golf courses. I think they can create a lot of definition to holes. It just seems like nowadays you can't really please anybody. It's like, oh, if it's tree-lined, they can't get away from the old school. But then take the trees away, it's a bomber's paradise, hit it wherever you want. It's hard to please everybody in that aspect.

But it is very tough. Max today on -- I played with Max, that par-5 on the front. I think No. 4. He just barely pulled a drive. It wasn't a bad drive by any means. Just through the fairway. On a par-5 he would just be hitting the 5- or 6-iron down there, but he had the trees on the left in his way, so then he has to navigate those. That's just a part of it. There's going to be holes you need to play on one side or the other and just kind of be smart when you get in trouble and not turn bogeys or pars into doubles and triples.

Q. I talked to a couple of pros who wondered how a course this far northeast would play this early in the year. Grasses aren't quite mature as much as it might be in other places. Is that something that you notice, and is there a way you can play it and react to it or take advantage of that at all?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know about necessarily taking advantage of it. It's just a thing that we're all trying to get used to. It's like any week; we're going to -- very rarely do you play back-to-back courses that are almost identical in terms of grasses and condition and whatnot.

We're all getting here, whether it be Sunday, today, tomorrow, and trying to get our feels of the greens, of the

chipping, whatever.

Q. Your reaction in terms of playing a course like that that might be unusual in terms of what you would normally see throughout a full season?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it's just no different. It's hard to explain. We play different -- like I said, we change week-to-week.

You can definitely tell it's probably three or four weeks away from being, like, really, really good. The course is great, don't get me wrong, but it's Rochester, New York, in May. I think it snowed like three weeks ago.

It's just the risk that comes with it, and you'll have some iffy areas around the greens, and some of the greens are maybe different than others, if they're shaded or whatnot.

The course is really good, that's for sure.

Q. By nature, you're a very fiery guy, inside and outside. I'm curious how you manage that as your frustration level was building when the results weren't coming, and how much of a challenge has that been in the last number of months when you haven't seen the results?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's very frustrating, especially it's a lot easier -- like anything in golf, it's easier said than done in terms of thinking big picture, thinking process, thinking I'm going to be better off for this and whatnot.

At the end of the day, after a couple of months or six months, whatever it is, where you're not performing as well as you feel like you should and not having the finishes you feel like you should or not winning tournaments like you feel like you should, it's pretty easy to get pissed off and understand what's going wrong.

Like anything, I've preached this to myself, I'm sure I've said it to y'all or I've said it to younger guys that ask, how you learn is failure and negatives, and I feel like I've had a great opportunity for a lot of learning the past, whatever, six months, couple months, this year.

I feel like I said it in Charlotte a little bit, I'm starting to see a little bit of a light at the end of the tunnel. Just nobody I feel like is in a better place than Max Homa out here. There's not very many top players -- there's no other top player in the world that's gone through what he's gone through in terms of having a Tour card, losing your Tour card, having to earn it back and then becoming one of the top players in the world.

I've talked to him about it before because he's, like, nobody out here really knows how bad it can be. It's like, I feel like everything is so bad and I'm ranked whatever in the world.

He's like, dude, I had to birdie my last five holes at Pumpkin Ridge to get in the Korn Ferry Playoffs. It's all relative, and it's all about making the most of whatever situation you're in.

Q. I know you've been with him for a while now, but how much of a help has Bones been with that for you because he's got such an even-keel manner about him?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, he's very positive. He's very encouraging. He's someone that I -- especially now, he's gotten to know me well enough, he can tell when I'm upset or he can tell when I'm down on myself, to kind of almost kind of put your arm on your back kind of thing and say, everything is okay, you're playing better than this or whatnot.

It's hard to have. I'm very, very lucky to have him by my side because he definitely makes things a lot easier and better for me.

Q. I know you talked in Charlotte about making the transition to AimPoint. Are you still using it, and does it become more familiar as you go down the road?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I am still using it, and I've come to find, just like anything in your golf game, it feels great some days and it feels bad others.

I played Keegan's back home in Jupiter and we played, and he just said he had a week in Charlotte where he couldn't feel it very well, and I'm sure it's just like your golf swing. You're going to have days where you can feel the slope like this and it's just bang, go, you're making everything, and you're going to have weeks where it's not great.

But just, again, like anything in your golf game, you've got to practice it. I felt like I had a good week practicing it, tried to get a little bit more accustomed to it, a little bit more fluid, and just making it easier routine-wise, I guess.

Q. Going back to your previous comments about results and maybe not what you'd want them to be, how do you define success and failure in this game, especially since it's not just one team versus the other, you're one of 56, and are those assignments you have to recalibrate throughout the year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I guess in literal terms, it's did

you win the tournament or not? It's unfortunate how it happens that way. In reality it's not how you should or how all of us base success and failure, but at the end of the day, we're all trying to win the golf tournament. And whether it's we back-doored a third place or we were tied with one hole left and made a bogey and finished third, we might be pleased somewhere in here with a third, but there's somewhere down there that's upset we didn't win.

I just think it's just kind of understanding where you're at at that time or in the golf tournament or in your game. There's going to be weeks where a seventh-place finish is really good for what I have that week, but then there's going to be some weeks where maybe I have a one-shot lead on No. 5 on Sunday and I finished seventh. Those sevenths are very different.

It's just understanding, I think, the situation and circumstances of that given day or week and basing it off that, if you will.

Q. Where does your grit to hang in there last year Sunday come from? Where does the guts to go for the green in the playoff on a par-4, where does that come from, and how did you develop that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think the -- a lot of it was probably how I was raised in terms of the grit and just hard work. Just the inner belief just to never quit, never give up.

There were many times in junior golf where like a lot of 8-, 10-year-olds you start sulking and pouting and -- you can even see players out here where you can tell when they've almost given up kind of thing. That was just something that my parents instilled in me, like you're not one of those kids. You're not going to give up. You're not going to quit. Make the best out of whatever you have. There's going to be days, like I was saying, where 70 might be the best that I have that day, but it's sure better than 71, or 75 might be the best I have that day, but it's better than 76. That's just kind of how I've always been taught.

In terms of the -- like 17, or whatever last year, I would just say that comes with confidence and trust in myself, honestly. I feel like getting in those situations is fun because that's why I've practiced, to where when I get out there, I don't think about anything but just executing that shot in that specific time, and I have enough belief and faith and trust in myself that I'm going to be able to pull it off kind of thing.

Q. Can you give an example of how you enjoyed having custody of the Wanamaker Trophy over the past year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, it was pretty fun. I went straight to Colonial the next week and shared a house with Kis, and it just sat on the dining room table the entire week. Well, I shouldn't say the entire week because I missed the cut, so for five days.

But then I wanted to go see my buddies at home in Louisville, so I took it home with me to Louisville, and one of my buddies had a little house party, and we filled it up with some beer and drank it. It's little stuff like that that's fun, but unfortunately, we've been going through a move and it hasn't been out and displayed. So hopefully we'll have one to bring home and display.

Q. There's not another trophy you have to bring back, is there, of the ones you've won?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I've got both.

Q. Well, they're replicas, though, right?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Probably, yeah.

Q. You don't know this?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't care, honestly. I've got them both. That's all I know.

Q. I wanted to follow up on the way you measure success and how you go about that. Do you feel like you're in a slump?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Right now? No. A couple weeks ago or a month ago, probably, yeah.

Q. Have you shown up at a tournament in the last year wondering whether you could win or thinking you couldn't?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah.

Q. What's that like?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It sucks. It's terrible. I mean, how I described it for a couple months is I've never felt so far and so close at the same time. That's a very hard thing to explain, and it's also a very hard way to try to compete and win a golf tournament.

That's how you get out of it, just playing your way out of it and hitting the shots when you want to and making those putts when you need to, and then your confidence builds back up, and next thing you know, you don't even remember what you were thinking in those times.

Q. Obviously last year was a heartbreak for Mito, the way that all played out at the end. Since immediately after or maybe a few weeks later, did you have a conversation at all with him about, man, tough break, sorry, that type of thing, or no?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I didn't. I don't really know him too well.

Q. Can what happened at the PGA Championship last year translate to this year? And, second, for the casual golf fan who might just watch majors, what is the best way for a layman to understand the AimPoint?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Sorry, the first question you said, how can I translate --

Q. Can last year translate to this year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not really. I mean, it's so long ago in terms of your golf game that -- the feelings can translate and the memories can translate, but a lot of things and swings and putts and chips have happened since then. That part doesn't really -- that part is hard to relate.

In terms of explaining AimPoint, I just would -- it's tough. I just would say that it's trying to get like -- damn, this is hard. It's weird because it's a complex system that makes reading greens very simple. I don't know if that makes sense at all, but it's like when you're learning it, it sounds like, how am I going to be able to do this, I don't understand it. But then once you get it, anybody who does AimPoint can tell you, when you have a planar putt, it doesn't matter if it's 5 feet or 15 or 40. If it's planar and you know the slope, you're thinking, I'm making this kind of thing, because you have the read exactly.

Everybody kind of perfects their own version of it, but it's just a way to try to simplify reading greens for me is how I've done it.

I feel like I didn't answer your question at all. I'm sorry about that.

Q. In hindsight, being that you're 10 years in the game, I consider you a vet now. Looking back, what advice would JT 2023 give JT 2013?

JUSTIN THOMAS: That everything is not as big of a deal as you think it is. I think everything always seems like the end of the world, or your playing bad that round was so important; you had to play well there. I feel like if I would have learned things a little bit sooner in terms of my bad rounds, my bad weeks, I feel like I would have been better off earlier. But it's just hard when you're 20, 21, 22 years

old to not think that playing bad on a Sunday isn't the end of the world when it's not the end of the world.

That's definitely what I would say.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time today, Justin.

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