

PGA Championship

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Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Valhalla Golf Club

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Welcome to the 106th PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Club, where two-time PGA champion Justin Thomas is joining us. Justin, welcome to your ninth PGA Championship. How special is it to be competing in your hometown this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's very special. I've been -- there's a lot of -- I would say this tournament at this golf course is a lot of reason I feel like for my love for professional golf and wanting to win majors and golf tournaments and watching Tiger here in 2000 in person. No, it's just crazy how fast it's gotten to this week from when it was announced to me being on TOUR and being fortunate enough to win this tournament and now actually being here. So I'm happy it's here.

THE MODERATOR: That's great. Thank you. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Curious what the challenge is for you not to put too much pressure on yourself because you want this so badly here in your backyard.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well the good news is I do have a pretty easy time putting a lot of pressure on myself already, so that shouldn't be too much of an adjustment. (Smiling.) But I don't know.

Kind of what I told everybody is I'm not really sure exactly how I'm going to feel. Like I've never experienced it. I've never played a professional tournament, let alone a PGA, in my hometown, so I'm sure it will be some new feelings, some good feelings.

Just came out yesterday and enjoyed it. I think just going to take it in and try to use it to my advantage. Use the energy, the support to try to kind of get me going and push me along as the week goes.

Q. Last week when you got the hometown hero banner, you wondered what your emotions would be like this week. Now that you're on the grounds and you're surrounded by the people and probably a lot of

people that you know, what has that been like or will that really hit you maybe even on Thursday?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's been great. It's been nothing but great things so far. I know it's only Tuesday morning, but no, the feelings and everything I've had have been all positive. I'm glad I came and played last week, Sunday, Monday, just not only for my own preparation standpoint but just with how the weather potentially looks today and tomorrow.

Yeah, I just kind of -- like I said, I think some of the -- you can't necessarily compare anything I potentially would feel on a Monday or Tuesday during a tournament round of any week, let alone a major championship here. Just going to try to make the most of it.

Q. Do you have any unique insights or observations knowing this course so well, having played it so many times, and does that create any advantages compared to maybe some of your competition?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think if we were playing Harmony Landing I would have a little bit more of an advantage than Valhalla. I haven't played here that many times. I've probably played 10, maybe 15. I think when I played last Sunday I was saying to my dad, I don't think I've been out here in eight or ten years; it had been awhile.

It just was -- it was a really, really big deal to play here when I was a kid. Not to mention I had Harmony that was all of four minutes from my house. So the way I looked at it, I was fortunate to have a couple birthdays where my parents surprised me, and I came out here, and I think maybe my first couple years as a pro when I lived at home they were gracious enough to let me come out a couple times a year, whether it was to play or practice.

The course hasn't changed too much from what I remember. It's all very right in front of you. You just hit a driver really far and really straight and hit your irons well. That seems to be the theme here.

Q. What do you remember about 2000, and was that kind of the first time you spent so much time at a golf



course during a major event?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I obviously don't remember a lot, being seven years old. But I remember just being probably like inspired, being very in awe. I just hadn't been to anything that big. I mean, the energy that week was crazy.

As you know, the Kentucky Louisville sports fans are, they're sports fans and we don't get golf tournaments really ever, let alone major championships, and when it comes here I think you see that with some other Midwest venues, that they love it. Just the energy was crazy that week and just hearing the roars in person. You're on one side of the course, you hear it on another side of the course, or maybe I'm inside and I could hear it where wherever it was going on.

As a seven-year-old that's pretty cool to hear in person. You think you can do anything when you're that age, but watching Tiger and Bob May duel it out and how it all ended and me being a Tiger fan that I was, it was about as perfect of a week as I could have imagined. I just remember that I had a -- not that you know what you want to do when you're seven years old, but I had a pretty good idea that I wanted to play golf.

Q. With your family history with the PGA with your dad, your grandfather, take us through what this particular tournament means to you. I mean, it seems like it hit you when you won your first one and you called your grandfather and everything.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It means a lot. I've been very, very fortunate to have some great experiences at PGA Championships, just with my dad serving on the board of the PGA and all the directors, everybody, they were just always very nice and gracious to me. They didn't necessarily need to be.

This is a busy week for the board members and everybody involved in the PGA. For them to always take time out of their day just to say hi to me and whatever it was, so I mean, when I was -- I just remember in 2017 being on that 18th green and holding the trophy and shaking so many of the directors' hands and like -- I mean I have known them for so long, it was really cool for me.

Obviously it was way cooler seeing my dad when I finished and talking to my grandpa, but it just was like, you know, there's a part of me like I've known a lot of these people since I was, you know, for the last 15 years of my life. It's kind of a full-circle moment. It's like I kind of watched them do what they did forever and now it's like now I'm on the other side and I'm the one that's inside the ropes on the 18th green with them as opposed to me watching as a little

kid them being on the green giving whoever the champion was the trophy. So, I sure like the second version better than the first (laughing).

Q. Appreciate you have quite a lot going on this week, so please forgive a quick Leeds United question, if I may. Will you be following their recent form and going into this big playoff semi-final on Thursday?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm very excited about my morning tee time on Thursday. That has worked out nicely for that 3 o'clock game.

Q. I don't know if you know Leeds have got a terrible record in the playoffs; they have never been promoted. You've got a good playoff record, including this event. What advice can you give generally for these big playoff matches?

JUSTIN THOMAS: My advice is very different than probably anything that would be useful or helpful to them, but I know I've really, really enjoyed learning a lot more about the sport. I mean, Billy Foster, I think we've -- between him, Jordan and I, we've definitely become a lot closer over the last year, and he's given us a lot of insight and knowledge and in terms of Leeds and whatnot and sending us videos from games.

But, yeah, I mean, right now I like the fact that they're playing at Elland Road. I know that they're a tough team to beat there, so I'm excited to watch.

Q. I wanted to ask you over the years there have been a lot of drama and theatrics at this championship at this venue, and I wonder why you think that is. What is it about this course that brings that out?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm not sure to be honest. I think that's a good question. I just think that something about that there's not a lot of different ways to play the golf course. For the most part you know if it's a par-4 or -5 you're just grabbing a driver when you get to the tee and you're just hoping you hit the fairway, and then you're probably going to hit somewhere between a 5- and an 8-iron into the green.

I think when you give all of us very similar places to play from, you have the opportunity for more a bunched leaderboards or you don't get maybe as much of a situation like last week. Like obviously you can; someone can run away from it. But history has kind of proven at this tournament that they have been pretty bunched leaderboards and it's been very close coming down the stretch.

I think that's because you don't stand on a tee and you're like, well, a lot of people are maybe hitting 4-iron or 5-wood, but you have five or ten guys that can hit driver past everything and then next thing you know you have three or four of those holes over the course of an entire round. Multiply that by four days, and then it's like you have a chance for that separation. So I think the fact that this course is played very similarly by everybody could have something to do with it. That's my guess.

Q. We talked to your mom yesterday, she said being here is kind of a full-circle moment, driving you around to all of these tournaments and things like that. As someone who has witnessed so many great tournaments here at this course - you know the history - what's it like being a Louisville kid and experiencing all that and being now a chance to be a part of this history?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's great. Yeah, I take a lot of pride in being from Louisville and I've enjoyed the couple opportunities I've had to watch tournaments out here and just, yeah, the people seeing this week, whether it's volunteers on this tee boxes or working the clubhouse or in the gallery, whatever it may be. It's enjoyable. Like I said, I'm very happy to be the one that's on this side of the ropes or taking part in the championship versus the one that's watching from the other side of the ropes.

Q. Some better performances the last couple times out. How would you evaluate your game now compared to maybe late last year or early this year when you were sort of building momentum?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I feel like I'm playing well. I feel like I haven't necessarily gotten as much out of my golf as I feel like I've been playing, which can be frustrating at times. But it also just reminds me that I am close and I just need to kind of stay patient.

I finally feel like at least this year I know I've been playing well enough to win. It's just a matter of doing it. There's plenty of -- I don't know how to put a number on it, but I'm sure there's kind of anywhere from 10 to 20 people each week that probably play well enough to win, it's just there's only one that takes advantage the most and does all the right things, and I just haven't been that person this year, and hopefully it happens sooner rather than later.

But I just have to kind of keep trusting what I'm doing and understand I'm working on all the right things and know that it will happen. I just can't force the issue or press because that usually doesn't end well.

Q. When you look at the guys in this championship

and the class and the talent, obviously Scottie's won the last couple times he's teed it up, Rory's won the last couple times he's teed it up. Does it almost feel like you have to play perfect in order to hoist that thing at the end of the week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I don't. I know that I've always had to play well to win. I think there's been different stages in my career where I felt like I can maybe get it around with not quite as great, but you always need to play somewhat well to win, right, it's not, especially at a major championship. With the high quality golf a lot of top players are playing and a lot of players in general honestly, it's just, golf is very deep right now. I think that you have a lot of people that can win any week they tee it up, and like I said earlier, there is only one, and it's just being that one that's fortunate enough to go about everything the correct way throughout the week and getting a couple breaks here and there and have a couple hot stretches, and then next thing you know you're in contention on the back nine and then at that point you just got to go win it. Yeah, it's just one of those things that you got to play well, no matter who is in the tournament or what's going on.

Q. You joke about putting too much pressure on yourself sometimes and we have seen you at Augusta or other times show emotion when things don't go right. How much is that pressure something you have to work on with yourself, something you have to make strategies for for kind of how not to do that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's tough. It's a lot harder than improving your wedge game. It's not like I can just go out and set a TrackMan down and work on hitting my numbers. It's just one of those things, like you -- I think at least I've learned that you can't just want it to get better and it magically gets better. I think I've -- kind of realizing certain times, like it's like, okay, acknowledging that I'm feeling certain things or thinking a certain way and then doing something about it or trying to shift how I'm thinking about it or what I'm doing.

I mean, it's tough. It's one of those things you can't just flip the switch, and I think all the greats at it, everybody, you know, that's, you could say arguably all the GOATs of their sport, that's what they do better, did better than anybody else is they stayed in the moment and processed better than anybody and they also can't explain how they do it because it's just all they know.

So everybody goes in stretches, and when it's easier than other times, then I look at Scottie and how he plays and I think he's -- he does that better than anybody in the world, and not only is his golf unbelievable, but that I think has a lot to do with how well he plays because he just stays in his

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

own world and stays in his process and no matter what's going on. He trusts in his ability, that kind of thing. So that's what I'm continuing to work toward for myself.

Q. You talked about staying in your own zone. With all the noise that continues to be happening, there's this committee, there's that committee, this headline, that headline with regards to negotiations. Is it just noise at this point? Are you kind of removing yourself from the situation or are you trying to stay involved and updated with everything that's going on behind closed doors?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I feel like I haven't really been too involved for awhile. I just am, I'm just trying to play as good a golf as I possibly can and try to win golf tournaments. That stuff's very important, but to me it's not as important as winning major championships and winning tournaments. If I could choose which one, I know which one I would choose, so that's the thing that I think I need to give attention to.

THE MODERATOR: All right thanks for your time, Justin.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thanks, guys.

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