

PGA Championship

Thursday, May 16, 2024

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

Valhalla Golf Club

Justin Thomas

Flash Quotes

THE MODERATOR: Justin Thomas is joining us at the 1616. Round 1 in the books for you. How did it go out there today?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I felt like I played better than I scored. It was fun. It was a lot of fun. Felt a lot of great things out there, a lot of positive encouragement.

I mean, it doesn't help when you're not making many putts in the sense of you feel like you're not playing that well, but when you're playing with one of the easiest 9-unders you've ever seen, it makes you feel like you're shooting a million.

I wasn't really paying attention much to leaderboards and whatnot, but when I looked up and saw where I was at, I felt a little bit better about how I was making my way around the course compared to the field.

Yeah, I easily could have shot four or five shots better today, but I'm proud of how I played the back nine to hang in there.

Q. What was the mix of nerves and excitement for you on the opening tee?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I've enjoyed -- it's been a lot more enjoyable than I thought it would be. It's weird, it's not that I didn't think it would be enjoyable, but I thought I would be way more nervous. I was nervous on the first tee today, but it's just fun. To be honest, I feel like I've never had this many people root for me before. So it's a pretty good feeling, to be perfectly honest.

So it's just really enjoyable. I wish we had more tournaments in Louisville because I like this.

Yeah, balancing the nerves and the excitement and having zero idea where the ball was going because of the sun, it was a strange opening tee shot.

Q. You referenced Xander a little bit in your opening comment, but can you speak to what you saw out of



him today and what that round was like, to have a front seat for?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'd say it's the same stuff that we've all been watching on TV this year or in person.

Xander, he's such a complete player. This year he's hitting it even further. As good as he drove it, now he's doing the same, just 15 yards further and faster. He's smart. I've always thought he has one of the best demeanors out here, which is obviously something that you can't necessarily just change overnight. He just has no quit in him, and he's always hanging in there and staying patient.

He's playing really, really great golf right now. So you feel like he's one of those guys every time he tees it up right now, he's going to be in contention.

Q. I'm sure you've been in rounds like he was in with Rory the other day when Rory had everything going. What does it show, I don't know if "bounceback" is the right word or whatever, but to come back and do this just days after? I'm sure he was extremely disappointed on Sunday.

JUSTIN THOMAS: You know, I'm sure he was, and I can't speak for him. But I would say it was a lot easier Rory bogeying 18, and he won by four or five, something like that, or double, whatever he made. It's hard to swallow, but Xander would have had to still go shoot 5- or 6-under to win.

It sucks not winning, but he didn't lose. He got beat. You can hang your head and really take into next week when you lose a golf tournament. But I think when you're right there and playing well and you just get beat, it is more motivation, I'd say, and just kind of stick with what he's doing.

Q. Does a 2-under like today where you played really well and didn't get much out of it, is that better than a 2-under where you scrap it around and make everything?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. I go back and forth on



... when all is said, we're done.®

that. It was weird, I felt like I hit kind of a mixed bag. I felt like I hit a fair amount of good putts that didn't go in that just needed a little bit more pace, and then I felt like I just hit some poor putts that started off-line right away.

In my opinion, I shouldn't say it's easier, but if I'm in a rhythm with my golf swing or I feel like I'm playing well, it's one of those things over four days I feel like I can potentially get a hot putter at least one day, and even if I just putt well or okay, I feel like I can find my way into contention versus sometimes if you're not hitting it well or you're scrapping it around, sometimes you just can't find it, and it's tough, too.

Q. So it's harder to flip around the golf swing than the putting?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would say. It's easier I feel like for the ball to get in the way -- or the hole to get in the way of the ball sometimes versus if you're not swinging good, it's pretty hard to hit-a-5-iron-from-215-yards-where-you-want kind of thing.

Q. When you're playing with somebody who's playing really well or I guess someone who's playing poorly, how does that affect you, and how do you manage it as you're trying to focus on your round?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I like it a lot more than if everyone is playing poorly. I've been in those kind of groups, and sometimes the group MO is just so bad, you feel like you can't get anything going.

I mean, it just was -- especially, I mean, I didn't hit first until the last hole today. I mean, between Xander making so many birdies, and I didn't really make very many. So it was like I had a pretty good idea if I just followed Xander after the start he got on, it was going to be a good finish for me.

So I think it's better at least in my opinion when someone plays like that because you can almost feed off of them, especially when you get crowds this big and energetic.

Q. Group momentum you mentioned, is that kind of a thing?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think so. I'd be hard-pressed to say anybody would say it's not. I think you see it often, especially on the weekends, or maybe you get two guys in contention who haven't been there, something like that, and you kind of get off to a flat start, and it's hard to turn around.

But when you kind of get things going and the ball is going in the hole, it's sometimes kind of nice, you almost feel like

you're in a little match-play-within-the-round kind of thing.

Q. You said Xander shot one of the easiest 9-unders you've ever seen. Has your game ever felt that easy?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

Q. What does it feel like?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Easy. (Laughter.) Like just where you want it to go, and it's going to go right there, and you feel like you should have shot 57 or 58, and you shot -- what did he shoot, 62? Yeah, it's fun, but it's real easy.

Q. Is it possible to be disappointed after shooting a 62?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Dude, look, golfers are disappointed no matter what they shoot. That is one thing that will never change. We could shoot 56 and we should have shot 55.

Q. You were talking about the changes to the course. How much do you feel like that challenged you today?

JUSTIN THOMAS: The changes in what aspect?

Q. Just lengthening the course, any tweaks to the holes or anything like that, the greens --

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would say the challenges are just what the course is, the length.

I mean, the fact that the greens are soft kind of takes away some of its defense. But Xander's caddie, Kaiser, and I were saying on 9 how tough this place would be if the greens could get firm and really fast. It would just be night and day, a different golf course. But there's nothing we can do about the weather.

It's long enough where you just have to hit a lot of quality mid- to long irons, and that's something that we don't have to do very often.

Q. When you're out there shooting the numbers you're shooting, how easy is it not to get carried away, going too far ahead in your mind? And B, after shooting a round like this, if you were Xander, how hard is it to get that out of your mind and just put it to the side and say, Now I've got three more rounds to go?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Definitely in my opinion, it's hard to not get ahead of yourself. I felt like I kind of did after making those two birdies in a row. I was like -- I had four holes left and was like, this is a chance for me to -- I birdie three of these last four and shoot 4-under when I feel like I didn't

play bad but I didn't play great by any means.

Then lo and behold, you the bogey the next hole. So that kind of humbles you real quick. It definitely is a place you have to stay in the moment because you can make bogeys on holes even if they're easy holes just as quick as birdies.

But you look at some of the longer holes with the greens being soft, if you get the right numbers and you're swinging well, you can still hit it close to the hole.

In regard to Xander, I'd say it is tough, but I know -- it's hard, but I know that he would rather be in his position than mine, and I think it's just one of those things you just have to try to trust your game and have faith that he's clearly playing well. But for the rest of our sakes, I hope he doesn't shoot any more 9-unders.

Q. You mentioned being surprised how much you've enjoyed it here. Were you also surprised by your emotion when the mayor proclaimed it Justin Thomas Day and made you a Kentucky colonel? Why do you think it has been quite so impactful for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I definitely was surprised at the emotion that day. It was the hardest I've cried, happy tears I guess you could say. I could tell as soon as I got there and saw the banner, I could just feel the emotions hit me, and I knew I was screwed. I was like, I've got no chance today. It's just going to be tough.

Just seeing people that were coming to support me, I think I said it earlier this week, Louisville obviously means a lot to me, but I think it actually means more to me than I even thought.

It's a lot of little things, whether it's the high school I went to, St. X, it's kind of a brotherhood, and I'm still really close and best friends with some of my buddies I went to high school with. It's everybody at Harmony where I grew up was so gracious and nice, both with my dad traveling and supportive of me and my dreams of being here one day.

I think it's just one of those things when it all comes together and maybe the past 30 years of my life are able to come together into like this one moment. It was pretty special.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.