

The Memorial Tournament Presented By Nationwide

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Muirfield Village

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas to the interview room here at the Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide thanks for joining us. Making your 8th start here at -- well actually 9th if you include the playoff at the Workday Charity Open last year -- but a couple of top-10 finishes in the Memorial Tournament. You've obviously had a chance to get out and see the course, just your thoughts on being back here and some of the changes that the course has undergone.

JUSTIN THOMAS: The course is great. I was saying to one of my pro-am partners today that I feel it's one of the best redesigns I've seen. I think a lot of times a redesign actually makes the golf course worse, as crazy as it is, and I think Jack did a great job of making it more playable for the amateurs and the members that are here, but also making it more challenging for us.

The greens have -- it's mind blowing to me how good of shape the golf course is in for less than -- I mean, what? Probably 11 months from when they started all this. I mean, I remember Sunday of the Memorial last year them tearing up greens as we were, as the guys in the final group were kind of playing. So the course is tremendous as always and I think Jack did great job of the golf course and a lot of us have tried to spend the last couple days trying to get used to a couple of the changes.

DOUG MILNE: One more question from me. Five top-10 finishes, obviously highlighted by your PLAYERS championship win. Just a couple comments on how you're feeling, state of your game heading into the week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, to be honest, state of my game is not great. I think my play recently has shown that. I've not had a very good calendar year, I would say, really just a good weekend at THE PLAYERS and I played well there a couple events early in the year, but I just haven't really had any results to show. I've been struggling a little bit with my swing and I haven't been near as consistent as I have been in the past, but I feel like I'm not as far off as the results show and then there's some days where I feel really

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far off. But just kind of need a little spark and just kind of get something going, but unfortunately to answer your question, no, everything feels pretty average. (Laughing).

DOUG MILNE: Well we admire the honesty. We'll take some questions.

Q. Can you talk specifically about the changes on the 16th hole and what will what those changes make that hole become now?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I didn't notice much, to be honest. I mean, if anything the right, the far right bunker just became a harder bunker shot. I mean I know that the front of the green isn't really a ridge, it's just kind of a gradual thing, but that wasn't really that big of a difference because it's kind of where we're trying to land it anyway. And then there's a little bit bigger slope kind of going to the back part. But, I mean, it's still a really hard hole. I think it would be a lot better hole from the tee up. I just think it's a hard green to hold, that back section, with a 6-iron or 7-iron and potentially a 5-iron if we get a different wind. So I think it's still a really difficult hole and tee dependent and wind dependent it changes it, but I think the right bunker shot has become more difficult because it all slopes away more. But in terms of the back of the green, I didn't really notice much of a difference.

Q. Could you please tell us why you did what you did for Mike Visacki last week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I was a little irritated that it got out. I didn't really want it to. That wasn't the intention of it. I just, I saw the video of Mike talking to, calling his dad after he Mondayed in Valspar, and in a day and age where it seems like only anything in the media is negative and not good these days, I just felt it was so refreshing and great to see and how genuine his excitement and emotions were. I mean, I don't know Mike. I didn't know him. I met him at Valspar. I just went up and said Congrats on getting in. It's a great story, and play well this week. But I just thought it was awesome because he's been playing the mini tours and been successful on the mini tours for a long time and people now knew who he was because of his story. I don't know, it just, for some reason it hit home to me and it just was like, man, you know, this is a dude who's been grinding for a long time and there's a lot of people, not just him, that are doing that, but I just wanted to help in a little

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

way and what I'm most happy about is the recognition he has got and I heard that someone on the board of -- I don't know if it's true or not, on the board of Charles Schwab heard about what I did and then wanted to sponsor him and take care of him and his expenses and everything throughout the rest of the year or however long it is. And that's what I'm most happy about, the fact that he is able to now take advantage of more opportunities because of just something little that I did. And, again, it wasn't the intention for it to get the publicity it did. I just wanted it to be direct between him and I, but if it helps him get more notoriety and helps him and others, you know, able to pursue this dream of playing on the PGA TOUR, then so be it.

Q. Two questions. You said you really were happy with the changes that Jack made to the course. Could you kind of elaborate on why you think the course is actually better and maybe more challenging and specifically could you talk about 15.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I think it's just, it's a little longer, so that's going to make it more difficult always and then some of the bunkers that you could potentially take out of play if you got the right wind, you can't quite anymore. But I don't know, it just, for such huge differences in like 1 and 10 green, it looks like it's been there forever and it looks natural. It looks normal. That's hard to -- Jack's been doing this for a long time, so he knows how to do it, and someone like me, I wouldn't know how to. But I just think he did a great job and in terms of just kind of making it look like it's fit and it's been there and, I mean, I loved the golf course before. I still love it now. I think it's a great track, a great test, and it's a place where you can go out and shoot 64 or 65 or 66, but it's also a place where you can shoot 74 or 75 just as easily if you're not playing well and I think this golf course still has that aspect to it. It's just routed a little differently.

And then 15, I think it's a -- I mean, I liked the hole before and I still like it. I think it's, it definitely favors a right-to-left ball flight off the tee, so the tee shot isn't as comfortable for me, but you hit a good drive and then you have the opportunity to still try and knock it on the green and make a 3. I think the green is definitely better with having less slope. If you hit it over there left of the green, it's not near as penal, especially that front area. And it just kind of widened and made a little bit bigger for some options of some back pins.

Q. Can you talk to the wider situation where the TOUR uniquely has the opportunity for you guys to Monday qualify on these weeks, like, it's a walk-on situation and how unique that is that this opportunity for him and others exists.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's great. It's hard to explain and it's really hard to explain to someone that's not in golf or doesn't understand golf, the opportunity that you could go out and Monday qualify. Like, it just literally --

Q. Well, not me.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, you know what I mean. (Laughing) maybe not realistically, but you could. But it's just the opportunity that someone who has been pursuing golf their whole life, someone who just wants to go try to Monday qualify, it's hard to argue with someone -- or argue, talk with someone that's like, well, I just, I wish I could have a chance or I wish I could do this. Obviously some people get through Q-School and have different mini tours, whatever it is, and it's not the same chance, but at the end of the day, you do have a chance. Someone does have a chance to go Monday qualify and has the chance to go potentially play well, have the week of their life, change their life forever. You don't see, obviously, stories of guys that Monday qualify and win or have a great chance to win very often. But the fact that it is possible in itself, I think is very, very unique and just adds to the many, the list of many things why golf is pretty special.

Q. Two questions, please. First of all, I know you never lack for motivation. Just wondering, is this a little bit of a bittersweet week being here in Columbus and maybe wanting to play a little harder this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's weird being here. My grandma actually moved, not. Not many people at her age decide to up and move her life. But, yeah, she moved to North Carolina, and she did it just late enough to miss Quail Hollow and just early enough to miss this tournament, so I'm starting to think that she doesn't really like me or something. But -- we offered to bring her here, but she just got settled in last week, so unfortunately I'm going to miss her. But hopefully she somehow sees this. I can convince her to come and to come hang for the week or the weekend, something like that. But it is, I mean, this is always a special event with them here and it's still just as special and probably even a little bit more special not having my grandfather here anymore, but it is an event that I feel like I'm very similar to the PLAYERS and a handful of other places that I do feel like I'm going to win here at some point in my career. I just really like the golf course and it's my part of the country where I grew up and not too far from Louisville and I hope it happens, but you don't know if it will. But it sure would be special, whenever that time comes.

Q. Secondly, Mike Davis's career at the USGA's coming to an end and his time as CEO and at the USGA sort of not totally but coincides a bit with your

career. Just wonder if you had thoughts on his contributions to USGA, to setups at U.S. Opens and what you thought of his work.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, I think his setups of the U.S. Open are just a very miniscule part what have he's done for the USGA. I mean, there's, I would say 99 and a half percent of what he's done for the USGA is stuff that I'll never know. I mean, he's continued to -- he's grown the USGA for, whether it's events, internally, making the game better in a lot of areas that I don't know. I mean, obviously, I just see the side that influences the professionals and myself and the U.S. Open, so it's probably not a fair judgment of what he's done for the USGA because I know that there's definitely some events that could have gone a little bit better in terms of course setup, but it's not all him. It's a lot of people that are involved and they learn from it. He handled them all with grace and tried to continue to get better and I know that he's created a great pathway for the future of the CEO's of the USGA and he's done a lot of great things for the game of golf.

Q. You had a little social media banter with Phil after he won the PGA. I'm just curious, what were you most impressed with about the way he won and just maybe speak to how he did that, with really not showing a whole lot of form for awhile.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think that's what I was most impressed with, and it's no knock to Phil as a player or person, but I think he would be the first to tell you that he has not played to his caliber the last year or two years or so and, I mean, he's had flashes here and there, but as a whole he wants to play better consistently and he just hasn't quite had that. I mean, I obviously would love to have Phil Mickelson's career or -- at the end of my career. I mean, I'm a long way from that, but I'm working to have numbers like that. I think he would be the first to tell you that he hasn't played how he wanted the last couple years and especially lately. So I think that was the -- you hate to say biggest surprise -- but was just like, wow, he's playing like the Phil Mickelson I grew up watching, where he's leading the golf tournament. He knows what he's doing. He's plotting his way around the course. He's hitting every fairway, which love Phil to death, we all know that's not a norm for Phil and, I mean, just making the putts when he needed to, hitting just flush iron shots, which is the Phil that I remember and I started playing with when I first got on TOUR, practice rounds and such. And, yeah, it was unbelievably inspiring for the age and the way that he did it, but also as a person who -- in myself, who is not playing, I feel like that well, and hasn't had a great year. I mean, look what he's done and he just won a major championship. Sometimes that shows that maybe I'm not as far off as I think.

Q. To follow up on the question on Mike Visacki, whatever did get out there, it did appear that he was speechless when you were meeting with him. Did you sense that was due to the gesture? The amount? Both? Neither? Did you get any feel for that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think it was the gesture, because he didn't even look at it and it's, it wasn't anything, not anything crazy. I mean, it was just, I just wanted to help, you know. I don't care if it's a thousand dollars, like, that's extremely helpful for someone who is in that position and that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be just, like, hey, man, I know Q-School's expensive, I know playing in these events are expensive, and like any little way I can help out, I want to. And I want to be helpful more than just money. I want him to be able to, I mean, I told him, I'm like, dude, any time you -- he lives in Florida and we were going to play some golf together, but I just was like, hey, dude, if you ever want advice, if you ever want to pick my brain, you ever just want to talk, like, I'm here for you. I'm happy to help. I was very fortunate to have some great mentors and people willing to help me growing up and if it's a difference of him playing on mini tours or getting his Korn Ferry card the next year, then, like that's, that means more to me than any amount of money I could ever give him or anybody. So it was, it just was great because, again, I haven't been in a great place, both just mentally and on the golf course, and for me it was great because it just, I felt joy out of seeing his joy and it just kind of totally made me forget about what's going on in my golfing life and sometimes puts things in perspective that obviously we're all out here to play golf and we're all out here to try to win a lot of golf tournaments, but changing people's lives and helping people who are less fortunate than you is sometimes, you know, more important than that.

Q. I want to ask you about 2014 U.S. Open sectional qualifying that you tri-medaled here at Brookside. What was your experience like going through that and how much relief did you feel when you did get through?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it is such a brutal day. It's so hard. It's so much golf in one day and often in this time of year you're probably going to get a little bit of weather at some point and potentially get some storms where you have to come back the following day or whatever it might be. But I had been close a couple times, where I had had a good first round, or at least had been right there to where I'm one round away from getting in the U.S. Open, and you know, when you've never played in one, that's a huge deal. It's such a different kind of nerves than trying to win a golf tournament or -- it's just like trying to make the cut sometimes or, like, when you're around the cut line, those

last couple holes are sometimes more nerve wracking than trying to win a tournament. I don't know. It's weird. It's hard to explain, but it's very similar in the fact that it's a little bit of an out-of-body experience and you kind of get out of the idea of I'm just trying to make birdie on this hole to, like, all right I'm just trying to stay ahead of the number to get in, whereas if you just tried to win the tournament, which as I remember what I did that year and following years, you usually end up qualifying or at least doing well because the only thing you're focused about is trying to win, and then if you don't, you're somewhere around it, versus if you're just setting that threshold as trying to qualify, if you don't, then you're just underneath, if that makes sense. So it's, I always, the golf courses that we played were always great and I enjoyed them and that was a, yeah, that was a special day.

Q. You mentioned earlier about maybe the negativity in the press sometimes and I don't know if you saw what happened this week with Naomi Osaka at the French Open. She decided not to speak to the press and then withdrew. Is it something you can empathize that sometimes it is difficult -- I know you're a professional -- but is there difficulties that we don't know about?

JUSTIN THOMAS: You know, it's tough and I felt terrible for her. I mean, I don't know as much about the story as I should. I just read briefly the headlines, which is another things thing. You can't get a whole story out of a headline. And I think it's more of how things are portrayed of maybe how they're said. If you and I are having a conversation and you know me, I'm very sarcastic, I like to have fun, and I might say something in light spirit, whatever it might be, but then all of a sudden that gets put on a piece of paper and people aren't going to read that in my sarcastic tone and now all of a sudden it comes off as arrogant or it comes off as cocky or it comes off as spoiled or it comes off as maybe not appreciative or whatever it might be, when really you and I were just BS'ing and someone didn't take it the right way. And especially her at such a young age, like, I mean a lot of people get into insecurities, they get into just, it's so important to, especially growing your brand and you want people to think highly of you, and I'm sure she just was in a situation where it's like, it's not worth it to me. I'm here to try to play tennis. I'm trying to win this championship and -- or win this Open, and I don't want anything to get in the way of that and maybe it just kind of got to her internally. And it's mind blowing to me that I didn't know that tennis players were fined at all let alone that much money for skipping media. I mean, that's, I think, I mean, selfishly I think that's a right that we deserve, to be able to say yes or no to, and I have a great relationship with a lot of you guys and because you guys are gracious to me, I'm fine talking to you. Obviously, if I

didn't have a good relationship, it might be different. But that's what it is. It can be tough at times and I think there's certain times in your life or whatever it might be that you maybe just need less of it, but I just think there's so many good stories out there and so many great things going on in sports and in the world that it doesn't always need to be negative. So I think that's kind of where I was going. That's a really long answer to your question, but there it is. I'll stop being sarcastic with you. I got to cut down on that.

DOUG MILNE: That's all we got for you, we appreciate your time, we certainly hope you have a great week this week. Thank you.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you.

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