

BMW Championship

Wednesday, August 26, 2020

Olympia Fields, Illinois, USA

Olympia Fields Country Club

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

AMANDA HERRINGTON: We'd like to welcome Justin Thomas, our defending champion here at the BMW Championship, to our virtual interview room. Justin, No. 2 in the FedExCup standings, looking to defend your title here at a new course. Overall what are your first impressions of Olympia Fields and the test it will offer this week in the second FedExCup Playoffs event?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's an unbelievable test. I've only played nine holes this week, and I'm going to go play nine here in a little bit. We had a college event here my freshman year, so nine years ago, and I remember liking the course. I remember it being a very U.S. Open-like course. It's long. The fairways are narrow, the rough is long. It's the firmest greens I've played in a while. Obviously we don't know what's going to happen with the weather, but I feel like we've had a lot of soft greens, hence the low scores, but yeah, it's a really, really well-set-up course from what I've seen so far.

Q. You mentioned low scoring. We're coming off Dustin at 30-under, which was a pretty good week for him. But it's been low scoring and bunched up really if you go back to Colonial. Now that we've had some time, can you attribute that to anything beyond strictly course conditions?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No. It's soft greens. I think if you looked at Memorial, the second week there at Muirfield, it was firm. The scores weren't high. And again, I understand that courses either don't have SubAir or it's not the proper climate or you don't have the ability to get your greens firm, but if you give us soft greens, we're going to shoot low. It doesn't matter how long it is, doesn't matter how short it is. That's just what it is.

I think firm greens and long rough was the answer to higher scores.

Q. You can only control one of them.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, that's exactly right.



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Q. If we assume that we're going to get rain or it's going to be soft or whatever, what do you see as the biggest challenge of this golf course that would test you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's tough. The greens are severe. I mean, again, it's pretty firm, and I hit a lot -- the nine holes I played yesterday I hit a pretty good amount of mid-irons and that's something I don't do very often. It's a really, really good tough finishing stretch. 15, even a par-5 is not an easy par-5 by any means. It's little things like that. But it's going to be pivotal to hit the fairways to where you're able to control your ball coming into the green.

But it seems like you're just going to have to have those par saves and really scramble well or leave the ball in the right place because you can kind of get it snowballing out here pretty quickly from what I've seen.

Q. Sticking with the topic of the golf course this week, for those of us who haven't seen it in a while, is there a comparative golf course that you guys have played recently that Olympia Fields reminds you of?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Pretty simply, no. We've played a lot of short and soft golf courses, and this is far from short and soft. I mean, the only thing I could remotely compare it to would be Muirfield just because of how the greens got a little firmer.

But in terms of golf courses, they're not very similar in that aspect. I think Muirfield is quite a bit bigger fairways and more doglegs, whereas this place is relatively straight, has -- it definitely has some doglegs but it's not anything crazy one way or the other. It's got some deep bunkers which is also similar to Muirfield. No, for the most part I think there's a reason this place held a U.S. Open. It's kind of in a league of its own in my opinion.

Q. If you said recently the last couple years, is there anywhere there's been a major championship or anywhere else that might be a comparative type of place?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I didn't play, but I guess a little bit of a Bethpage like. It's tough. It's right in front of you. There's nothing about it that's tricked up. It's just a difficult golf course that you have to go out and execute well. In

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that aspect it reminds me of a place like that to where visually it does look a little difficult and it is difficult when you're playing it, but if you're able to hit the fairways, if you're playing well, have control of your golf ball, you can make some birdies and still shoot a good round of however many under par that is. But you're not going to be seeing any 59s and 60s on the same day here.

Q. More than half the field this week is just looking for a spot next week at East Lake. You're obviously in a different position. Do you feel like it's a different mindset knowing you're going to be there and maybe trying to jockey for position on the leaderboard to start Thursday at East Lake?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, that makes sense, but I'm not trying any harder because I want to start at 10-under versus 8 or 6 or whatever it is. I just want to try to have a chance to win this golf tournament. If I take care of what I can take care of, then so be it. Whatever DJ does is out of my control. I can't control what he or Berger or whoever else is on the list, as well, I can't control what they do. The only thing that I can do something about is my own golf game and how I perform. That's all I'm trying to do is just put myself in the position to where I have a chance to win on that back nine on Sunday, and if it puts me first, great, if it puts me in fourth or fifth, so be it, but at the end of the day I just have to go play great golf, or try to, at least.

Q. Last week you talked about how if you had that two-shot lead at East Lake again you'd handle it differently. What specifically would you do differently, and then why did that lead affect you and were you surprised that a two-shot lead with 72 holes remaining affected you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, not to sound bad, but I'm not going to say what I'm going to do differently because I might be in that position next week and I'll let them figure it out themselves.

I'm not surprised that it felt weird because no one has ever been there before. It was very similar to I felt like Q-school when I played. I remember I shot 67 the first round and I was in fifth, and I got home that night and I was like, I've got five more rounds to go. I have to maintain good golf for five more rounds. Like I don't know what to do. Usually you have three more rounds, and then I had an entire another four-day tournament and another day to go.

So when it's just something different, it's hard to know what to think because you've never been there, so you sometimes just have to create your own mindset or thing that might work and just hope it does.

At the end of the day it's still golf. You just have to play better than everybody else.

Q. Was being a leader since Monday in a sense last year at East Lake, did that wear on you possibly?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It didn't wear on me as much as it just was harder when I was out playing. That was the biggest thing. I mean, when you're going through interviews and you're at the time with fans and have the interaction here and there, you hear enough chatter or just -- whether it's questions you get or whatever it might be, you know you're in that position, so I understand what you're saying in that sense.

I hope to be in that position every time I play the FedExCup and the TOUR Championship, so hopefully it's something I get more and more comfortable with. But yeah, it just was a little bit different.

Q. You were 10 when Jim Furyk won the U.S. Open here. What do you remember about that week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Absolutely nothing. Literally nothing other than Jim Furyk won.

Q. What I was getting at was for a non-major that moves around a little bit, does it change anything at all to you when you come to a course like this that's got a fair bit of history to it, whether it was Crooked Stick, Aronimink? Does it do anything for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It doesn't, to be honest, and that might sound bad, but I --

Q. Furyk is going to be upset, but yeah.

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I mean, I'm happy for him and he won a U.S. Open; he's going to be just fine. I don't care if anybody cares about my PGA; I've got the trophy at my house still, so that's just the way that it is.

But no, it is cool. I absolutely love this tournament. There's so many great courses in this part of the country and we're able to play different ones every year and go back to previous ones, and it's just -- it is, it's little things like the locker room. The locker room here and it's the same at Medinah, it's super old. It's kind of like it is at -- Oakmont has a little bit of that vibe. It's just they haven't updated it, where a lot of the places have the more modern and the organization and stuff like that. It's the old school like middle-school lockers where they're loud when you open them and you close them and open them up both ways and they haven't changed the organization and stuff like that. You can tell that that was a place where people

just hung out and you've got the tables in the middle of the aisles and stuff like that. It is cool. I did notice that coming in here that a lot of these locker rooms that we go to for this tournament of these historic older places are out there.

Q. I have a question about your strategy off the tee this week. You mentioned hitting fairways, but here at the North Course the landing zones in the fairways are guarded by a number of bunkers, providing a challenge off the tee. I was wondering what's your strategy this week to avoid those difficult approaches in so you can attack the greens at this course?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, in terms of strategy, there's really -- I mean, this sounds bad, but there's really not much strategy other than you just need to hit the fairway. You need to figure out what puts the ball there.

The back nine that I played yesterday, although I like it, there was a couple tee shots that didn't fit my eye. They were definitely preferred or favored a right-to-left ball flight, which is not what I like to hit off the tee, so something like that is something where if I'm working it left to right I have a little bit smaller landing area but it's something that for me it's going to be important to commit to whatever I'm doing. I'm going to need to step up on the tee, and if I'm hitting a cut, say on 18, I understand that my fairway is going to be a little bit smaller than something that's coming in with a draw.

I just need to be committed to that and have a small target and just play an aggressive shot to that small target versus trying to hit a shot that I'm uncomfortable with that might fit the hole a little bit better. A lot of it for me I think this week is just going to be about sticking to just being myself and the shots that I'm comfortable with that got me here and hopefully just execute them well.

Q. St. Jude you were 4-down going into Sunday and it was your biggest Sunday comeback for a win. How does it feel different on Sunday starting four back than when you have a 54-hole lead which you've had a lot of success closing out?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, you just have to play totally different. When you have a lead and when you have one day left, you just have to be smart. You can't make big mistakes. You really just need to -- for me, at a place -- it depends where it is, but I've been fortunate to where some of the places I've had leads, like pars are a good score where I don't have to shoot 65 or 64 to keep the lead. It's just about fairways, greens, putting it in the right spot if you miss the green, make sure you leave it in the right place. Something like that when you have a lead going into Sunday I think is important.

But when I'm playing from behind, you have to be a little bit more aggressive, but it's really just about making as many birdies as I can. I can't worry about what's going on in front of me. The only thing I can control is myself and just try to make a bunch of birdies and try to get in it going into that back nine, which fortunately I ended up doing on Sunday of Memphis to where it put us in good shape.

Q. Do you feel like you changed your strategy Thursday at East Lake compared to a normal Thursday?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, it just is totally different. Having to maintain the lead for one round and four rounds is totally and completely different. You can't play conservative. It's not like you can protect a two-shot lead over four rounds, if that makes sense.

AMANDA HERRINGTON: Justin, thank you so much for your time and best of luck this week.

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