

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas to the media here at the 2024 TOUR Championship. Justin, if you could just give us some opening comments on your season and making it to East Lake for the eighth time.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's always a good year when you're ending the year here in Atlanta. It was very motivating last year not being here and watching on TV. This is a place that obviously I've had some success, but I also just really enjoy.

I think it's a great course. It's getting harder and harder, I think, to make it to East Lake and to be a part of the TOUR Championship.

I'll be the first to admit, I think I kind of took it for granted there for a while thinking you're going to be here every year, but you've got to play really well, really solid golf. It is an accomplishment.

Although I am No. 30, I'm still happy to be here and excited to go.

Q. I heard you played nine yesterday; what are your thoughts on the restoration?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, just played the back nine yesterday. To be perfectly honest, I did not realize how much was changed. I think I just read an article or two and the article kind of only highlighted maybe a couple holes and only saw some pictures, and I thought it was just those holes that were changed, not every single one of them. I was a little surprised by that.

I'm blown away at the condition of the course. For a change that recent ago, to be in the condition that this course is in is astonishing. I'm sure as everybody said, the greens are incredibly firm, so that'll be a challenge, but I think it'll take a couple years to honestly know exactly what I think about it.

I loved it, and I didn't think really anything needed to be done beforehand, but like I think everybody, we need to be fair and give it a couple years before we really know how it is.

Q. Viktor was in here yesterday saying that he didn't feel like he had a great season but then the perspective part of it is if you get to East Lake, you seem to have touched on it. Is there some sort of middle ground where maybe you look back and didn't like parts of the season but getting here is an accomplishment in and of itself?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Oh, for sure. There's plenty of parts of the season I didn't like or didn't love. Like I said, I really just took it for granted, I'd say. It was always a goal to be here, but I felt like it was -- although I do feel like it's one that I'm capable and should achieve every year, it's still an accomplishment, especially with how the season is now and just how much shorter and the amount of golf you're playing. I feel like it puts more emphasis on every event.

I was talking to Adam Scott about it last night; it's just -- I don't think you can really kind of, like, 8th to 20th your way to East Lake like I feel like you kind of could before. I don't know if that statistically actually is accurate or makes sense, but I just felt like you could play really well all year and maybe just not finish out some tournaments but just have a lot of kind of top 10s, 15s, 20s, whatever it is, and by the amount of events you were playing in you'd end up being here; versus now if you don't have really any top -- you don't win, any top 2, 3s kind of thing, you have to finish a lot of times in the top 10 or be there very, very, very often, I feel like, to make it here versus before.

Q. You mentioned being 30th. Does that change your mentality coming into this week at all, given where you are in the starting strokes?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. I'm very fortunate I've never been in that spot. It's always been nice starting with at least some under par. But no, obviously -- look, it's no secret that my chances are pretty slim this week, but they're a lot better than if I was sitting on my couch at home, that's for sure.

I'm just going to try to play as good as I can and make as

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many birdies as I can. It's hard to say exactly how the course is going to play. I feel like the old course I probably had a better chance of making up ground just for the amount of birdies.

I feel like it's going to be hard to have a seven-, eight-, nine-birdie round out here where I felt like I could do that on the other course, or the old design.

But again, I have no idea, so we'll see.

Q. Is there a certain change that you might have made this year looking back compared to last year, maybe a shift in mindset or a swing change that you'll look back on as something you want to continue doing that has helped you this year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: A little bit. It really was just -- I think I just made -- it's always a problem I've had of overanalyzing or just trying to be perfect, if you will, but I feel like I just got too much down that road.

But the biggest thing for me, I think, where I kind of got in trouble and I get in trouble sometimes, is I just lost all ownership. I feel like -- it's no fault to coaches, but I always had too many people around, and it was like -- I felt like I was too reliant on everybody, whether it be my dad or a putting coach or whatever it may be.

It works for some people, but for me, I've always been really good at adjusting in the middle of a round. I wouldn't be scared to change my grip or change a swing thought or something on the course because I'm like, this isn't working, so I need to do something differently, whereas I felt like I kind of lost that accountability and I lost that ownership when I always had my dad here.

It wasn't that it wasn't working; I would get in the habit of hitting and I would look and be like, what is that? I lost all of my own self, if you will.

I just feel like kind of owning that and being better at figuring stuff out on my own is what helped me play better this year, and I feel like will help me to continue to play better.

Q. How did you actually make that change?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's hard, but it just was -- I mean, just communication. It's awkward, especially when your coach is your dad and I tell him, I don't want you to come out this week. And it's not like I don't want my dad here this week, I don't want my coach here this week. I think we even had that this year.

I remember like at Valhalla for the PGA this year, I was playing great and I felt really good about everything, and I told -- when we landed in Louisville, I told my dad, look, this is going to be a tough emotional week for me. It's a lot going on. I was like, I don't need my coach this week, I need my dad. I was like, I'm good. I feel good about everything. I like where things are going. I don't necessarily want you here this week as a coach, but I need my dad. I need the person that's going to be there that I can talk to.

A lot of it is on me and everybody involved just communicating that because if I don't say anything, obviously they'd never know.

Q. You mentioned things you might not have liked about this year. What did you like? What were the things that you look back on and say, it was pretty good?

JUSTIN THOMAS: The things I did like? I felt like definitely getting off to -- got off to a nice start there at the beginning of the year; had chances to win a couple tournaments. Felt like I had a couple of those rounds where I feel like I would have more often or I have had more often in the past of -- I kind of call it going a little unconscious where I feel like every shot is exactly where I want it to be, and it's like I just get in this little zone and it's pretty much love ^ , but just stay out of the way kind of thing.

I know I feel like I can aim here; it's going to come down here. I feel like I can just birdie hole after hole after hole after hole. And it doesn't happen that often, but it's a fun feeling when it does. I feel like I had that a couple times this year.

But just getting in contention, and I think that I wasn't in contention or really, really close on the back nine on a Sunday like I would have liked, but I still was there decently -- a decent bit going into Sunday feeling like I had a chance.

I felt like I had two chances to win -- they weren't great -- but two chances to win two majors this year, the last two of the year, and obviously they didn't turn out anything what I would have liked.

Valhalla was nice, but the Open wasn't a great Sunday by any means. But I was there, or I woke up that morning knowing that I had a chance to win the golf tournament. That's nice.

Q. Do you feel like you're auditioning this week for Jim?

JUSTIN THOMAS: A little bit. I guess I would answer that, I don't feel like I am for me, but if I was him, I would say I am, if that makes sense. With how many people have an opportunity, I think it would be -- he's definitely looking at guys that are potential picks and how they're playing.

But most importantly, I am here and I know that some guys aren't. But then again, I was in that spot last year where there was guys that were trying to get picked and I wasn't even in the Playoffs.

I think I talked about it maybe last week or Memphis. I'm definitely more at ease now than I was last year about getting picked, and it's not from a lack of wanting to be on the team or feel like it's not as important. Just my priorities are in a better place, that if I play the golf that I know I should it'll take care of itself.

Yeah, I obviously really, really want to be on that team, and I know there's a lot of people that have a chance. It would be nice to play well for a lot of reasons this week, but that would definitely be one.

Q. Speaking of last year, do you watch golf on TV? And if you're willing to admit that, did you watch much of the Playoffs last year that you missed, and did it motivate you or piss you off, either one?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I do watch golf. I watched them, and all of them I'd say had very different emotions. I watched Memphis laughing at how unbelievably uncomfortable and hot everybody looked on TV. I remember being in Nashville at our house there and watching on TV and every person I saw on TV I was like, I would love to be there, but that sucks. Every person looked like they could pass out at any moment, how hot it was. I got a little bit of enjoyment out of that.

Watching Olympia Fields, funny enough, Jill grew up like 20, 25 minutes from Olympia Fields, and I was in town, we were seeing her family of all weeks, which was not that fun for me. Went to a couple places and people wished me luck that week, and I was obviously not playing.

It was weird; we went and saw Jordan and Annie and Sammy that week, so that was a strange one. And then watched some in Atlanta, and that was probably the hardest one to watch because I love this place and really, really wanted to be here.

But yeah, it was very different emotions in all of them.

Q. As somebody who began the year outside the top 50 trying to get into those Signature Events, I'm

wondering if you can speak on the Signature Event structure, your thoughts on it, and the potential pathways that have been created for players like yourself who are outside the top 50 to get into them?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's a huge, huge deal. It's, I think, very similar to making it here. It's extremely difficult. You have to have a very good year to be in the top 50 and earn your way into those events, which I think is fair, and rightfully so. I don't think it's something that you should get grandfathered into, whatever it may be.

I think the fact that the guys in the top 50 have earned that is great. Also, I felt a lot of pressure this year to play my way into those, but it kept me extremely motivated. I didn't want to have to rely on exemptions. It was also weird and uncomfortable.

But yeah, reaching out to tournament directors, asking for exemptions, and telling them I hope I don't need it, but if I do need it, can I have one type thing.

But I was fortunate enough I think through World Ranking and the Aon Next 10 I was able to qualify for them. And I like that for the fact that guys that are outside, yeah, they might be upset or not happy that they're in them, but they have the same opportunity to play their way in just like myself and everybody else can.

That's what we all know we signed up for in golf. You can go out and get it yourself. So I think that's great.

Q. Do you have a handicap at your home course?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I do not, no.

Q. If you ever play with guys who are not pros but have a game, how does it work? Do you just sort of guess as to how to give them shots? Do you do something like play your worst ball against them or anything like that, crazy?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Probably depends how much money we're playing for. You want to win the bet on the first tee, naturally. There's a couple guys that aren't pros that we kind of have figured out somewhat of what strokes are.

There's a handful of guys down in Jupiter that either tried to play or did play a little bit that they very well could go beat us any day that we play. Just one or two strokes a side, something like that.

But it really is just a guessing game. I think we always do some kind of like adjust at the turn to where if the match is 2-up or more either side, then you adjust accordingly on

the back nine. But it's really just a guess.

Q. There are some pros that have handicaps at their home club. Do you think it would be odd for a pro to be giving another pro shots like even in a match at home, or is that common?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's definitely not common. I think it would be pretty -- I don't want to say disrespectful, but I'd be pretty pissed if Scottie and I played a practice round and he's like, do you want a stroke on this nine? It would be like, what do I think of myself and what does he think of me. Honestly, it would be a pretty good intimidation factor.

I definitely have some buddies that I play with at home that are maybe mini-tours or stuff like that, people that I'm close enough with where I feel like I can say that and I'll just -- I'll be like, do you want some strokes or what do you want and they kind of look at me, and I know right then that I've already won the match because that's what I think of them, kind of thing.

Q. This week there's a creators event as well as the championship. I wondered your thoughts on the fact there's more young people, their interest in golf, they want to become influencers as well as actual professional golfers like yourself nowadays?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's very cool. It's obviously very different. That's the day and age we're in right now. At the end of the day, if it gets more kids, more people interested in golf, that's what's most important.

I don't know that field very well, but I know that, yeah, there's a handful of influencers, people out there that people know them probably way better than they know me. And that's not right or wrong, but that's just the power of it.

I think them being out here and their time valuable just like ours is, so for them to take the time on a big week like this and come play a course and have the opportunity to create a little bit more buzz, that's great.

It also gives kids a different avenue to want to be involved in golf. I think that's a good thing, regardless if it's professional or influencer.

Q. Presidents Cup or not, there's a big chunk of time coming up for most of the guys in the field who aren't from Europe. Are you comfortable not playing a lot of golf? You went to South Africa last year, but are you okay taking a big chunk of time off, or do you still feel like you need to play?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't like taking a lot of time off. I

think I get a little rusty.

I have plenty of things planned that fill the time pretty easily, but just going to take a little three-day vacation with Jill from here. I have a foundation event that I'm doing after that. Then it's hopefully getting ready for Presidents Cup after that, and if not, I'll have to figure out what I'm going to do with my time. I'll probably add an event somewhere this fall to do.

So it's just trying to stay somewhat competitively in it and not get too rusty.

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