

THE PLAYERS Championship

Saturday, March 13, 2021
Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA
TPC Sawgrass

Justin Thomas

Quick Quotes

Q. One of the things that about today, didn't look like you left a lot of stress for your putter, less than 50 feet worth of putts for seven birdies and an eagle.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I wish all rounds were that easy. I hit the ball beautifully, I drove it well, I hit a couple squirrely shots there at the end of the front nine, but the good part is that I knew why they were happening. I knew what the swing flaw was, what the physical mistake was, so I felt like I kind of bounced back from that pretty well. Hit some really good shots on the back nine.

But I just know that I have to stay patient out here because you can make a lot of birdies, and hitting driver well is helping.

Q. I don't want to imply on your behalf that this course is ever easy, but for a Saturday at THE PLAYERS, was this as accommodating if that's the right word that it was for THE PLAYERS on this day with little wind?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would say it was easier yesterday than it was today, but I mean, this course is like that. As long as you hit the ball in the fairway, it's not very long, you got four par-5s, you can realistically eagle -- besides No. 9 you can, but it's not likely. You can eagle every par-5, you got a short hole and you can make eagle on this weekend at No. 12. So you can have crazy stuff happen out here and you can really, really shoot a low number. I know that going in or I knew that going into the weekend and I know that every time I tee it up out here. So I think that's the reason why maybe I played well is I just know to stay patient because you never know when a run is coming.

Q. Is this the best you've felt on a golf course in a while?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes. It is.

Q. I was hoping you would expand, but anyway...

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes, sir.



Q. You start birdie, birdie, birdie, birdie. What are you thinking going to the 5th hole?

JUSTIN THOMAS: To keep the hammer down. I've started out, I actually made four birdies to start around here before. I think I did it my rookie year when I shot 65. So I knew that -- and I think I bogeyed 5, as well. It's just, I think you get through 4, and 5 is clearly a lot harder than No. 4 is or a couple of those holes, and hit a beautiful drive there and I just was staring it right down the smokestack with an 8-iron and just double-crossed it, hit it in the worst place you could hit it. So obviously I would have liked to make birdie or par there, but that could have been the best thing to happen to me to kind of wake me up and snap out of it, because I wanted to keep making birdies. I didn't want to kind of hold back and play away from making bogeys, I wanted to keep trying to make birdies.

Q. With few exceptions this tournament's got a history of being kind of an eclectic mix of players, and Saturday is really a big separation day. Are you aware of that and were you thinking of any kind of number you would have needed to give yourself a chance?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I was not aware of that. I told myself I thought 10-under had a pretty good chance to win the tournament going into this weekend, thinking there would be a little bit more wind today. But it's just -- I mean it's getting harder. It's getting a little bit firmer. The greens are still pretty soft, but you know they're going to set it up tougher on Sunday. You know where the pins are going to be, and the greens are going to get a little bit more baked out. It's going to be a little windier, and it's a Sunday of a PLAYERS. It's a huge event and nerves are going to be there. So I knew that today was important, but I didn't exactly have a number in mind.

Q. You sort of have these like heat-check rounds like pretty often, Erin Hills, Hawaii, come to, mind. Is there something in common with each one that like something happens early in the round, something happens before the round where you kind of know you're going to have it going?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would say that the U.S. Open and here were similar because I wasn't -- I wasn't out of the tournament here, but, I mean I was, I don't know what did



Lee start the day at, 9 or something? So I was seven back. I was pretty far back at the U.S. Open too.

So you're not -- it's not like a Saturday when you're one or two back and you're kind of looking at the leaderboard like all right, where am I at now, it's just kind of like, dude, I'm seven back, I need to make a lot of birdie these next 36 holes. Maybe there's something there that I need to learn from.

I feel like I've kind of picked up on that in the past, but no it's just, it's such a fun golf course to play because you can shoot 2- or 3-over so easily but, man, you can shoot 63 or 64 so quickly too.

Q. Do you feel like you can replicate it tomorrow or do you need to?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would love to. I don't think I need to, but I would love to because I would like my chances if I shot 64 again tomorrow.

Q. That confidence you were talking about 10, that approach you leaned back a little bit, 16 you had that awesome club twirl. What are you thinking at that time?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's fun. Golf is so fun when you're playing well and when things are going well it's really easy, but this game isn't like that, unfortunately. I've had definitely my fair share of lows this season and I just a lot of stuff going on mentally that I felt like I've never had to deal with and maybe taking things for granted or just not enjoying the game. Being irritable, being frustrated, emotional on the golf course is not good for me. It's definitely not good for Jimmy. I'm sure he likes it when I play better a little more, too. But it's just when you're able to get in those zones and hit those shots exactly how you see it, it's fun. It really is.

Q. I know you're one of the longer hitters on TOUR, but based on what Rory said yesterday did you ever feel the need to chase speed or distance and if not why not?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think I did probably like four or five years ago and got a little bit, and I definitely did. I still am, and have been since Bryson. But it's just, I mean, you would be stupid if you said what he's doing to golf courses doesn't make it easier.

I think it's extremely underrated and not talked about enough how straight he hits it for a swinging at 135 miles an hour. I mean I can hit it pretty damn crooked at 116 or 117 miles an hour and he hits it really straight at 135. And

he putts it really well.

So yeah, having that extra, for me it's being able to find that extra 10 or 15 or 20 if I need it or if I can do it. Yeah, I would love to fly it 330 every time, but no offense to Bryson, but I'm not going to put on 40 pounds. Like I don't have the build or stature for that. So I'm just, I've always been about making, getting the most out of what I can, but it's not like I'm solely focused on that, I've been working on other parts of my game as well.

Q. You said it's the best you've felt on a course and you mentioned fun. Does that go hand in hand or is this as much fun you've had on the course also recently?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Recently for sure. Good golf and fun, unfortunately and fortunately, works together for the most part. I wish my mood and emotions weren't so dependent on my golf, but golf is my life and it is my job, and I care a lot about it and I care a lot about how I play. So it unfortunately does depend or make and break my mood. But I'm trying to get better. I mean, I'm growing up a little bit, but at the same time it means a lot to me and playing well and winning tournaments means a lot as well.

Q. Was there specifically one thing in your golf game, driver, irons, chipping, putting, that's clicked that's brought on this confidence that you felt like you might have lost before coming in?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it was only one round, it's not like I feel unbelievable again and I'm back to how I felt in '17 or 2018 or whatever, but it just when you see signs and you're able to -- I'm able to hit shots that I've struggled with the last couple months, and just stepping up there and making putts at the speed that I want to and almost kind of creating breaks with the speed that I'm hitting putts, it's stuff like that that when I'm feeling good and when I'm in a little bit of a rhythm is what's nice. But, no, I'm never going to -- I'm always chasing, you know what I mean -- I hate to say perfect because it's not the right word, but you know what I mean.

Q. Little change of subject. You mentioned a few minutes ago that you've had your fair share of lows, and I don't know what kind of relationship you have with Chris Kirk, but could you just talk about what it, whether the word is inspiring or uplifted or whatever, to see him bounce back from the challenges that he's faced in the last year and a half?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I don't know -- I know Chris, obviously we're cordial and we have seen each other out here quite a bit but I'm not really close with him. But I know

his story enough, and it's a crazy, crazy game, and I think a lot of people from the outside don't realize how hard it is sometimes and how lonely it can get. I'm sure he had some tough times and look at Brendon Todd and what he did.

It's something about those Bulldogs. They seem to fight back. Good thing the football team hasn't so far, but -- sorry, you're standing there -- sorry, Kirby, if you heard that.

But, no, it's what's cool and fun and inspiring about this game, because when it happens it's solely on you. You can't get traded to a team and ride the bench or come in a couple plays and your team wins the Super Bowl, it's you come back, you put in the work, you dug it out of the dirt, you found something mentally to get it done for yourself.

Q. With fans coming back, environment coming back, if you were thinking about how am I going to be received and things like that, just given the summer that you've had?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I didn't really think about that, no.

Q. And that idea of coming back and being the crowds are chanting for you and stuff like that, just kind of what does it this feel like coming full circle a little bit?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's just great. I've been ready for fans to come back for awhile. Being in contention of a big tournament or any tournament is not remotely close to the same without fans. You don't feel -- you just don't feel it. You do, but it's just so different. Hitting a sand wedge on 17 when it's blowing five, seven miles an hour that flies 135 yards, like that doesn't happen with no fans. That adrenaline and being able to dial that in and having the experience and also being able to control your emotions, it's a lot and it's what makes it, again, so hard to win out here.

Q. With what you said about Bryson a minute ago and his swing speed and hitting it straight, if you went into a final round with him tied for the lead, would you feel like you were at a disadvantage and if not why not?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would feel, yeah, I'm definitely at a disadvantage off the tee, but I feel that when I'm playing well my game holds pretty well.

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