

THE PLAYERS Championship

Sunday, March 14, 2021

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: It's a pleasure to welcome the 2021 PLAYERS champion Justin Thomas to the interview room. J.T., after Friday you were seven shots back and came out and shot a 64 Saturday and then followed it up with a 68 today. Just this weekend and battling back, just how you sum this up and what this victory means.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It means a lot, obviously. It's a huge championship, very special. It's a tournament I've wanted to win, a tournament that I truly did feel like I was going to win at some point, and hopefully multiple times. I love the golf course. It was in incredible shape this week. The greens were so good. The fairways were perfect. Rough was long. Just a great test of golf. I mean, that's why it's a PLAYERS Championship.

I tried to stay patient. I felt like the last three holes on Friday changed the momentum for us for the tournament. Birdieing 16 and then that birdie on 18 was huge, and getting a little bit of momentum and kind of rode that into Saturday and obviously had a great day. And then today it was about trying to get into position and then hang on from there.

Q. Can you just talk about the roller coaster of emotions that the last two months has been for you and maybe what this means to you? Perhaps this means a little bit -- maybe a bit more powerful to change the narrative from all the stuff you've been trying to work your way through since Sony.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's been bizarre is probably an understatement. It's been a crappy couple months. I've had stuff happen in my life I never thought I'd have happen, and I mean, losing grandpa was terrible, and having to play a round of golf dealing with that, and then on top of that not playing well, it just was a lot, and it took a lot on me mentally.

At the same time, that's just the way that it was. I had to figure it out and had to get over it, and if I wanted to come to these tournaments and have a chance to win, then I needed to suck it up and get over it. If I wanted to throw a



pity party for myself or feel sorry for myself, there's no reason to show up, and I can stay home until I feel like I'm ready.

I felt like I was in a good enough head space where I could play. I just wasn't playing well. And then once I wasn't playing well, it was kind of snowballing.

This week was huge to win a big championship like this in front of fans again, which is incredible. You know, it tested me mentally, physically, emotionally, and I'm very proud of myself for getting it done.

Q. When you're on that run from 9 to 12, 5-under through four holes, can you describe what that zone is like, and at that point was there any doubt in your mind you were going to win the golf tournament?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Doubt probably isn't the right word, but a lot of unknown. There's a lot of stuff that can happen. You can hit a lot of great shots on 13 through 18 and not make one birdie or even play them over par. 17 is such a crapshoot this week with how firm that green was, and then you have adrenaline going. 18 is 18, so there's a lot going on.

I knew I needed to finish the job, and I felt like I didn't do a great job of it. Obviously hit a great shot on 13, good putt, and played 15 well, got kind of a bad break I felt like on my tee shot, and then played 16 and 17 beautifully.

I am proud of myself for that, but I was in such a great frame of mind and focused all day. I really felt like as soon as I started on 1 tee, I just was in a zone and in a focus that I felt like I could make the ball do what I wanted with it, and it felt like I could hit the putts exactly how I wanted. Yeah, it was nice to get in that little head space.

Q. You closed out Memphis last year and there were no fans there, but there were fans there today, and they were quite in your face as you made that walk from 16 to 17. Can you talk about what's the difference in nerves level winning a tournament with no fans and then winning a tournament with fans?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's not even remotely close. I can't even attempt to explain it. It's like -- I mean, it's like having



a money game with your buddies and then it's like playing in front of 10,000 people. It's hard to explain. But it is such -- you're nervous. Like you want to win the tournament when there's no fans and you feel it, but the things that I felt out there today and those last couple holes is something that I haven't felt in a really long time because of all this, in over a year, probably since like Mexico last year.

It's just bizarre. The hair on my arms and neck and legs were standing straight up walking to 17 green, and to have to play five to eight yards for adrenaline just because of the fans and the moment on 17 and 18 and other holes, it's stuff that's so hard to explain. But it felt great. I mean, that's why we all play. That's why we all do this.

But it did feel great to be able to execute and hit some great shots in front of those fans today.

Q. Things kind of went crazy with the final group on 4, Bryson hit the top and then Lee Westwood hit it in the water. In the group in front could you hear what was going on? Did you have a sense of the chaos that was playing out?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I didn't know. The only thing that I knew was whatever the leaderboard said.

Q. What clubs did you hit on 11 and 16?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I hit a 4-iron on 11 and a 5-wood on 16.

Q. You played a number of really bold shots as this course asked you to do a number of times, like the draw runner, whatever you want to call it, on 16, the club twirl on 18, if you will, the line you took there. What stands out to you? What are you most proud of the shots you really took on today?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I hit some really, really quality long irons. That 5-iron on 9 was really, really good, to be able to hit that green. Jimmy said it was the first time a player of his has ever had an eagle putt there, so I was glad to have that. That 4-iron I hit on 11 was awesome. But that 5-wood on 16 -- how I played the entire 16th hole because that tee shot does not fit my eye, but that's a shot that I've hit this week on 2 and then on 16 the last two days, just kind of similar to what I hit on 10 at Augusta. I tee it low and just shut the face and kind of let it sling out there and try to get it on the ground and let it run. With it being into the wind like that, it would have been a perfect 4-iron on a flat lie or a little downslope. Because I was on that huge up slope it was probably playing 20, 25 yards more with that wind.

To try to hit a cut off of that upslope with a 5-wood which was already going to go high is something that I thought was tough, and to execute that exactly how we wanted was huge. So I'd say although I hit some really good long irons, how I played 16 was awesome today.

Q. Were you nervous on 18?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Oh, absolutely, yeah.

Q. When the ball was in the air?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Oh, for sure. I can't lie, I thought it was very 50/50 or if it was going to be dry or in the water. The only thing I knew is that I just absolutely smoked it. Obviously the farther up you get the better chance you have, and I knew that if you're able to kind of get that little like downslope that I did or that I kind of hit on, it can kind of get rolling.

But I mean, that's the kind of stuff that happens when you win tournaments. You get lucky breaks like that. Yeah, it was too close for comfort, to say the least.

Q. Did you give yourself a talking-to walking from the 8th green to the 9th tee or did something happen and all of a sudden boom, boom, boom?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I was playing so well those first eight holes and I felt like I was hitting a lot of good putts, just wasn't making anything, wasn't getting anything out of my round. I just tried to stay in that same mind frame. I really just tried to keep executing and hitting the shots how I wanted and I felt like the putts were going to fall eventually. Jimmy did a good job keeping me calm and in that frame of mind, but I knew one hole wasn't going to affect me or impact me. I know you can shoot 6-, 7-, 8-under on the back nine out here if you get it going, and I just tried to make sure that I was in the frame of mind to where that was possible or where that was able to happen, and that stretch 9 through 12 was huge for me.

Q. Do you by any chance realize that you had hit the first 17 greens in regulation?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I did know that, and I'm not happy the fact that I missed 18 with a sand wedge to screw that up. I should have backed off. I heard -- whoever was putting on 17, I heard the fans and I was thinking about that over my shot instead of -- which is just horrendous mental work by me. But yeah, I'm not happy I missed that green.

Q. How close did you come to not playing the final round at Waste Management because of your grandpa? And then at what point did you think about

him today, even if it was just maybe chatting with your dad about him after the round?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I never was thinking about not playing. I just know him, especially I was talking with my grandma, and she was like, he's going to want you to play, and I knew he would want me to play. He'd be very mad at me if he would have found out that I didn't play. But it just was -- yeah, that was the hardest round of golf I've ever played. I wasn't in a head space to be trying to win a golf tournament, but I was trying for him. That was the main thing.

I thought about him this morning. I think about him every day, but thought about him this morning and then I think when I saw my dad walking up 18 was the first time during or since I teed off on 1 when I really thought about him.

Q. Did it feel like a little bit of a double whammy with what happened to Tiger, a close friend of yours, so soon after losing your grandpa?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I keep telling everyone -- I kept telling everyone on my team or my family I'm ready for something good to happen this year. It's been a pretty bad year and a lot of bad things have happened, but that's life, that's a part of it, and you've got to take it for what it is and try to get better because of it and take everything that's happening with a grain of salt, and yeah, I'd say this qualifies as something good.

Q. You think about J.T. where you were at the start of the year and the wild detours that have been mentioned before, did it take winning, do you think, to kind of straighten out the path, to feel like you're back on track, if you will?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't think so. I mean, the head space that I was in this week I think was a huge step for me. I was in just a great head space. I was in a lot better place than I have been the last couple months, so I think that was huge, and I don't think it's any coincidence that my golf was better.

I think you just -- so much time to think out there between shots, before rounds, while you're sleeping, before you're sleeping, over the shot. There's so much time, and it's the only -- it's such a big difference from other kind of reactive sports, that we have so much time to think. It was really hard for me not to sway and start thinking about different things and that affecting me. But like I said earlier, I think with Todd I've been working really hard on getting myself back to where I should be and where I want to be, and yeah, I mean, winning definitely helps. Winning helps everything.

I think just the fact of the head space I was in this week was a big positive.

Q. How did you find it? How did you get there, to that head space you're talking about? It's not easy to do I wouldn't think.

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I did a lot of things. I talked to people. I've reached out to people. I mean, it's not -- I mean, I'm not embarrassed to say that I reached out to talk to people to kind of let my feelings out and just discuss stuff with them. I think it's something, especially at our level, a lot of people probably think that they're bigger and better than that, but some of the thoughts and things I was feeling, it wasn't fair to myself, and I needed to do something, and my girlfriend Jill was very helpful with that and staying on me to make sure I was taking care of myself, like I would want to do for anyone else in my family.

Yeah, just like I do in my golf, if things are going on in life, I need to work on it to try to get it better.

Q. Had you ever had to do that before?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No.

Q. You're pretty low maintenance?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I guess (chuckling).

Q. When you were flying home from LA after that missed cut, where was your head then, and could you have imagined turning things around so quickly at that point?

JUSTIN THOMAS: My head was not in a good place then, and no, I could not imagine turning it around this quickly. I think DJ is a great example of someone I've thought about a lot. I mean, Jimmy and I literally talked about it today. The place that he was in and how he was playing when we played with him in Columbus last year and then how he finished off the year was -- I just can't put it into words how insanely impressive and how I wish more people saw how he played those first two days for what he did the rest of the year.

It's just -- golf is such a hard game. It does that. You can look -- your score can look a lot worse than how you're playing and vice versa. He was going through some tough stuff and tough times, but we all know DJ mentally is really, really strong, and he stays very even keel and forgets stuff easily, and I think that's something that I may have used a little bit to say, you know, I've just had a couple bad weeks, and those -- I didn't play as poorly as he did in that, and

then look what he did, he won the FedExCup and won the Masters and did so many great things and back to No. 1 in the world and dominating. I'm like, if he can do it, why can't I type thing.

I think using examples here and there, but what he did definitely helped.

THE MODERATOR: Justin, congratulations. Thanks for the time.

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