

# THE PLAYERS Championship

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Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

## Justin Thomas

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas to the interview room here at the 2024 PLAYERS Championship, our 2021 PLAYERS Championship winner. Justin, hard to believe you're making your ninth start here at TPC Sawgrass. What's it like to be back.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's great to be back. A place that I really enjoy. I like the golf course, the energy, everything about the tournament. It seems like the TOUR's making a pretty cognizant effort of trying to make this a very, very special week for us and our families and everybody involved, and it feels that way, so it's always great to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Two top 10s this season a T12 last week at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by MasterCard. Just speak to your form coming in this week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I feel good about my game. I feel like things are very, very close in terms of winning tournaments. I feel and know that I'm playing well enough to win tournaments. It's just at this point about actually doing it.

I think it's, like a lot of us, start putting a little too much pressure on ourselves and I sometimes want it a little bit too bad. So just stay patient and just trying to let it come to me and let it happen, and hopefully it happens sooner rather than later.

THE MODERATOR: With that we'll open it up to questions.

**Q. Could you lay out for us how your friendship with Gary Woodland developed and how jarring it was for you when you first heard the news that he had a brain tumor.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, Gary, man, I have a lot of stories and a lot of funny memories of kind of around the first times that I met Gary. He's always very welcoming and just very easygoing, very happy. He never acts like too big for anybody. He treats me the same -- maybe a little



differently, but treats me very similar now to how he did when he first met me. I just think that's a great quality of him.

He actually told me when we were playing the 3M. I mean, Gary's been one of my -- I would say one of my closest friends out here for awhile, and especially with him being in South Florida now, we're spending more time.

But I just asked how -- I always make fun of him. He's getting old, and I'm like, you know with your old body and everything good, how you feeling, do you need anything this off-season. He's like, well, and I could tell he didn't really want to talk about it. I kind of just let it go. The next day we just happened to be by ourselves, and he told me what was going on, and I about fell to my knees.

I mean, I was like, I appreciate you telling me that in the middle of my round, Gary. I had like an 8-footer for birdie, and I was like, you really think I'm going to make that putt now? But it was a big perspective thing, and I'm just, I'm so happy that he's back out here and doing well.

**Q. So did he tell you this in the middle of a round?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah.

**Q. In the middle of a round?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

**Q. You were paired with him?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

**Q. Did you like admonish him afterwards a little bit for picking that time?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, no, I mean, look, I asked the question and, no, I don't legitimately have any hard feelings about something like that. It was just, it's more perfect for me because then it's just another opportunity for me to give him a little bit of grief, because that's what we like to do to each other.

**Q. As a follow-up to this, how uplifting is it for you now knowing that things are on a much better track for**



**him, and even though part of that tumor is still there, that it seems like he's back to being Gary.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's great. It's a great -- it's obviously a great story. I mean, it's great for him and his family. I think golf is in reality probably the pretty far down the totem pole in terms of importance and why that need to improve.

I know Gabby is much happier that he's in a better place, I'm sure his kids are, everybody around him. It just so happens that he's also able to play professional golf at the highest level again too, which is great.

**Q. Do you find yourself more appreciative of your game after kind of going through the struggles you did last year compared to maybe what you kind of thought before 2023?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes and no. I definitely, I think it's easy over look, at least for me personally, it's hard to give myself credit when things are going well is how I would maybe best describe it. It's hard to say without really sounding cocky or arrogant, but like I played really, really good golf for six, seven years, and while it was happening of course I would never sit here and tell you -- I would tell you about all the things I would want to do better and why this should have been better because we're golfers; that's what we do.

But, yeah, sometimes when it's not going well it's easier to sit back and look like, all right, damn, I was playing really well and I was doing a lot of things well and I was in contention a lot more than anybody else. I did all these different things. I just think when you're in that moment or when it's going on you sometimes can lose that. You can just lose that view of it.

So it's more just trying to get back, and like I have been enjoying it and enjoying the competition and just trying to put myself there and win tournaments, because that's more fun than anything.

**Q. With regard to Nick Dunlap, curious if you can speak to his kind of quick journey here to get here and how much you've relished trying to help him out a little bit, and what are some of the things that you have tried to impart in terms of advice to him.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's a very, very tough, quick adjustment for anybody. I mean, not that there's probably -- count on your hand the amount of people that have ever done it or had to go through that, so it's not like -- I mean, he can ask me for all the advice that he wants, but in terms of what he actually went through, I can't relate in the sense

of I was supposed to go back to class next week and take some kind of exam and I just won a TOUR event and now I have a full TOUR card into all these events.

So that part, only he could make that -- I do think he made the right decision, sorry, Coach Seawell, but I do; I think and know that he did. But I was there to help him when he was in school and I think he knows that, and I try to always tell that to Coach and the guys on the team when I see them is look, like I was very, very appreciative of anybody at any level above me that was willing to help me when I was that age, and all I wanted to do was get better. I wasn't talking to somebody because of who they were. Like, yeah, it so happened to be that maybe they were successful or they were a big name in golf, but I viewed it as an opportunity to -- I'm talking to this person because they know a lot and I'm able to learn a lot from them, which will give me an edge on the people that I'm playing against.

I want to give Nick all the help I can give, not too much to where he's beating me all the time and all of us, but, yeah, he's just getting his feet under him and getting comfortable, but I have no doubt he'll start playing well here soon.

**Q. Last fall we talked about you wanting a renewed ownership in your swing. Where are you at in that process, and are you still happy with the work you're doing?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's very similar. I'm just doing way more practice and way more work on my own. I just think I used -- I was talking to Mike Tirico about it this morning because he was asking similar about working with my dad and how is that going and everything, and I was like, it's great.

I'm trying to be a little bit more like scheduled and strict in the sense of like, all right, we'll work one day a week when we're home. It's not like, hey, I'm going out to practice and you just come with me.

I think if you look at yourself every day in the mirror for six months you don't notice much change, but if you see yourself the first day and at the end of the six months, then you're like, Dude, you've gained 30 pounds, and it's like -- whereas I would have looked at my swing and be like, that looks terrible. But if you see it every day you may not notice the changes and the differences.

So I think it's beneficial for something like that, but also on the accountability side for me, and I know when I'm out there on the course now is any kind of feels or things that I'm able to manipulate or maybe change on the go or stuff that I've practiced and done on the range at home.

**Q. A bit off topic. No one's ever defended here before. I think it's a course that people say doesn't quite suit one person's game. Can you speak to why someone hasn't been able to kind of find the key to sustained success on this course?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think first and foremost it's just really hard to win a golf tournament, let alone win it, defend and win it back-to-back. So I think that's the start. It's one of the best fields that we have, so that's another reason. It is, it's just, it doesn't -- it truly does not fit anybody. It's not a bomber's course. I mean always it always helps, but you look at a week like this week, how long the rough is, and I just think you have to have a lot of shots and you have to have kind of be able to execute what the course and the conditions are giving you.

Especially with it being in March now, you can get cold, you can get rain, you can get a lot of wind. It's unfortunately going to be soft more often than not but you can get it firm sometimes, so it's more just kind of adapting, adjusting, and it's just not a place I feel like you can show up and you know what you're going to get every single year, like maybe some other places.

**Q. Since you became a member out here, who's been the most dominant player? Did I say that right? Like over the stretch of nine years, which player do you consider to be the most, have the most dominant stretch maybe?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's a good question. I mean I would say obviously not on TOUR anymore but I mean D.J. -- I think D.J. was the most dominant in terms of consistently -- I mean Rory's up there, but he's had some years he hasn't won some. Honestly, I would put myself up there. I have a lot of confidence in saying that. Probably D.J.

**Q. That was the other side. Is there a difference between a guy that would be looked upon as kind of a dominant force compared with people who have had dominant years. You could look at you in 2017 or Jordan, J-Day, etcetera?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, I fall into this all the time with other sports. It's recency bias. It's whatever happens most recent; that's the only thing you have in your head.

I think you see that a lot. Even in like the College Football Playoff; at the end of the day, the schedule is the schedule; it shouldn't necessarily matter when you lost your game, if it's your 10th game or your second game. But for some reason it matters so much more when you lose that 10th game than the second game.

Not looking at Ryan in particular, but it just so happened that Georgia loss late in the season. That's another story, but (laughing). Same thing y'all did, I guess.

So I think it's very similar in that sense of it's easy when especially if you ask a fan, be like, well, you know, how is so-and-so playing, and it's like if they've played well recently, it would be like oh, they're playing great, when maybe you look at the eight months prior to that and they played like crap.

But it doesn't work like that, I would say. I don't know if that's right or wrong, but that at least to me is how it seems.

**Q. Jumping off that question a little bit, you didn't even mention Scottie, for example, who's been on a bender for awhile. He's been No. 1 for almost the last year or so. But yet he doesn't seem to have that kind of superstar aura, no offense to him, just because of the way he carries himself; he's low key. He doesn't have that aura like a Rahm or Rory; you know what I'm saying? What is it about him that's it's like that where he can walk down a busy street in Manhattan and nobody knows who he is. What do you think about that, and do you admire that about him?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I just want to clarify, I didn't say him because he wasn't out here when I turned pro, because I definitely would have said him.

**Q. I wasn't going to say you were dissing him, but he does get overlooked a little bit as a dominant guy, even though he's won a bunch of times.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's ridiculous how good at golf he is and how -- I mean there's a lot of things that's -- I'm actually really excited to play with him this week, because we've had a couple times where we've been close to playing or we were supposed to play on Sunday at Pebble and then obviously it got cancelled. We just haven't played together in a tournament in a while.

It's impressive. He's just one of those guys I think you're in the scoring tent and you're maybe doing your scorecard and someone's doing theirs and you hear Montana in there, like okay, Scottie, I had you for 67, and you're like, what, you shot 67? You're like how, what?

It's just he just plots his way along and gets around and he just does it better than everybody else in the world, and he's done it better than everybody for a really long time.

That doesn't really address what you asked me in terms of

kind of him being under the radar, but I think that's also kind of speaks to him. He doesn't care about social media. He doesn't care about popularity. He just loves golf and he's just a grinder and all he wants to do is just play really, really well and practice a lot, and that's what he does.

**Q. Feels like we are kind in an era of discussion about the structure of the TOUR, who should be in events and what the events should look like, where the events should go. Curious, a lot of those thoughts are about, they invoke other sports, right, that golf should try to establish events like F1 has or a structure that resembles a Champions League. Curious, as a sports fan, do you look outward and feel like pro golf should invoke any one thing in particular that you really like when you look across the sports world?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I try not to do too much, just because it's obviously so different. The one thing that I would say as a whole that I like the most is just when you have all the best players playing together as often as possible -- I mean, obviously you can't have, you know, not every NFL game is a Pro Bowl, but it essentially it is, right? I mean, you have -- it's all the best in their specific sport, and it's an extremely small percentage in the grand scheme of things of how many play professionally in their sport.

But there's nothing better than Sundays when you can just sit on the couch and you get to watch some freak athletes go play football and hit each other all day.

I mean, so I don't know, but that's kind of the main thing I feel like I've -- I feel like would be, is beneficial to fans and is beneficial to us. I was talking to Coach Seawell this week, coach at Alabama, and we talked about our team and we talked about the practices and when we played and how competitive Bobby Wyatt was and Cory Whitsett, and Trey Mullinax, Hunter Hamrick, Scott Strohmeier, Tom Lovelady, all these guys, and it's like we truly feel like we were better because we played around each other and practiced with each other.

I think the same is to be said for at a competitive level. I mean, I know Jordan and I fed off each other in 2017, 2018, 2016, and we kind of pushed each other a little bit. We may not have had a conversation about it, but I know internally I don't want him to beat me, and I'm pretty sure he feels the same way.

So I think getting all the best players in the world together more often is just going to create a more and more competitive nature and which I guess would result in a better product.

**Q. Is it a little dangerous then I guess for pro golf to**

**look outward and try to replicate things, because it's so different?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. I think more than anything as I'm trying to not -- I mean, I was this way kind of when the TOUR Championship format changed. It's like, look, I didn't like it, it's still not my favorite, but you have to give something time.

That's how I'm trying to be with how these tournaments are. It's like, I think that from my understanding it sounds like that's what a lot of the board members or Jay or people are saying is that we need to give this a little bit of time to see if it works.

Pretty much anything, any league, sport, whatever, has tried ever has been really their best guess of what they think is best, and then if it isn't, they change it and do something differently, and if it is good, you stick with it. So, hopefully the choices we've made have been the best choices and we can just keep on keeping on.

**Q. Rory used the term "fatigue" this morning to describe how he felt fans were starting to feel about kind of new paradigm in professional golf, all the questions around money and deals or lack thereof, equity grants, whatever. I'm wondering, are you feeling that same way? Are players feeling that same way? You guys are going on almost three years now of answering questions about some matters that you don't have a great insight into. Are you feeling that same sense of fatigue now coming in week after week and trying to answer these questions?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: A little bit. I wouldn't say it's -- it's just one of things. I don't mean this disrespectfully, but it's like, we get asked it by y'all and y'all either write about it or it's the headlines or whatever it is, and like we know or I know coming into a press conference, like I'm probably going to get asked a question about LIV, I'm probably going to get asked a question about this. It's like, but if I don't, then it doesn't happen.

But I also understand that that's what's going on in our sport and that's what y'all are here for and that's what we have to talk about.

But it's not the same fatigue that I felt probably like six months or a year into it, when it was so new that nobody knew what was going on and all anybody could talk about in the locker room was what was going on. Like, that was annoying, to be honest, to me.

I've just tried to kind of remove myself from most of the conversations because I just don't -- I haven't found the

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

benefit to it. I'm just, I don't want to say hoping for the best - that sounds kind of hopeless - but just trying to remember or help look at the bigger better things going on kind of thing.

**Q. So you don't necessarily feel like an obligation to sort of inform yourself about what's happening? Not suggesting you're not, but Viktor was sort of saying earlier, I know what I know; I haven't probably dug as deep as I could have or should have. So I'm just wondering, have you come in knowing the kind of questions you're getting are you kind of making an effort to sort of know as much as you possibly can?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: No. Maybe that's the college dropout in me (laughing). I think -- I mean, y'all know, I will be the first person to tell you guys exactly how I feel and speak my mind, and I'm never going to -- I don't want to be a robot up here and say anything.

But at the same time, I'm very uncomfortable talking about things that I don't really know much about, and that I kind of like it that way. I think you can kind of go down that rabbit hole of wanting to know a lot and knowing a lot, but at the end of the day, I just want to play great golf and win golf tournaments, whether I'm playing for one dollar or 10 million or a billion dollars. Like I still want to win that trophy that they're giving out on Sunday at the end of the week, and my best opportunity of doing that is probably to focus more on golf than the alternative stuff.

But I do know that I have a good group of guys that if I want to know more information, then I can reach out to them and they can try to fill my dumb self in.

**Q. When you won here in 2021 and for many years before that, this tournament was build as the best field in golf. With the LIV guys not here anymore, that's probably not the case. How do you feel about that?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it's still been the best field in golf for many previous years. Yeah, you could always make an argument that there's other tournaments that are or are not. The PGA Championship has been the deepest field in terms of the most top 100 players, and I'm not just saying that for selfish reasons, it's just the truth.

I know what you mean in terms of how World Ranking and guys that are or aren't on the TOUR anymore, but that's just kind of the reality that -- and what they have put themselves in, and, yeah, I mean, I'm not going to have an asterisk next to my name for winning this because the field wasn't too good, right.

**Q. What's your level of confidence in the job that Jay's**

**been doing?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I know that it's gone way -- I shouldn't say way deeper, but it's just way bigger than Jay. I think Jay's just a part of the huge group of people that has been pushing for all the changes and progress that the TOUR's been making.

So I've been pleased with all the latest stuff that's been happening and been going on, and Jay's been a part of that group, so I think this is a lot bigger than one person sitting there and making all the decisions. Understanding he has his role, but there's a really, really big group of people and players that are involved now that I think are making a whole some decision for all of us.

**Q. One of the things that Jay stressed yesterday was this desire to improve the TOUR product going forward, especially with the new PGA TOUR Enterprises, and the default answer from stars like yourself is always to just win a bunch of tournaments and everything will kind of take care of itself. I guess outside of performance, what do you think you can do personally that would engage the fans in a new way moving forward?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, some of it may be things that I don't know, right. Like I feel like I'm making an effort now in my career to engage with fans or to, things like my AJGA event that I've had every year and in Louisville, Kentucky. I mean, it's little things like that which now, not to give you a shout-out back there, but like an intern who worked for the AJGA who has worked my event forever just started with the PGA TOUR, and who knows if that progress would have been made if I didn't have that event and maybe then somehow with the PGA TOUR -- so it's, there's just so much so many little things that I probably -- I shouldn't single myself, that a lot of us do that we probably don't even know that can help or that are helping grow the game, and just make it more accessible is not the right word, but just make it more watchable, more fun.

I just, I hope that I can continue to do stuff like that. I'm not necessarily sitting at home trying to come up with ideas of what's new ways that I can help. I'd like to think that I do as much as I can already, and I'll just continue to try to do those things, and if other opportunities present itself, then I think myself and others will try to do so. But it's a hard thing, right, to just come up with a couple things like these are a couple items that could help type thing.

**Q. Would you consider, in the off-season of course, giving like a 15-handicap just, I don't know, one lesson maybe at TPC, just play 18 quick, I don't know, just spit balling here, you don't have to answer now, give it**



**some thought, sleep on it.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Okay. Yeah, we can maybe do like a home and home, like where you come here, maybe we'll spend some time on the baseball field or I don't know what do you think.

**Q. I'll give you some baseball lessons, you give me some golf lessons you got it?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: My dad's the coach, by the way, so anything bad that happens, that's on him.

**Q. You bring your dad, I'll bring mine. I'll see you here, TPC. We'll talk later; we'll figure it out.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Perfect.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you so much for your time. Best of luck this week.

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