

THE PLAYERS Championship

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Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Justin Thomas

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning. We would like to welcome the 2021 PLAYERS Championship winner Justin Thomas to the interview room here at the 2025 PLAYERS Championship. Justin, you're making your 10th start this week. Talk about what it's like to be back here.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's always great to be back here. I was just trying to think of honestly what this, what the media room situation was like over the years, and I don't remember it being this big, that's for sure.

But yeah, I think everything that the TOUR has done with Sawgrass, just with the whole experience, with the golf course, I mean it always just looks so perfect, so perfectly manicured. Yeah, it has a very, very special feel to the entire week, and I think you can tell as players are starting to get into that mindset and kind of that mode of it's getting to the big stretch of golf here, and I think it definitely seems to start with this event, so it's great to be here.

THE MODERATOR: You have three top 10s already this season, including a runner-up at the American Express, just talk about where your game is right now heading into the week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: My game feels, it feels really good. I think even a week like last week, I feel like I played better, but, Bay Hill, it's such a bizarre place; I think it, I said to Rev walking up 18 on Sunday, I just was like, I don't think there's any courses we play that make you just want to, like, pry your own hair out or hit yourself with a club more than that place. It's just, it's unbelievable. I think it can expose you very, very quickly.

Sorry I kind of got off topic there, but the reason I said that is because it, you know, even the weeks that I feel like I maybe don't have great finishes or I haven't had great finishes, I feel like it's close and doing a lot of the right things.

So yeah, I'm excited to keep playing and competing and trying to give myself chances to win.



THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Is there one hole that plays more different now than when you first came here in 10 years, either due to the course alterations or distance gains?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Distance-wise, no. I mean, the golf course plays so, so, so different in March than it does in May. The difference of Bermuda and overseed is, it's like two different golf courses. I think the year that I won, it was -- I mean, I don't know how many years we've done this in March now, but it was definitely the firmest or the closest to May I've seen it play.

I think this course is more fun and more challenging when it gets like that. I think it puts more of a premium on the shot making and just the ball striking aspect. I think that's why in May you saw so many different winners. I think you saw a huge variety of bombers and short hitters and left-to-right, right-to-left, whatever you want to call it.

Obviously when it's a little bit softer it changes that. I think you've seen some just longer hitters that are winning because the course does play much softer. But it is, it just is -- it requires people to play from very similar places on a lot of holes. You can get very different weather. You can have some nasty, cold north winds in March versus May, so I would say a lot of the differences just come from kind of how the golf course and the weather gives you.

Q. Scottie's trying to three-peat here. Before he even defended his title, no one had gone back-to-back. Just wondering what about this championship or this course maybe doesn't allow consistent success.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It is interesting. I feel like it's something I've kind of been asked similarly every year. I don't know what it is. The more I play it, the more I think that obviously if you hit every fairway, you hit every green, you don't have that variety, but your ball can just go to a lot of weird places here.

I just think over time you're going to have some years where it honestly -- you just get really unlucky. I mean, I've had so many years going for the 9th hole is a great example of hit a great drive and hit what I feel like is a good second shot into the green, and say you have a left



pin, you're trying to leave it just kind of just right of the green, like normal, playing your angles, and you get one bad kick and now you're on a downslope of one of those moguls.

2 is very similar; you can hit one, you have a right pin, you're trying to hit it over there left side of the green, left edge of the green and you can miss the green by two yards, lands on that slope, and next thing you know you're in some kind of lie on a downslope in the rough that you can't even hit the green.

So very quickly, holes out here can go from birdie holes or birdie opportunities to really grinding for par, sometimes bogey. So I just think over time Pete Dye courses kind of have those characteristics of it requires a little bit of luck.

Obviously it's not a gimmicky course by any means, but just the way that some of the slopes and whatnot are around the greens, I think just over time you're going to have some years you just get unfortunate.

Q. Additionally, first round last year you played with Scottie. Do you remember anything -- he tweaked his neck at one point and was getting -- do you remember just kind of realizing that and kind of watching him go through that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I remember it very well. We were actually, I was talking to him or joking about it last week, because he obviously had the neck situation last year and went on to win, and I didn't know, but I guess his neck, kind of something came up at the Masters last year and obviously he won there. So I was like, clearly you need to tweak your neck more because you've won two pretty big golf tournaments doing it.

But I just remember, and I said, I told him last week, that I think I was more like infatuated watching him go around the course with a messed up neck than I was playing my own game. It was just, it was really -- I think watching great players or any player win without their best stuff or get it around a golf course without their best stuff is very impressive, and I think it kind of speaks volumes to how they are as a player.

He was far from a hundred percent, and I audibly laughed out loud as his tee shot on 12 because his reaction was -- made like even Scottie's follow-throughs and body language look absurd. And then I felt pretty bad when I realized he did it because his neck was messed up.

But just watching him get around and hit way more club because he couldn't fully turn or not attack certain pins or shots because he didn't have everything in the tank, that's

what great players and some of the best do is they find a way to get it around and find a way to be in contention, and he won one of the biggest tournaments doing that.

Q. There's a lot of things like this being your 10th PLAYERS or playing with Luke Clanton earlier in the year that might make you feel old, but is there anything on TOUR that you kind of makes you feel young?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not good that I can't come up with an answer probably pretty quickly. Not really. I think I'm holding on to my friendship with the Gary Woodlands the Adam Scotts as much as I can to try to make them feel old and make me feel young, so maybe guys like that are my only saving grace.

Q. You mentioned the how the course here can turn birdie opportunities into survival golf pretty quickly. Over these 10 years how have you learned to adjust to the conditions here and avoid trouble as best you can?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think it's being -- you have to be in the right state of mind. You have to be very patient. You have to be accepting at a place like this. It's obviously easier said than done.

Like all of us, or all of the other players, I'm sure I've had years I've done it better than others, but the goal is to play well enough to not present those opportunities as often as possible, but at the end of the day, things are going to happen and it's just really about minimizing the mistakes.

I think driving the ball is extremely important here, which is I think a huge reason Scottie has not only done well here but everywhere, but especially here. Driving the ball is a premium because you have a lot of scoring clubs and four par-5s and birdie opportunities. So getting it in play off the tee, and then from there really just taking each hole and each shot for what it's worth.

I think once you get ahead of yourself, you could be standing on a hole like on 8 and you're like, well, I got a par-5 in No. 9 and then I have a short iron on 11 and then another par-5 on 11 and then a short hole at 12, and you're thinking I have some birdie opportunities, and next thing you know, you can make a couple bogeys or even doubles pretty quickly by getting ahead of yourself. So it's just very much staying in the moment and trying to execute search shot the best you can and just more accepting and taking where it goes.

Q. It's been a couple of months or six weeks since your letter. Have you seen it resonate? Have you seen any kind of changes that you hope to see because of that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I guess. I mean, I've been asked that before. I don't know if I'm probably the right person to ask. I probably honestly would ask y'all or ask people that are watching more so.

But I would say I've seen a difference in the broadcast and our TV partners and stuff like that, which is -- I mean, it was a big part of it as well. I wanted -- it was a message to everybody; it wasn't just a message to players. I think it was like, hey, let's do all we need to work with you guys, you guys need to work with us, y'all need to work with us, we'll work with ya'll. We're all on the same team, so let's make sure that we're all making progress together and we're not trying to hold anybody back.

I think that -- I feel like the listening to the fans and making adjustments for the better in the broadcast and how things are done and maybe coverage, whatever you want to call it, I think that some of that improvement that I've seen has not only shown in the ratings but it's been taken well by fans.

You're always going to have negatives, no matter what, but it's just about getting obviously more positives and more people wanting to see the change and the effort and I feel like that's been the case, but I don't know if it has anything -- I'm not going to necessarily take credit for it by any means, but I would hope so at least.

Q. How does life change in priorities change for a first-time dad?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, priorities change a lot. They completely change. I think for me, just the way that my brain and I'm wired, it's like I welcome the challenge. I get excited for it and I think I'm just trying to get better at -- or I realize quickly that of -- just separating my life.

I think it's very easy to take things home with you from the golf course or it's easy to dwell on things or whatnot, but I think it's been better for me in the sense of I just, I try to very much manage my time as well as possible and make things more efficient, but when I'm out here, I mean, number one, I'm always going to be a dad and husband, but when I'm out here, I'm Justin Thomas the golfer and I'm trying to do everything I can to be the best golfer I possibly can. Then as soon as I get home I'm not the golfer anymore; I'm there to take care of Molly and provide for Molly and Jill and be the best dad I can, the best husband I can, and it's not time to think about how I should have hit 7-iron on 16 instead of 6 or whatever.

So I think that's helped me because I'm just prioritizing things differently and not dwelling on things in the past

because yeah, what you're taking care of a three-month-old it's no time to be thinking about anything other than taking care of a three-month-old.

Q. I'm doing a story on pace of play and I was talking with Gary Young and he was mentioning that they have this data every week of who is the fastest player, who is the slowest player; they can aggregate it over time. Their take is it would be a good deterrent to make this public. Is that the kind of thing you would support?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It definitely is. It's something I've said, if we put it in the locker room or put it out, which would obviously end up getting out, but nobody wants to be known as that. I mean, I'm the first to admit I mean I'm on the slow side of players. It bothers me, but I've talked to many officials about it, like I want to know why I'm slow because obviously the first thing that any slower player thinks is that they're not slow.

I never want to be the guy that gets paired with somebody and that person is like oh, my gosh, I have to play with Justin, he's so slow, because I know guys that I get paired with that I'm like, oh, my gosh, I have to play with so-and-so, they're so slow, and it's not a good feeling because you know you're going to be on the clock, you know, and that's not fun.

Having to play a place like Bay Hill, if you're behind and you're warned, like that's not a fun place where you feel like you have to pick up pace. But I do think it would be something that would be helpful, but I just think there's a lot of little things that go into it.

The fact of we played like Torrey Pines, Genesis we played in twosomes on the weekend and we played in four hours, versus a couple weeks ago or before that at the Farmers they played in -- that was like the story that was going around, it was like five hours and 30 minutes, and Dottie said on air how long it was taking.

But the difference it makes of twosomes and threesomes and the amount of people in the field, it's a big deal. So I think that we're making progress, but at the same time it can always get better. It's just finding the fine line of improving it and making sure that it's improvement that's needed, while not jeopardizing the game and just the reality.

When you play at a place like an Open Championship when the greens are 9, the ball's not really going to ever get outside of tap-in versus last week like it's really hard to hit a putt and be able to finish after that. Like it's just hard to get the ball around the hole because of how fast the

greens are. A place like Augusta, whatever.

So if you look at every group and people are marking after every putt, all of a sudden you add another person to the group, you have the entire -- like that's a lot of time that people don't realize. But as long as we're making strides, then I'm for anything.

Q. After Rory won Bay Hill he said that he's kind of taken a look at Scottie's game and the success he had and the things he wanted to take from Scottie's game. I was wondering if you've done something similar, if based on his success there's things you try to emulate in your own or just if Scottie continues to have the success how he might make people reconsider kind of how to play in this day and age or play differently.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think it's hard to play -- at least in my opinion I think it's hard to play with him and be like, oh, I want to play more like Scottie. It's like, no duh, who wouldn't want to hit a lot of the fairways and a lot of the greens and be the best ball-striker statistically on planet earth for the last couple years.

Like, yeah, of course that sounds good. But that's not necessarily -- it's something you can work to get toward, but I don't want to say it's unrealistic; it's just, it's the reality, right. But the times I've spent playing with him or even watched, his demeanor and his mental toughness and the way he plots his way around golf courses, and how he just wears people down.

I mean, playing the Hero with him in December last year, that was a good learning experience for me, because I've been in contention a lot the last couple years that I haven't won, but I hadn't had a lead and played with it and got to watch the guy who's won more than anybody in my own group.

Just playing with him in that situation was -- it sucked because he beat me and I didn't play well, but it was a learning experience for me to just watch how he plotted his way around, and I feel like very similar to what I've done many times when I've won and how I've handled it mentally.

I think that's what he does better than anybody else. Then you add that with the quality of his golf and it's why he's been so tough to beat over the years. So I think there's a lot of areas of his game you can obviously choose to try to copy or emulate, but I think his mental side is what separates him more than people realize.

Q. Given the amount of time it's taken the TOUR and LIV to come to some kind of resolution, are you

surprised that it's been in limbo this long?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I guess. But also, I don't know. There's just so much that goes into it. Like I think it's -- I'm glad I don't know more or I'm not more invested because I think it would be mentally draining, physically draining. It just would be exhausting.

Yeah, I think it's very obvious we all just want to get it resolved, but this is something that's pretty serious, so it's not like you or anybody can say, all right, this is what we're going to do without it being perfect. I think obviously everybody needs to be on the same page, and I think when it gets to that level, I don't know if the government's getting involved, like there's just so many things above my pay grade that are involved that I don't know about, that I probably shouldn't or can't speak to because there's just so many things involved in it. But obviously like the rest of us, we would love for it to be done sooner rather than later.

Q. As a follow-up, the few times there might be conversation amongst players, do you get the sense that fatigue has set in with not just with yourself but with all the players?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Definitely has. I think this is like the third time I've played this tournament while this has been going on in some way, shape or form. Yeah, I think we're kind of like past the level of exhaustion. At least it's not consuming everything we're being asked about. You just get a couple things here and there, but there's just so many of us, really on both sides, both us on TOUR and I think the LIV players, that we don't really know what's going on and we're just playing golf and hoping for the best and because there's a lot that we don't know and that we can't control or do letting the higher-ups do it.

Q. You mentioned the three years. Has LIV been good for golf? Would we be playing for -- you, not us, obviously, playing for 25 million. Would the players be taking greater ownership of things, if not for LIV?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think you would be stubborn, and as stubborn as I am, to say that, you know, a lot of things that have happened have been because of them and what's gone on.

I mean, there's a handful of guys or there's a couple guys like a Phil or a Bryson that how they went about it maybe isn't exactly how I would have, but they did make a lot of points or say some things that were -- that had some value to them or had some truth.

But it is just how it all transpired. I obviously wish it could have just gone differently, but that's neither here nor there,

but do I think that a lot of things that have happened on our tour and in our game are because of that.

Now, it's hard to say has it made the game of golf better because, you know, you can take both sides. It's like, yeah, it's maybe done some things on TOUR that have improved the TOUR, but the game of golf as a whole, if it's separated in different and creating some animosity, then that's not necessarily better, and so it's hard to say. You can make arguments on both sides, but there's definitely been some good and bad on both, but wish it obviously could have just been all good and gone on how it was somehow.

Q. What's one thing you've learned about the business of the PGA TOUR that you didn't really know from being on the PAC?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, you don't really get too much into business on the PAC. I feel like that's more of a board member situation or conversation. We really don't -- I'm trying to even think of when we've talked business side, other than purses changing or FedExCup changing and whatever you want to call it.

We really don't, we're not sitting there crunching numbers of like, oh, what are we spending on this or how are we doing this or what are those employees or what's going on. I think being a board member, and I applaud those guys so much, because they give so much time, the player directors, of being the guys that are sitting in those meetings and talking and listening and hearing all that out.

But, you know, the stuff we're -- I don't want to say it is less important, it's just different, that we're talking about on the PAC.

Q. What's something you feel like you've had an impact on?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Just the PAC in general? I just think, I mean I noticed because, I mean, I was off the PAC for a couple years, when I first got on, I got on because it was like, I want to -- it was kind of similar to what I said about like the letter; I don't want to be the guy that's sitting in the back and complaining about things but not doing anything about it.

I felt like going on the PAC was my chance to speak my mind. Then to be perfectly honest my first couple years on the PAC, I didn't feel like that was the case. I felt like it was, you know, nothing was voted on, it just was basically us going in there and being told kind of what was going to happen to an extent.

So that's when I then went off. And then I feel like we have a voice now. I feel like it's my job on the PAC is to speak on my behalf, but also the other members, to say how we feel, to say, ask questions, whatever you want to call it, and I feel like I don't necessarily -- I can't necessarily put a finger on like one thing that we definitely did this, but I would just say as a whole what we've changed is just our voice and how we're heard. I truly feel like we have a say in how things are done and will be done going forward type thing, which is extremely important, obviously.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you for your time Justin. Good luck this week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you.

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