

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 the 2021 PLAYERS Championship winner Justin Thomas to the interview room here at 2026 THE PLAYERS. He's making his second start of the season. Justin, welcome back to TPC Sawgrass. If we can get your comments on being here this week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Always excited to be here. Generally it's not my second event of the season is here, so I'm sure it feels like this event came quickly for a lot of the guys in terms of how fast the season goes, but a little bit more so for me, given my situation.

But I'm always happy to be at TPC Sawgrass and playing in THE PLAYERS. It's been one of my favorite events, one of my favorite courses since the first time I got here in my rookie year so excited to be here.

THE MODERATOR: One year removed from tying the course record with a 62 including a record 11 birdies. Just take us back to that round.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I think it was -- obviously it was a lot of fun. It was needed after my Thursday round. I think a very, you know, I love Joe Skovron to death. I loved the first two days, and the relationship we have, you know, he texted me that night and he goes, a lot of people are going to talk about your round Friday, he's like, but I remember your finish on Thursday.

I birdied my 7th birdie of the 8th hole and the 9th hole to shooting it was like 79 or something like that. And so I felt like I took a little bit of that momentum and rode it into Friday and had nothing to lose.

And, yeah, it was one of those fun days where you go a little unconscious and just kind of see pin, hit pin, and made some putts while I was at it too.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Start with something a little bit off the wall, I guess,



but how much do you pay attention during the week of a tournament to the weather conditions, either that day or across the week, and do you kind of have a lot of weather apps on your phone or do you rely mostly on the TOUR guys, Stewart Williams and Wade?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm going to tell you. (Looking at phone.) I have six weather apps. I have The Weather Channel app is just kind of my standard weather app, but The Weather Bug is my optimistic weather app. I'm a huge weather optimist.

Like people, you know, rightfully so, but you see a chance of storms and it's oh, you know, you look at the weather today for the rest of the week and Thursday's going to be a rain-out.

I'm like, no it's not. It's going to get better. It's going to be fine. Yeah, there's a chance of rain, but it could be overnight and there's a lot that can happen. Like it's going to be fine.

But that being said, yes, I will look at the weather probably in advance more so for packing purposes. A place like this I feel like I've played enough that getting different wind conditions doesn't necessarily like throw me for a curveball like maybe playing some places like majors that we don't play that often.

If you're playing practice rounds all with a south wind and then, say, it's a north wind in the tournament, like that can throw you for a bit of a curveball if it's a place you don't play often.

But this place, I don't really see that, so I'll look at weather and like, yeah, as I said, I got seven or six options, so maybe I'll just go with whatever one has the best.

Q. Does the information you see pretty much match what the TOUR meteorologist services are giving you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think we can all agree the weatherman's the best job you can have in the world. You get paid to be wrong pretty often, and if you're wrong they obviously know a lot more than we do.

But, yeah I don't know, especially anybody that's spent



time in Florida let alone lives here, we have stuff that can pop up pretty quickly left and right. Not as much this time of year as once we kind of get in the summer it just happens every day.

But, yeah, I will look at it, but I generally, if I'm looking like I'll check the more so like the wind direction or kind of where it's coming from like before I'm going to warm-up or if it's like a long walk to the first tee even I'll look at it and you can kind of get an idea of where it is in my warm-up and go from there.

Q. Bay Hill you mentioned that physically you were feeling fine, just maybe the results were more of a concentration issue. Is that something that was just a byproduct of not getting competitive reps over the last five months or is that something you've been kind of fighting throughout your career? And then I guess how do you rectify that coming into this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was probably a combination of a couple different things. I think, I mean to be perfectly honest, there's no scenario that I ever would draw up or be okay with in terms of how long I've taken off and how long I haven't played if I'm going to come back and shoot the scores.

Like I'm never going to say that that's okay. I am still, you know, going to be a little easier on myself than normal. It's not a very great event to come back to, to be perfectly honest (laughing). It's just the fact of the matter. I really, really would have loved to play Cognizant, but I don't like playing four in a row. I haven't my whole career.

So I definitely don't want to start my season playing four in a row given the circumstances. I feel like here and Tampa, Tampa's a golf course I love and I just really feel like I have a great chance to win every time I tee it up.

So it just is more of one of those things, again, of, yes, it's an event I want to play, but it's just kind of the way that it unfolded that I'm starting my season probably at the toughest test that we have.

But, yeah, it just was something where take that much time off, I generally am a little bit rusty just in terms of the thought process and kind of how you're plotting your way around during a tournament versus not of the so usually after a couple weeks it was all that and more after six months.

Q. When you got out you said you were trying to give yourself some grace. Were you able to do that over the weekend and what did you do when you got out there Saturday, Sunday?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I did. It just took a little bit. I was really, really, really down and bummed Friday. Again, I wasn't expecting anything unbelievable by any means.

But again, like I said, there's no scenario where I'm okay and think that it's fine to shoot that poorly and put those kind of scores up.

But, yeah, I really just needed a little bit of time to decompress and think about it and just almost regroup, if you will.

Yeah, it just is something where just kind of, just get back to work and keep working on the things -- don't feel like I need to blow it up and restart and do all these things differently.

It's continuing to work on the things I'm working on and continue to give attention to things that need attention to. But also, yeah, see areas that I could improve on after, you know, not a great week, and I had a lot of those areas.

So just working on 'em.

Q. This is the first year in forever Tiger's technically not eligible for this event. And we know the history. They don't give exceptions. If Tiger wanted to play, what would you say?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I'm always going to be for him playing. I think for the betterment of golf and the tournament, I don't think there's anybody that would be against it. I guess unless somebody that isn't qualified, I'm sure they would like to play too.

But I guess we'll cross that bridge if we get there.

Q. Where did you end up playing on Saturday?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I actually didn't play. It's one of those things I realized of like, okay, yes you want to play, you want to go do this and that, but I planned on kind of these three weeks of taking the Monday off after. Just taking a day off I think is kind of what I need to do for the time being.

So, yeah, just I went and worked out and got some treatment and actually just drove here. So no golf.

Q. Sunday took off?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I played 18 with Sam Burns yesterday here. It's actually quite peaceful.

Q. How would you compare your game from when you won here five years ago? What's better? What are you still working on?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, always working on, I think all of us are, trying to get better in certain areas here and there and fine tune things. But nothing, I feel like nothing really stands out in terms of, I mean statistically you could definitely say just the my ball striking and the consistency of my iron game or driving just was tighter.

The bad days were -- aren't as good as I would like them at the moment, but I feel like I'm a better putter than I was then. I feel like my short game's always getting better. There's definitely times that I may be not thinking my way around a course as well as I would like to, or that I maybe have in previous years or a week like that.

It's all in there. It's not like it's something -- talent or skillset doesn't go away. It's just not there at a specific time. So it's just trying to get it to come out as often as possible.

Q. Let's start with those weather apps. Have you ever thought about deleting a couple of 'em?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not really, no. Got no reason to.

Q. Where you're at right now starting so late, how much is the I guess the tighter margins to re-qualify for the TOUR on an annual basis been part of your come-back-to-the-TOUR mindset? Does that make sense?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. In terms of do I feel a need to either play, start sooner, or play more because of how the TOUR's setup; is that what you mean?

Q. Yeah.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't. I'm trying -- I really tried not to. I would say if that was the case I would have played Genesis in a heartbeat. I mean I was playing rounds of golf. I played a couple rounds of golf even the week of Pebble.

I just, I really, really stressed so much on myself of just not rushing this. Just so that I'm not coming back in my first tournament back and it's like I'm just trying to get through the week.

Because when other things aren't working properly, then other parts of your body start compensating and then that's how you get injured in other areas. So it's like I just, yeah, of course I think anybody would be an idiot to say that, oh, I'm just right on pace. Like it's fine. It shouldn't be a

stress, or not a stress, but shouldn't be a challenge for me to get to Atlanta, get in these tournaments.

Like of course it's going to be harder. I missed a handful of events that I play really, really well, but there's still no reason or no reason I shouldn't believe and know that I can't still do all the things that I would want to achieve in a normal season.

I'm still able to play all the majors, I'm able to play in these, in THE PLAYERS and still playing in, you know, a lot of big events that I played well in or won.

So if I just stick to kind of what I'm doing and not force the issue, yeah, I very well could have to add an event or two here on there, but I can't worry about that. I just can only worry about THE PLAYERS in a week like this.

Q. On that surgery, a lot of guys have had something similar. Have you sought council with any veteran pros about trying to establish patience and trying to come back at the right time?

JUSTIN THOMAS: A little, yeah, I have. I mean, I would say the resounding thing that I heard most from everybody is just no one's ever come back too late. Everybody always comes back too early. I'm very -- honestly, I take a lot of pride and very proud of myself. I never once during the recovery or once I was starting to play golf and hit balls, I never once pushed it like let me see if I can hit a 5-iron, let me see if I can hit a driver. Or let me like hit, like it feels okay but like me hit a couple more balls.

I never let myself get to that point. I'm like, this is -- I'm 32 years old. I can play this sport competitively and really, really well for another 10 to 15 years like no problem if I just go about this how I should.

And, yes it sucks so bad to miss Riviera. Like of course I don't want to miss that event. Or to miss the events earlier in the season, or not be sharp for some of these events that I love.

But, you know, in the big picture it's like if I struggle at the beginning of the year to come back from this injury and I go win a couple majors this year, like nobody's going to remember that I just shot 14-over at Bay Hill, right?

So it's just about just keep plugging away and just keep trying to get better and not let any kind of injury be a hindrance on hopefully along successful career.

Q. Noticing from your return last week there was a few older clubs at the top end of your bag but they looked pretty new. I would ask about how long have you had

those in there and like having some of those older models, and do you have a little personal stockpile or the Titleist guys bring those for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I didn't. I only had one different club in the bag. When you have a lot of time off you can -- I cleaned out my garage, so man, I had a lot of golf clubs. Yeah, a lot that -- old stuff that I found. A couple heads like 3-wood and 5-wood heads that I found which were nice because there's not a lot of those left.

They're not exactly -- they haven't made them for a while. So it was nice to add a couple to my stockpile. So that was a good bonus. Yeah, it just something, yeah, I kind of had found and knew I had hit well and had success with, so, yeah, gave it a try.

Q. There's been a lot of speculation around Tommy Fleetwood being kind of an apparel free agent right now. Seems like you're experimenting with some different stuff as well. Wondering if you could just clear up what's going on with your apparel deal and where you're looking or where your head's at with that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm wearing whatever I want every day I wake up. It's kind of nice. Yeah, we've kind of joked and seen each other here and there and we'll kind of look at what they're wearing, kind of look at the tag, see what's going on.

But, yeah, just was one of those things that, you know, when it's right and when something makes sense, the timing, it will be what it is. But now, for the time being, yeah, I'm just kind of enjoying what I'm most comfortable in and whatever it is at that specific time.

Q. Is there anything that you're realizing that you really like to wear that you like haven't been able to wear for a long time.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. It's hard to say. I think it's more of the, yeah, it's whatever. They all might be the same size or look the same or whatever, but everything fits very, very differently. So it's just nothing in particular. Just more the randomness, probably.

Q. With your familiarity with this event and success here would you say that the course or the tournament as a whole has gotten tougher or easier from your perspective from a course setup standpoint have you seen or noticed anything over the last few years that stood out to you in terms of how hard or how easy the course is playing?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think in general in March it's going to play easier. I think the scores will be lower just because it's most likely going to be softer. I think when it's overseed versus Bermuda, like you're just victim to the type of grass. We see it at anyplace we play overseed. Like the fairways last week were overseed and like the tee shots, they're still -- the fairways are still firm or can you see it's burnt out, but we'll still get mud balls.

Or like a week like here it was not soft by any men's and yesterday Sam and I still got a fair amount of mud balls. It's not anything to do with the condition of the golf course. It's just when -- Augusta is the same way. Like it's just, the overseed, how it is. It's just the mud or something in the soil. Like it's just, it picks up more mud.

I don't know the scientific reason why, but I've played enough golf to realize that that is the case. But because of that it's just softer than it is when it's Bermuda. And any time you give us a softer golf course I think that we're generally going to play it better because the ball it's easier to get it close to the hole and have you more access to certain pin locations and chipping around the greens.

But with that being said, you can get some pretty cold, nasty north winds in March versus May. So like most situations, the weather has a lot to do with it. But I would say as a whole it's going to play more under par in March than it did in May.

Q. Is there any way to set it up potentially harder given, like you said, the conditions and sort of the reality of the time of the year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: What do you mean?

Q. Like is there anything setup-wise that could be don't you think to make it more challenging?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. They grow the rough out pretty proper. It's the same every week. It's frustrating watching and seeing, whether it's golf fans, people, whatever it is of getting frustrated about seeing scores what they are.

But at the end of the day a lot of what the courses is -- they're victim by the conditions and the weather. The TOUR can do all they want, but at the end of the day if it rains and it's soft, like they can't -- yeah, they have -- I'm sure they have maybe some SubAir, they have something that could make it firmer, but it's still going to be softer.

That's just when it's softer it's going to play easier. It just doesn't matter where you are or what the situation is. That's just kind of the way it is.

Q. Curious, have you had any formal or official discussions with anyone about being the next Ryder Cup captain? And specifically I guess along those same lines, would any of them have been Tiger?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Have I personally?

Q. Right. I mean, with the group or what you, just I don't even know if there is a formal thing that would occur, but...

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm on the Ryder Cup Committee, yeah. Yeah, we've had some conversations, but those are all personal within the Committee.

Q. What are you expecting as far as when there might be a resolution, if you can even say?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I think it's just kind of wait. We wait and see.

Q. Has it been refreshing to be able to pick your own clothes and are you going to do any scripting for the majors?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's refreshing but it's also, it's harder. I mean my wife will tell you like I'll sit there and just stare in my closet and look and say, okay, I can do this with this.

I mean I love clothes. I love fashion. Like I just -- I've always enjoyed it. So that being said, when it comes to like packing I'm not just -- I'm not having her pick the stuff out for me or like I'm not just kind of grabbing some pants and shirts.

Like I'm -- I just, I like to put together outfits and figure it out. But because I'm doing it it's probably taking me quite a bit longer than it did the other way.

But that being said, it's still -- like I said, it's fun to be able to do, to me. And it's not -- yeah, it's just kind of like whatever you're waking up and feeling that day type thing. But may have to put a little more thought of it ahead of time for some weeks.

Q. What was your reaction to the new tag line of March is Going to be Major?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Probably the same thing everybody else's was.

Q. Can you elaborate?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't think I need to.

Q. Sound like outside of a car and a house you spent more on clothes than anything else. Is that accurate?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, yeah. Clothes and, yeah and watches probably. Probably those two.

Q. When you talk about the meaning of winning this tournament, you've beaten one of the best fields in golf, but what we've had in the last couple years, you've also beaten the best at Southern Hills, at Hilton Head, and you look at Memorial and all the other Signature Events. So what is the meaning or the best value, I guess, of winning THE PLAYERS considering we have great fields a lot of times during the year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's a good question. I'm not sure. I mean, it's an event that has a lot of history. I think kind of starting, I feel like to understand or respect a little more of the history has a lot to do with, you know, maybe the importance of something, of a tournament, of a win.

So I don't know. That could have something to do with it. You could probably say the same thing of just like, well, then why is winning the U.S. Open important? It's like, well, it's the U.S. Open. It's like, well, this is THE PLAYERS, you know what I mean?

It's a hard thing to explain. But, yeah, I think obviously, yeah, the last couple years are different given the situation in golf and not everybody being here. But it's still, you know, the biggest event that I would say that we have on TOUR, and it's one that we all want to win.

I mean, not that we want to win some -- one event the most, but I have a hard time believing that a lot of people wouldn't put this one as first up there. So I'm not sure if that really answers your question or not, but I tried.

Q. It was a good effort.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: All right Justin as always thank you for your time.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you.

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