

WM Phoenix Open

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TPC Scottsdale

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Justin Thomas here in the media center at the WM Phoenix Open. Third start of the season, two top 10s. I know you weren't able to finish the job at Pebble, but just some opening comments on your game entering the week here.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I feel like I'm playing well. I feel like things are continuing to trend in the right direction. Back at a place I really enjoy, and feel like I've had a couple chances to win in the past and haven't been able to.

I'm really hoping that this isn't a sign of things to come for the weather and the PGA TOUR season, how these last couple weeks have been. It's always enjoyable here, and I'm excited to get going.

Q. You mentioned this being a place you're comfortable at. You've had four top 10s in the last five years here, tied for the most of anyone on TOUR. What is it about this venue? Is it the atmosphere on 16, and what is it about this place that seems to bring out the best in your game?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think it definitely in my opinion fits -- it's definitely a benefit to be a longer hitter. I think you have a couple holes where you can take a couple bunkers out of play. Even with the rain that I think they've gotten, the greens are still not soft. At least they're very, very firm compared to Pebble last week.

I think with the par-5s, hitting long irons into the greens or even woods, being able to hit irons up in the air and feel like you can kind of hold the greens or stop them I think is an advantage, but also I feel like I know how to get it around here pretty well. I feel like I've played patient every year, and I just kind of wait on my little run whenever it happens over the course of 72 holes and just try to minimize the mistakes.

Q. Speaking to the crowd atmosphere out here on 16, you've always been someone to get the fans hyped out there. What, if anything, does that do or do you look forward to being able to interact with the fans that way

this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's very unique. I think it's great that there's one a year because they do it right. I think people underestimate that when you have -- how many people are on the hole, 20,000 people in one place, when there's a lot of constant noise, it just is almost like a white noise sound. But when you get 1,000 people and you get a couple people that decide to be that person, then it's just kind of annoying.

It's great here, and they've done a great job of trying to control the chaos as much as they can.

But I always enjoy the banter and trying to hit it close and trying to make a birdie. They ain't scared to boo you no matter who you are.

Q. When you think back to 2023, what did you see in your swing at the time that you were trying to change, and at what point now with the swing did you decide to kind of go back to where you were before any of those changes?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I definitely -- over the years in my career, I feel like I've -- my dad will be the first to tell you, and I will, too, now, as is I chase perfect maybe a little bit too much. It's just a tendency I think a lot of us have, not necessarily perfect but wanting your swing to look a certain way, and I felt like my hands were really, really starting -- I've always had high hands but I felt like they were creeping a little too much. I felt like it was something that I just kind of needed to monitor. So I wanted to just try to get them a little bit lower, and because of that, I ended up doing it off of the ball instead of at the top, so I just would basically suck it inside, get my hands way inside, and then my club would get really steep going back, and because of that I had to lay it down to get it on a good plane.

I look back at videos from last year and I'm not surprised that I played as inconsistently as I did because I said it last year, I really do feel like I have good enough hands to make it work a couple days a week. But it's just completely unrealistic to do that for four days, and as good as the



players are out here, I was making it very hard on myself.

But honestly, it was after the British Open, obviously air very long flight home. I really just was looking at current videos, old videos. I have a folder on my phone of all of my favorite swing videos over the years and ones that I liked the most, and I really couldn't fathom or understand how I got that far off.

Just trying to, kind of like you said, get back into some old habits, some things that maybe I don't like how it looks as much, but that's in my DNA. That makes me who I am.

It's taken and still is, a lot of golf balls to get that muscle memory back and get it in a spot that I'm comfortable with. But I sure like this version a lot better.

Q. Rory was talking last week about a phone call he had with Jordan about a disagreement about the path forward. With the Strategic Sports Group deal now in place, do you feel like the TOUR can go on its own now, or do you still feel like there needs to be this coming together for the good of the game?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm not necessarily super adamant one way or the other. I want the best product and the best players.

I would say that there's a handful of players on LIV that would make the TOUR a better place, but I'm definitely not in the agreement that they should just be able to come back that easily.

I think there's a lot of us that made sacrifices and were very -- whether it's true to our word or what we believe in or just didn't make that decision, and I totally understand that things are changing and things are getting better, but it just would -- I would have a hard time with it, and I think a lot of guys would have a hard time with it, and I'm sure we don't need to convince you why we would have a hard time with it.

I think there's a scenario somewhere, whatever it is, down the road of some kind of version of some guys being back, but when and what that is, I have no idea.

Q. Do you get the sense that Strategic Sports Group is going to make significant changes to the PGA TOUR? Or do you think it will look pretty similar at least initially?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm not sure. I really don't know. Like you said, you don't get to be who they are and you also don't invest that much money for fun just because you love the game of golf. Clearly this is something that they view

as an investment, and to be able to have it grow, which is exciting as a player but also as a fan of golf because for that to continue to grow and get better, then our product is going to get better, which is going to be more fan friendly to watch.

Everything about it should continue to get better and more and more watchable and enjoyable and just people wanting to be fans of golf. That part of it is exciting to me, both as a player and as a fan.

Q. Adam Scott once told me that after a down year in 2009, he was picked for the international Presidents Cup team sort of out of the blue or there was a debate whether he should be on that team or not, but being picked catapulted his confidence back and sent him to the best four years of his career, him winning the Masters, World No. 1. Is there any similarity to you getting that confidence boost and getting kicked back into gear at the end of last year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It definitely gave me a lot of confidence boost, but it was unbelievable the amount of relief that I had playing in Napa versus when I played in Minnesota and Wyndham and the rest of the season. I knew I was thinking about it, but I didn't realize how much it was consuming my life.

It's wild. It clearly is a problem. There were other issues, but I just was trying so hard to make that team and to play well to where I earned that spot on the team. I've never been picked, and I didn't want to have to be picked. I wanted to qualify. Then I wasn't playing well, and I'm like, now I really have to earn my pick.

It was more of a relief for me like mentally and emotionally than anything, but talking to the guys, whether it was at the practice session or that week and kind of hearing how the conversations went, there were just things that guys told me in their confidence in me that they didn't need to tell me but was very nice of them that definitely made me feel a lot better about the situation.

Q. All the trends and all the numbers and everything point to you having a massive week here like you normally do, so I'll flip it on you. What's the one thing that's stopped you from maybe getting over the finish line here?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I haven't had a good Sunday when I've been in contention. I've back-doored a couple Top 5s. I think this is a place where if you have a hot week -- I feel like for me, the two keys are driving it well and putting it well. I think if I drive it well, I should make very, very, very few bogeys, and then if you're putting it well, you

can just make so many birdies. That's obviously extremely, duh, like if you drive it well or putt it well any week. But there's some courses that I feel like you can kind of just -- maybe I don't need to putt great or whatever.

It's just a huge advantage if I do. I feel like if I'm able to hit good drives on the par-5s, take advantage of those and some of the longer par-4s where maybe without a good drive you're trying to make 5 or 4 and all of a sudden it turns into a birdie hole. It could just be wanting to win a little bit too bad, just trying a little bit too hard.

Q. With hole 16, it's kind of crossed over to casual fans and sports fans know about it and ask about it, but before you were a TOUR player, were you aware of it, like the Tiger ace and the history? How does that experience compare to what you might expect before you actually play it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I can't honestly remember what all I remembered just as a junior player. I probably idolized and watched everything Tiger did, so I probably had seen that ace and maybe I didn't realize what the hole was like at the time.

Yeah, as I was junior golf, amateur golf and whatnot, yeah, it was always fun and exciting to see. But I didn't think it got me ready or prepared for what I felt like. Just the adrenaline and the nerves, it's in my opinion similar to trying to win a golf tournament, a big golf tournament.

I think the hardest part that I always say is that you have to just hit like a nice little finesse great distance controlled short iron, and that's a hard thing to do when you have a lot of adrenaline. You just want to tee it as high as you can and swing it as hard as you can with a driver. You have to kind of feather an 8- or 9-iron in there, this part of the green falls off and this part runs away. It's definitely one you have to calm yourself down.

Q. With Bud Cauley coming back, what's it mean for him to be back and what's his friendship meant to you through the years?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm so, so excited Bud is back. I'm really happy and proud of him because I know he's had a lot of time and thinking of is this going to ever get fixed, is it going to be cured, am I going to play golf again.

I know how good Bud is and I know his raw talent. I just wanted to keep him positive and keep telling him because my thing I always said is it's going to work out, whatever. Just time will heal, whatever. He's just too good of a player to not have won out here at some point.

I do truly think if he can continue to fix this issue and keep getting better and better, he's just so good and so talented that he just has had an unfortunate go with injuries in the past and not really getting in a rhythm. But I'm excited that he's back. He's one of my best friends in the world, so it's fun to have him here.

Q. Since the first time you've played the 16th hole, have those nerves decreased over time, or have you gotten used to it, or are those nerves still higher than just a normal hole?

JUSTIN THOMAS: They're definitely higher than a normal hole. I would say they're still there. It's just maybe different than the first time.

It's hard to hit -- you have some of those pins that are pretty severe and very -- the green is very undulated around the pins, so you have to be very cautious of your speed.

The last thing you want to do when you have 20,000 drunk people yelling at you is to run it four feet past. You don't want that, so then you're trying to manage your speed. It's a great test for where are you at and how you handle nerves I would say. But it doesn't just go away, or at least it hasn't for me.

Q. Going back to Bud, what's the scouting report on his game right now, and is it true he's been beating you a bunch?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, he's been kicking my ass at home, that's for sure. He's been playing well. He played well in the two events that he came back in the Bahamas, the Korn Ferry events. I can't imagine what he was feeling in that first event because I definitely am not comparing the two in any way, but if I have a month off competitive golf, the amount of rust I feel my first round, let alone, what, four years, multiple years? To come back and play that well and consistently I think speaks volumes to where he's at, but I'm also sure he has a totally different perspective out there while he's playing, with the accident and injuries and being a dad now.

Like I said, I would hope it can continue and he can continue to get better and stronger physically, but I think the TOUR is a better place with BC out here.

Q. With the new deal and the TOUR having a for-profit business and TOUR players being equity owners, what is an example of something you'll be more willing to do now that you're, quote-unquote, an owner versus just being an independent contractor?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I haven't really thought about it, to be honest. I don't think I would do that much differently. I feel like I'm not -- it's not like I've said no to things in the past to where it's like, oh, I'm not doing this because it's going to benefit the TOUR and it's not going to benefit me.

Q. Do you think you or other guys will be more willing to do walk and talks and be mic'd and stuff like that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. Everybody is different. At the end of the day, I can create more equity for myself by playing better and winning more golf tournaments and majors and FedExCups, so on and so forth. If I feel that that is in my best interest to do so, then I will.

But me personally, I don't foresee myself making a decision based off of something like that. At the end of the day, the end goal is to win and play as well as I can in golf tournaments, and that's what I need to do. I feel like there could maybe be some things elsewhere, but like I said, I honestly hadn't really thought about it.

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