

Arnold Palmer Invitational

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Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas to the interview room here at the 2026 Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Justin, making your season debut. Just want to start with how are you feeling and how have you been since we saw you last fall after surgery.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, feeling good. I'm obviously excited to start the season. I've been watching a lot of golf, so I'm excited to be playing it in competition for myself this week. Yeah, there's not much else to say other than that. I'm just excited to be back out.

THE MODERATOR: What did the timeline look like for your recovery, of coming back practicing and picking up clubs.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, surgery was November 13th. It was the first of the year I was able to start chipping and putting. Kind of slowly progressed through that. It's basically kind of 50 yards add each week, essentially was kind of like the formula that we used. Then, yeah, by I guess it would have been by the beginning of Pebble week or maybe end of Phoenix week, I was able to hit some drivers. It was just, yeah, kind of slowly but surely, it was just more of monitoring how I felt each day, if something felt weird or off the next day, did I do something different the day before, what was it. Really just not trial and error, but kind of trial and error. Just paying attention and listening to everything. But I tried to be very, very diligent and smart and conservative of any kind of timeline of coming back, just because I didn't want this to be an issue down the road.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to open it up with questions.

Q. Have you ever felt weird or off during this -- let me clarify -- during this recovery? Have you had days that something wasn't right?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Definitely. Yeah. It's wild. I obviously learned a lot about it. I had plenty of time to read and

research and whatnot, both probably good and bad. But my understanding of it, anything nerve related is very different in terms of maybe how you feel than just not a basic, but an ACL or a labrum or whatever it may be. It's pretty, the time lines of everybody and probably how they're feeling are very similar. But from my understanding, again, anything nerve related is just very specific depending upon the person and how long maybe the nerve was compressed or the nerve had pressure on it.

The doctor, best way he explained it to me is, he basically grabbed my arm or my leg and he goes, If I held on to this for eight months, when I let go it's going to take longer for your arm to feel normal than if I just did it for two minutes or a month or whatever. So how long it can kind of take for the nerve to get blood flow and to be working normally again is different for everybody. So that made it difficult in terms of asking other people, talking to other people, whatever it may be. But I definitely had a couple days where you have like kind of a week there for a couple weeks after the surgery where almost like your nerve wakes up of like, okay, I can move again, whatever. And it is really, it's a weird painful feeling and it's scary. I'm sure everybody goes through it that's had the surgery of, Oh my God, what did I do? I just did something, but I'm doing nothing. So it's not like I did anything in particular, it's just a part of the process.

Q. Do you feel full go?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I do. Yeah, I'm not necessarily going out and doing any, you know, two hour long driver sessions by any means, but I didn't really want to do that before I had surgery, so I definitely don't now. But it's just, yeah, in terms of like, you know, the ability to go at a drive or whatever it may be, I don't feel like that is a hindrance at all for me.

Q. How tough is it not to want to overdo it, not to push yourself, number one, and number two, what would be a successful week here for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's very hard to not over do it and to press it. My whole team, trainer Kolby, and my physio, who I did my rehab with, they were incredible and I owe a lot to them and thank a lot for them. And obviously



surgeon, Doctor Qureshi, everybody was great. But it's just my number one thing that I reiterated to everybody is just like we're not pressing this, we're not pushing it. If the timeline is two to four weeks to start rehab, like let's start at four weeks. If it's start chipping and putting at four to six weeks, let's start six weeks. Golf is a funny sport where, and we're fortunate that I can play at a very competitive high level until my mid to late 40s, I feel like, and to try to come back a couple events early just because I love Riviera or just because I love Pebble Beach, it doesn't make sense in terms of over a long career. So it's just, it's a lot, a lot of patience. Poor Jill, my wife had a lot of the same conversations with me a lot, but keeping me in a positive frame of mind of sticking to what I'm doing. So it's just a part of it, but in terms of this week and it being a successful week, I mean I'm, I mean I got to be realistic, I haven't played a tournament in six months. Probably honestly, I think the longest I've gone not playing a tournament since I started playing tournaments like when I was seven or something, so, yeah, I'm going to be rusty in terms of competitive. I mean, my golf feels really good. I feel like I can do anything I want with the golf ball at any given time, and it's just going to be the, you know, the concentrating for four and a half, five hours on a very difficult test four days in a row, a lot of the little things that I haven't done in a long time that I just have to be nice on myself and give myself a little bit of grace. So, yeah, just trying to do that mentally the best that I can this week.

Q. Just wondering your confidence level that things won't linger, that the back will be solid for a while, we have seen Will get the surgery, Tiger get the surgery, things have lingered for them sometimes. Just wondering where your head is at in terms of believing that that won't be the case for you.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Obviously you never know what's going to happen or what could happen. I mean, I'm sure they feel the same way I do. I mean, my hopes is that this never is an issue again, right. It's one of those things you just maybe have to be a little bit more diligent on a couple things here and there. But I did everything I possibly could for three months to get this to heal, to recover, as well as I felt like I could have. And try to get myself back to a good place and a place that I was not hitting golf shots or whatever in any fear of anything. So I feel good about that. Obviously everybody keeps asking me how I'm feeling, and I've been joking, but it's true, I must be feeling better because other stuff's starting to hurt again, so I feel like I'm pretty back to normal.

Q. And then just on speed, do you feel like it will take a little while to ramp up to where you were presurgery, or do you feel like you're there already?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not really, no. On the range yesterday I was kind of living around 76 to 77 ball speed. So I'm definitely probably not cruising at the exact same, but it's more of like I feel that I can be a very similar, if not the same speed as before. I'm just not going to go, you know, do it 20, 25 times in a row on the range like maybe I would have beforehand. But so maybe that's a good thing in itself there.

Q. Was there a moment when you knew something was really bad for you last year, or was this gradual, and also were you in any distress at the Ryder Cup?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I wasn't. And there wasn't anything, that was the hardest part about it. I would say if I would have known, the timeline would have looked very different because I would have had an MRI on my back much sooner, and I would have been in surgery Monday morning after the Ryder Cup. But it was just, it's weird, it really is. It's like I had zero back pain during all of this. My back never hurt, it was never, I mean, yeah, it got tight like I'm sure everybody else's in this room does at times. But it never hurt. I felt like my whole right leg was just, like I couldn't consistently get it where I wanted it. It was like my right hip, I had a very difficult time consistently loading into it on my back swing. I had a hard time building strength on my right leg and my right hip. I tried, you know, we did everything that felt like I could, and on my end to just not really improve it.

Then finally after taking some time off after the Ryder Cup it was, it just started to get way more nervy. It was starting to go down my leg more and more, and then that's when it was kind of like, all right, anything nerve related we should probably get a MRI on my back and it was, yeah, it was immediate of, you know, no wonder. I mean, yeah, by the time surgery happened it was, my, I was number and tingling on the bottom of my foot kind of thing.

Q. So as this was going on you weren't even really sure it was a back?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Oh, no, not at all. No, it was never like, oh, I wonder if I have to get surgery. It was just like, man, like why can't -- my hip just felt fatigued, that's really all it did all year. I had to, it just took me a little longer, like I had to add more stuff in my warm-up to feel like I could kind of get it working, get it activated, whatever you want to call it. But, yeah, it was weird, because it was never anything that I felt like an injury or it wasn't something of at all last year of like I can't play in this tournament because this feels like that. It just was, you know, some days it would just feel like a little more tired than others and it's a long season, it's a busy season, I just kind of figured it was just maybe a part of that. But, yeah, the body's a weird

place, man. There's a lot of weird things going on.

Q. Did you miss the, I guess, simple pleasure of hitting golf balls?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I missed it a lot. I went through a lot of waves. Being away from it for that long it was like I, yeah, I missed it a lot. It's a great opportunity in the off-season to try to improve and improve and get better and work on things, and obviously not having that. And also it's like, Oh well, I'm home, and I get to spend all this time and do all this stuff with my family because I was able to be home and be spend time with them. But, you know, I mean, Molly would crawl up to me and kind of look at me for me to pick her up, and I just had to stare at her like, I'm sorry, I can't pick you up. And how am I going to explain that to a one year old. So, yeah, I went through waves. Yeah, it wasn't, you know, three months doesn't seem like a very long time, realistically two months of not being able to do much compared to some other surgeries and how long people are out for. But it felt like a lot of time for me of riding emotions of, you know, feeling like depressed and feeling like excited motivated and feeling better. You know, it's a lot of different feelings.

Q. What's your goal this week, what would be a good week, what's your long-term outlook for the year? What do you want to try to accomplish and not again be hard on yourself?

JUSTIN THOMAS: My main goal is really to get myself in a place where I feel like at Augusta I'm good to go. I mean, not in terms of my golf game, but just, I don't feel rusty, I don't feel like I'm still kind of getting comfortable, I'm still, you know, course management, whatever that kind of stuff. Like physically, conditioning, my biggest goal up until then is to feel normal there. Like I said, I fully have belief between the golf I've been playing and how I feel like my game is. I mean, I'm hitting, I am playing well enough where I can do things physically golf-wise to play well and contend this week, but it's just, it's all of the other factors of the physical and the conditioning of not losing steam on 15 or 16, and how am I going to feel the next day and so on and so forth that I just don't think I can be too hard on myself in that sense the next couple weeks.

Q. Part of the reason that probably why Scottie's distance control is so good is he's able to take speed off and still get the ball high with a lot of spin. Interested if how do you hit a shot like that and/or do you try to bridge your gaps by doing something else?

JUSTIN THOMAS: What? In terms of?

Q. Like kind of a knockdown shot that still goes high

with a lot of spin, whereas normally when you take speed off it's low and doesn't have a lot of spin.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, you can do it a lot of different ways. I -- or I shouldn't say a lot of different ways, but everybody has probably different ways they do it. Depending upon the club, but, you know, sometimes I'll even feel like my hands are a little bit behind at address, so I feel like I can still make an aggressive, you know, passive move through the ball, and the ball just comes out a little bit higher for me. Open the club a little more going back. There's -- I'm sure a lot of guys have different ticks for them to maybe feel that or think that. But I'm very feel in terms of how far I'm taking the club back to try to get it to go a certain distance that a lot of it is also feel in that sense too.

Q. What do you think you learned most about yourself during the difficult times and the down times?

JUSTIN THOMAS: That I'm going to need a job when I retire. I definitely am not good at doing nothing. Yeah, I'm going to need to find something whenever I stop playing golf, because when you have nothing to look forward to or nothing to feel like you can improve and get better for, when you're kind of wired that way, it's a hard thing to step right into. So I would say that.

Q. Winning a major, a big deal, like you did in 2017 at the PGA. And then you always want to try and validate it. Did you do that at the 2021 PLAYERS or he had 2023 PGA? 2022 PGA, sorry.

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's a good question.

Q. It's a trick question.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Oh, I see what you're doing there. Yeah, I mean who, potato, potato (phonetic). Like I'm sure I validated both of 'em. Maybe I would love to win 'em both this year and maybe I'll let you know after that. I don't know. Yeah, I couldn't really answer either one of 'em, they both made me feel pretty good, so I don't know.

Q. What was the best book you read during your time on the shelf?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Matthew McConaughey's book Greenlights is pretty good. I really liked that one. Although every single person I told about reading it responded with, you should have listened to it on audio. And I'm just proud of myself that I actually read the book. So, you know, that's about right. I would say that one. That was the quickest I've ever gone through a book. It was good.

Q. (By Charles Barkley) We're glad to have you back.



My question is -- first of all, he lied, you don't know how to read. You went to Alabama. But my question is, when Alabama was getting rolled by Indiana where exactly were you at?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I was at home. Yeah, I was at home, probably just looking at my phone waiting for some kind of sarcastic text from you, or, all of a sudden, all of these huge Indiana football fans that were friends of mine that I had no idea about. So, yeah, I should have reached out to you how you deal with big losses like that. I mean, you've gone through that more than I have, so I should have just asked you.

Q. That was well played.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Perfect, we'll wrap it with that. Justin, thanks for the time.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you.

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