

# WGC Dell Technologies

## Match Play

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Austin, Texas, USA

Austin Country Club

## Justin Thomas

### Press Conference

LAURA VESCOVI: We'd like to welcome Justin Thomas to the interview room, making your fifth appearance at the World Golf Championships Dell Technologies Match Play. Let's just start with some opening comments about being back in Austin and thoughts on the match play format and then we'll open it up to questions.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm glad to be back in Austin. It's always a fun event. It's a cool golf course. I think it's fun because it can play so many different ways, I know it has over the couple-year, I guess four years that I've played it. You can get firm and fast and some serious wind coming off that lake, and it's fun. It's just a cool track and you're not -- I feel like usually if you played a stroke-play event here you would be very worried about the draw that you get because the weather can fluctuate so much throughout the day, but in match play all you're worried about is your opponent and trying to beat him. So hopefully I'll try to channel some good vibes I had from a couple years ago and play a little bit better this year.

LAURA VESCOVI: We'll open it up to questions.

#### Q. Can I ask how you celebrated the victory?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, we didn't leave the grounds until probably 9:15, something like that, so I had to go back to the house that we were staying at and get all my stuff and our dog and then head to the airport and got -- I think didn't get home like in our house until probably 11:15, 11:30, something like that, and I was so tired. I think I just had some chicken fingers or something like that at the course and just split a bottle of wine with my girlfriend and went to sleep shortly after. I think I fell asleep on the couch, so I knew it was time for me to go to bed.

#### Q. Did you get any texts from Tiger after the fact congratulating you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, for sure. I had some texts from him. I got to FaceTime, talk with him a little bit after,



because I knew he would want to chat and catch up and I knew he was going home the following day, so it was cool. I mean it was, he was in great spirits, was glad to hear how supportive, and my dad said he was texting him the whole day, giving him grief about what was going on, so it was good to see he was watching.

#### Q. You've said in the past that you don't mind razzing Tiger a little bit because you guys have such a good relationship. Were you able to do that in your phone call or FaceTime?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not really. I mean, first and foremost every conversation I've had with him I want to make sure he's doing all right and feeling well, but we're just talking like we always do, but he told me that I toed my tee shot on 18, which I didn't. I hit it right in the middle, I just overturned it a little bit. But he's adamant that I toed it. But I made sure to remind him that I didn't. It was right where I needed to be.

#### Q. Have you shared any thoughts that you have about maybe playing in the Olympics this summer?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, I mean I'm ecstatic to have the opportunity to do so, if the Olympics -- I hope they happen and I hope I qualify because I think that would be one of the coolest honors that I've ever had. It's something you don't obviously get to do too often and it's probably the only one of the only tournaments that I would brag about playing in or qualifying for, the fact that I would be able to play for Team USA in the Olympics. So I would be honored to, and I hope I get the opportunity.

#### Q. Obviously iron play was part of the victory at Sawgrass and that's a strength of your game. Has it always been a strength and came naturally to you or have you always been a strong iron player or what makes you a good iron player do you think?

JUSTIN THOMAS: To be honest, I don't know. Or I don't know when it happened or I don't know maybe what necessarily makes me a good iron player. I mean, obviously I practice it a lot, but I practice a lot of areas in my game. But it just, it feels like it's the area in my game that I have to think the least, so it's -- that, I think, kind of speaks for itself.



I think a lot of people in this game -- I mean, if you ask Rory what he tries to do with a driver and how he tries to swing it, he probably tells you, I don't know, I just aim there and I hit it as hard as I can and it goes where I want. Or Jordan with his putting, like, hey, you know what are you trying to stroke it or how are you trying to get the ball to roll, and he's like, I don't know where I'm aiming I'm just kind of hitting it and it goes in a lot.

So I've been fortunate to get on a run where I've hit my irons well since I've gotten out on TOUR, but I would say a lot of it is hard work that my dad and I have been doing and just trying to make sure it's something that I can repeat, because even if it's something that maybe that I don't like or we don't like the look of it as much as potentially something else, as long as it's repetitive and it's going to do what I think and know it's going to do, the ball flight that is, then it's as good as it needs to be.

**Q. As a kid was shaping shots and creating iron shots something that you just enjoyed about the game?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I definitely enjoyed it. Probably, I don't know like when that specific moment was of like doing it often. I think I was -- when I was little, especially in kind of middle school and high school, a little bit in the college, I predominantly played a draw. I think I just -- that was my swing tendency. I had the club across the line and then from there I would kind of get under and that's where I would hit a lot of draws, and I definitely learned quickly that I needed to be able to move the ball both ways, at least to help out here and at the highest level, and it's something I've continued to work on and feel like I've gotten better and better at each year.

**Q. I'm doing a history on the 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines. You were 15 at the time. Where were you for the Sunday final round? Were you watching it and did you take off school Monday for the playoff and what do you remember? What are the key moments for you?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was in the summer so I didn't have to take off school luckily. But that wouldn't have been the first time I had missed school because of a golf tournament, so I probably would have anyway, but I was in Ashland, Kentucky, for an AJGA event, and I think I had to qualify on Monday maybe. I was there Sunday for something. I just remember it was like raining and there was a bunch of us underneath like this shed and there was a tiny TV up and we were all a lot of us were watching it there. So I don't know if that was Sunday or Monday, and I can't specifically remember, but I just remember watching that U.S. Open there. At least I'm pretty sure I do. It's a long time ago. But it was, yeah, it was bizarre and a pretty fun, because a lot of the other kids were obviously my age or and we were

all huge Tiger fans.

**Q. So you were basically under a shed cover watching on a little TV.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. Yeah.

**Q. How big a fan were you then and how much were you rooting for Tiger?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I was a huge fan then and I definitely was rooting for him. I mean anytime he was on TV or had a chance to win, I was rooting for him.

**Q. Do you remember the putt on 18 on Sunday? Do you know if you were watching under the shed then?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't, I don't. I'm sure I was, if I had the opportunity to, but I can't honestly tell you that I remember.

**Q. Had you watched a lot of U.S. Opens before that and was that a stand out for you at the time?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I just, I watched golf all the time, so it wasn't necessarily -- I mean I liked watching the majors. The Masters is probably my favorite tournament to watch, or The Open Championship because I was able to watch a lot of it. I would wake up at 3:00, 4:00, 5:00 in the morning and I would watch it all the way through coverage. But like I said, I can't honestly specifically tell you remembering watching one U.S. Open more than another kind of thing.

**Q. Was there anything kind of new or useful to be learned golf course wise from the November Masters or was it just kind of a completely different animal?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, to be honest, I thought it was a different golf course. I mean I think -- D.J. I think would have won whether it was like it was in November or April. I mean, he played far and away better than everybody else. But I think and it might sound bad to say and I don't mean to take anything away from them, but I don't think it's a coincidence that some first-timers or younger guys played well, because a lot of the past experience, at least that I had only played, what, four or so times, and it was engrained in my memory, so I can't imagine someone like Tiger or like Freddie, like those veterans or like Phil that have played so many Masters, that are used to that ball being so fast down No. 15 chipping that way, and just a lot of little things here and there that I had a hard time getting used to that really just, it was, it wasn't the case this year. But at the end of the day everyone had the same amount of time to prepare, everyone knew what the golf course

was, and it just was about execution. But it definitely was -- you had to go about it, I think, differently than you do in April when it gets firm and fast.

**Q. You mentioned 15. Are there any other examples throughout the golf course that was just kind of mindblowing, the differences between the two?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, there was. I mean 1 green you could get the ball to stop kind of in the middle of the green a little bit easier. I mean, holes like 2 with that back pin or even you get that kind of middle right pin where you can use the slope like it just -- it wouldn't go all the way, and then if you hit it like in the bunker on 4 you were able to kind of hit it up on the slope and it come down, and it just wasn't the case.

So it was a lot of -- like on 7, if you, that bullpen, if you get it anywhere up on the slope it's going to come all the way to the hole if not past the hole, and last year it wouldn't even get to the hole sometimes. So in November, like we knew it was going to be like that, we knew it wasn't going to be the lightning fast, really firm like it can get in April. So I mean, again, it wasn't like we showed up on Thursday and it was like, oh, wow, this isn't what it was the last three days. We knew what we were getting into.

**Q. What's the mental challenge of this event compared to others, and when you make it to a Saturday and Sunday as you try to grind through that, what do you think some of the biggest challenges of that part of it are?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well I've only made it to Saturday once, so that was fun. But it's kind of weird and different just because obviously your match is most important and you just keep winning your matches, it doesn't matter what everybody else does, but it does matter at the same time. I mean, when you're going through the pod play, I mean, you hope other guys do something else, especially once you get to that second and third round, but you know if you go 3-0 you're going to be fine, you're going to get through, it doesn't matter.

I think that's something I've struggled with in the past is looking too much at maybe other matches or worrying about what else is going on or playing to my opponent too much. I mean, there's an extent where you want to play to what they're doing, but at the end of the day, I mean, if I was teeing it up on Thursday in a 72-hole stroke play event here, I would feel good about my chances of beating a lot of these guys, especially if I'm playing well, but sometimes you feel like I try to change my game plan or do something different, and that's something that I've struggled with. I think that's why I haven't played well.

So I really need to stick to my game plan and how we play the golf course this week, and if for some reason we have to alter something, then so be it. But hopefully just end up sticking to our game plan.

**Q. And then second, just how much over the last few years have you and Jordan actually talked golf? I mean I think we see you guys as golfers and we think you guys just talk golf all the time. I would assume it's more of a friendship. And how excited are you that he's starting to kind of find his form again?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm very excited that he's found his form again. I knew -- I mean, he would still probably argue that he hasn't or he's not, I know he's not where he wants to be, no golfer is everywhere they want to be. That's kind of the beauty and the difficult part about it is that we are always searching, but he just has his confidence back, he has his swagger back. He's talking a lot on the golf course again, which is him.

We talk golf swing some. I mean, he's more technical than I am. He is feel-based, but he knows more about the golf swing than I do and the mechanics and that's just not how I am, but we talk. I mean, whenever we share houses we'll always talk about our rounds. That's something that I think all of us do. But it's not like we're texting on a Tuesday on an off week about how to hit a fade or these draws we were doing or whatever it is. It's usually just 27-year-old guy talk.

**Q. Playing well like you are right now, do you almost hate to take a week off and try to, the old philosophy (indiscernible) are you glad to have a week to kind of rest and recoup, and have you gone (indiscernible) or do you stick pretty much to what you like to do?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I lost you a little bit about three different times there, but I'm going to try to answer what I think I heard. I sometimes like to play if I'm playing well, but having a week off is nice because being in contention takes a lot out of you mentally and you get pretty drained, so it's nice to catch up on rest and just emotions. But obviously it's nice for physically the golf game to continue to keep playing. And that's all I can really -- it kind of -- you broke up a couple different times, so sorry.

**Q. Have you gone back and forth on whether you like to play the week before a major take a week off and go to a major site early or do you have a pretty set routine or do you back and forth on that?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I have a pretty set routine. I like to take the week off because, like I said, it takes a lot out of

you mentally to win a golf tournament, and if I'm going to a golf tournament I plan and hope to win it, so I would essentially be, I feel like, putting myself at a disadvantage before the week starts, just because of how drained I would be going into the week and that's something that I don't like to do.

I think when you get to place like an Open Championship, at least for me, who doesn't play that often on that kind of grass and that time difference, that's a little different story. I wouldn't mind going over there early to get acclimated to the time and the conditions.

But in terms of like Augusta, I don't really see a situation in my career where I would play the week before, or even the other majors. I mean, I've always enjoyed taking that week off. But then again, there's going to come times where maybe I feel the need to play, if there's a course that's similar to it or in the same region or whatever it might be. But for now I enjoy taking weeks off.

**Q. My question is when you look at some of the really great match play golfers, today or through history, a lot of them tend to be these very combative, aggressive kind of personalities. And if you're, you know, trying to brain read, you say oh, yeah, that's why they're good at match play, because they're like that. But a previous answer you gave almost made it sound like when you have the best success it's when you're not trying to adjust your psychological game to be combative. Are you sort of trying to keep a neutral stroke play mindset when you're playing match play? Am I reading that right?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes and no. I think I am. I need to -- my thing is that I shouldn't try to not make birdie because of what this person's doing. Like if I have a wedge in my hand, and like he misses the green, I shouldn't all of a sudden like try to hit it to 20 feet. Like if I have a wedge in my hand I'm trying to make a birdie because that's when I end up hitting it to 20 feet and then he maybe holes a bunker shot or hits it close, and then I either lose the hole or we halve the hole, and the next thing I know I get to the next tee, like, what was I doing, like I should have tried to make birdie there.

So that's kind of what I mean in terms of playing to the opponent. Now obviously there's going to be times where if they hit it in the water or they like short-side themselves, definitely going to make a bogey, that's one thing. But if I have a 12-footer and they have a 15-footer, I shouldn't be not focused on my putt until, oh, they made it all of a sudden, now I'm like, oh, crap, now I've got to make this putt to halve the hole. I'm like, I'm trying to make this putt because I want to make a birdie and I want to go one more

under par than I was when I started this hole. Just like I would be in a stroke play event. So I think that's the similarities that I need to take into this week that I do into a stroke play event.

**Q. I know this is not an easy one to answer, but psychologically do you notice a difference in yourself in how you focus on the opponent on a match play week?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: On how I think of the opponent?

**Q. Yeah, are you more combative? Are you coming in more aggressive in your own mind against this other person because of the new format?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Sure, absolutely. I mean, I hope every match I play against everybody in match play they play the worst round of golf they have ever played in their life (laughing). I mean, I don't care how much I like the person or how great they have been to me; if it's match play, all I got to do is beat that guy and selfishly I hope they don't play well.

LAURA VESCOVI: Thank you, Justin, and good luck this week.

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