

RBC Heritage

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Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, USA

Harbour Town Golf Links

Justin Thomas

Press Conference



RBC Heritage

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome defending champion Justin Thomas back to the RBC Heritage. You just wrapped up the traditional opening ceremony on 18 with the cannon. How was that experience for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was cool. Same thing I'm sure everybody says, it was very loud and scared me pretty bad. But I was very pleased with my shot. I had no idea what it was going to be like both swinging in that jacket and hitting a persimmon club like that.

It was a cool experience, and it sounds like it's been a tradition and part of this event for a very, very long time. I was so impressed with the amount of people that were out there and showed up, so it was very cool.

Q. Your fifth start of the season since returning to competition. How much are you looking forward to returning to a course where you've had a lot of success?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I like this place. I'm sure a lot of people would say the same, that it's a very, very different feel compared to last week. It's such a grind but also the hardest walk we'll have all year, very, very long rounds, long days. Coming to a place like this where it's very flat, a lot easier walk, rounds will be significantly faster, it all feels a lot easier until -- sometimes this place can play very challenging and you have to give it the attention that it deserves.

But it's a place that I'm comfortable at and I feel like I know how to play. I know there's been some changes, not very much, but tweaks here and there, but for the most part, I feel pretty comfortable around here.

Q. Do your legs feel a lot heavier when you walk, when you're walking around a flat surface? I would think it feels like running compared to last week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's a lot easier to walk. My feet were pretty sore, I think, like a lot of guys. The physio room yesterday afternoon was pretty busy. I think a lot of

guys with hips and quads, everything like that, very, very sore.

It feels like you kind of are floating and running around here a little bit.

Q. Were you prepared for the cannon blast? Did they tell you? Was it as loud or louder than you thought it was going to be?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I was prepared. I definitely had a lot of people tell me. But got some earplugs and definitely used those, and I'm glad that I did. Yeah, could see if the cannon went off a little early in your swing, I could see a whiffing-the-ball situation pretty easily because it is very loud.

Q. Were you concerned about whiffing before you went up there?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not really. I can't say I've ever done that, so I had zero expectations of what it would be, but I'd probably be a lot more fearful doing it again knowing what it was like.

Q. This isn't anything we didn't know last year, but now that you're in the midst of it, can you talk about what it's like having two majors and three Signature Events in a six-week stretch? Is there an issue there? Is that fine? A lot of money.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, but it's tough. I mean, it's not how I would prefer to draw it up, I would say.

I think especially when it comes to majors, because majors are -- the season is important. Obviously it's very important for your FedExCup standing, how your season is going, getting into events, not in events, whatever it may be. But majors are kind of what guys will generally build their schedule off of, in a sense, of what they need to do to prepare for a major, and it's also how kind of your legacy in the game is remembered for a lot of people.

Going to very difficult courses into a major I don't think is probably how it would be drawn up for a lot of guys, but it's one of those things that it's obviously -- we've had some

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changes and probably will continue to see some in the next, I don't know, couple years until it gets -- it'll never be perfect, but at least something that's maybe a little more ideal for guys in their eyes.

Q. I was curious to know what is your impression so far of the newly renovated Harbour Town Golf Links course?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's great. I've only seen nine holes. I just played nine today. I'll see the back nine tomorrow morning. Yeah, I think Davis and his team did a great job from what I can see. I think a lot of redoes or restorations, to be perfectly honest, I think they screw the course up pretty bad. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous a little bit about it.

But knowing that Davis was doing this made me feel a lot better, one, because he is very good at this, but two, he loves -- he isn't going to completely change a golf course at a place that he loves like Harbour Town. I think he won here five times, and this golf course and got has been great to him. Anything that he was changing or doing was going to be very minor and for the better because a lot of what makes Harbour Town what it is, you need to keep, and that's the doglegs, the small greens, the trees where they are.

From what I've seen so far, it is very, very subtle tweaks.

Q. Getting to know Jackson Koivun a bit, what's impressed you either about his game or how he carries himself?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think everything. I haven't played a lot of golf with Jackson, but I've played enough -- I think we've played maybe two practice rounds at Oakmont last year, and I just remember leaving those practice rounds like, this kid is really good.

I like -- it feels like he's got a great head on his shoulders. I like how he goes about everything. We'll stay in touch and he'll pick my brain on some stuff, but I feel like he thinks about stuff the right way, and he's played unbelievably. To continue that high level of play in college, I think it would be very easy to get complacent and kind of get bored, but he's not doing that clearly, but also whenever he gets into professional events he's playing really well, too. I think it's just a matter of him for him. Even though he is an Auburn dude, I'm happy for him.

Q. What kind of things does he pick your brain about?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Just a handful, whether it's preparation -- I'm trying to remember during the Open when we played,

he just would ask little stuff about whether it would be scheduling, where to live whenever he does turn pro, about that decision, about -- it probably is more as we're playing things of that was maybe a little more organic versus calling me and scheduling some kind of thing.

But he seems like -- I'm always impressed with kids in college, whatever, that ask questions and want to learn because that's very much how I was, and I feel like it was very helpful for me.

Q. You had a really hard week last week, and a lot of times players like to come here and decompress and relax with their families and go to the beach and things like that. Do you have any favorite activities on Hilton Head Island, or are you new enough to it that you haven't figured them out yet?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm probably not new enough to Hilton Head Island, but I'm new enough to the having a child situation. Molly is almost a year and a half, but last year was our first year having her here and she was so young. But it'll be different this year. She's running around. She's doing more. Hopefully we'll get some time to go to the beach, especially with how nice the weather is. I remember we actually Sunday morning last year before the final round. We all went to the beach and let her play in the water, stuff like that.

Yeah, we'll definitely find some time, I'm sure. My wife is probably doing plenty with her and some of the other wives and kids, as well. But definitely find some stuff to do.

Q. I wanted to follow up on Jackson. If you were an agent recruiting college players, what would you look for? How do you know someone is going to do well?

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's a good question. I feel like the golf side, obviously you can see. I notice a lot, or probably what I pick up on more than anything is just talking to them and how they talk and how they go about things.

I know I've been around some college players that are very comfortable, if you will, and it's hard to explain, but versus somebody like Jackson, I don't think he -- he doesn't feel like he's owed any of this or I should play like this or I deserve this. He seems like he just really wants to be the best player he can be, and he's not cocky, he's not arrogant, he doesn't think he's above anybody or any situation versus some other -- I've been around maybe some that are.

I would say for me, that would probably be the biggest thing is just kind of seeing how they handle themselves.

Q. When you look at what you've done, the majors you've won, the world ranking you held at some point, what makes you good, compared with, say, someone who's 100th in the world? Obviously you have some skill in terms of swinging a golf club, but a lot of guys do. What do you think sets you apart? I can ask the same thing of Xander, of Scottie, of whoever.

JUSTIN THOMAS: You're making me think really hard. I would say my ball-striking over my time -- I don't know if you mean something physically like that or something non-tangible.

Q. I guess it's the not tangible stuff, isn't it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes and no. I think, yeah, having the talent and having -- you have to have some skill. You have to have some -- there's a lot of people you see try and do something athletic or sport related where you're just like, you're just not going to get it. I have some of those people in my family, I've watched them try to play golf and I'm like, you're never going to be good at golf no matter how hard you try. That is a part of it.

But it's a good question. I'm not sure if I could -- other than a specific thing in golf, I don't know. I think my work ethic and my want to win golf tournaments and drive to be the best I think has a lot to do with where I am. But I'm not sure.

Q. How hard is it to refocus -- you talked about the grind that Augusta is. How hard is it to reset and refocus yourself coming into what is a difficult test this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It is tough, but I mean, at least for me, I've found that using yesterday as just a day off helps. We stay Sunday night, just drive here yesterday and just take the day off. I came and saw my physio and hung out, but just really need a day of rest and to decompress and kind of get back to it today has been a pretty decent recipe for me the last however many years.

Q. Would you say that it makes it easier, harder, no difference being the returning champ?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. I mean, I think it's harder in the sense of you're going to have more expectations. You'll have more eyeballs on you, you have more asks of you, obligations. But I like the fact of if I get myself in that similar situation or scenario on Sunday, I really like the fact that I've experienced it and done it firsthand and come out on top, so that's good experience to be able to build on.

Q. Can you talk a bit about the 14th hole and the way

it's so tough?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. 14 is a brutal hole. It's a hole that you feel like you just have to step up and hit a good golf shot. You don't really have a bail-out. It's not like if you're uncomfortable or don't have the right club you can bail out left of the green and have an easy up-and-down. There's trees lurking over there to where your ball just as easily could hit a tree and go in the water or go out of bounds. It's a very difficult up-and-down sometimes from over there.

Then you also add in one of the toughest factors about this place is the wind, with it being so tree-lined, the wind just goes everywhere. It kind of will get down in the trees and it just swirls. You know it's supposed to be one direction and you're looking at the pin going another direction and you're feeling it on the tee going another direction, and you're sitting there trying to figure out how far to hit it and what shot to hit, when you have to be so precise with your distance and your accuracy, it becomes very, very difficult.

That's what makes this place kind of what it is, and yeah, it's a very challenging hole.

Q. Do you feel like it's the toughest on TOUR, the toughest par-3 on TOUR?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It can be. I would say as a whole, I don't think it is, but there's definitely a lot of other holes that I would choose to play before that one if I needed a par for my life depending on it.

Q. Building on that, as the defending champion, what did you learn last year through your performance maybe specifically on Thursday that you can take into your approach this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think I did a great job last year of plotting my way around here and just my overall strategy and execution. Obviously I played really well, but I think that there's also a lot about this course of just knowing when it's time to attack or maybe more so when it's not time to attack because this place can just -- you stand on a tee and you feel like you should have a good chance at birdie or you look at the scorecard and see the length of the hole and think you should make birdie and you just can make bogey after bogey very quickly if you get complacent or lazy.

I think sticking to a very good game plan and just kind of picking my spots when I need to and being very patient.

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