

# Valspar Championship

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Palm Harbor, Florida, USA

Innisbrook Resort (Copperhead)

## Justin Thomas

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions.

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas to the interview room here at the 2026 Valspar Championship. Justin, you're making your 264th start on TOUR, your third back this season, your ninth appearance here. I guess, how do you feel after a couple of good tournaments under your belt? Were you kind of surprised to be in contention last week so quickly back into it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yes and no. I think it was similar to a lot of what I had said pre-tournaments, both Bay Hill and PLAYERS, I felt like physically in my golf game I was capable of it and I had been very confident in what I had been working on and seeing. But just actually doing it in competition is completely different, as you can tell, over the course of two weeks for me. But, yeah, I felt very comfortable. Last week was huge for me and very proud of myself, to be honest. Although I wish the weekend would have gone differently or better. But, yeah, it's a big tournament and I would be pleased with a week like that if I was having a normal schedule. So coming off of six months off competition definitely proud and happy of that and hopefully just get a little bit of momentum from last week going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Got a nice collection of top-10 finishes here, but you've been in the mix with a chance to win a few times. What is it about this golf course that fits your game so well?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I love this place. I hope that it is a, you know, it's a tournament that works in my schedule every year. I love coming here. I think it's one of the most underrated courses that we have, that we play. It's very in front of you, and I think it's not necessarily something that looks visually intimidating or difficult, but if you're not sharp or if you're not managing your game or emotions well, you can just make bogeys so fast. Yeah, it's a place that I enjoy playing because I think it's an old school kind of design. The guys are hitting it in a lot of the same places in the doglegs, and the fairways are very, very narrow and the greens are very difficult. So you just have to control your ball and be smart around here.

**Q. You talked about your affinity for this course. Why do you think the field is getting stronger and stronger? I've been coming here a long time and the strength of field this year is really, really good. Why do you think that is?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think a lot of people feel the same way I do about the course. I think it's a great golf course and it's just one of those, it's one of many events that we have that it's just where it is in the schedule. Some guys that, they play in Texas, and it just doesn't work in their schedule for that reason. Or they like to play maybe, you know, I think the majors kind of take the priority, for good reason, of what you're doing for preparation. So this event has an impact on that for some guys. I think it's an event, I remember the Travelers being like that back in the day, is that because of it being the week after the U.S. Open, a lot of guys wouldn't play. But whenever somebody would go once they would be like, wow, this is a great tournament, a fun golf course, it's a great atmosphere, and I think a lot of people have experienced similar things here. So I'm glad that more guys are starting to come here, because it definitely deserves it.

**Q. I don't know if you've addressed this since Brian spoke, but what were your takeaways from sort of how he presented the PGA TOUR, where it's going, and what are you most eager to see, what development are you most eager to see, considering what he said?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: If I'm being perfectly honest, I didn't really, I didn't watch it, I didn't read anything. I was busy trying to get ready for THE PLAYERS. So I'm probably not a very good person to ask. It's probably not very good of me. I should at least watch it and listen to it at some point. But I haven't seen any of it.

**Q. You personally, I mean, you're coming back off an injury, a major injury, and how do you feel now coming, doing what you've done in the last few weeks and what is your plan going forward?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Right now I feel fine. I'm a little tired,



to be honest. Last two weeks -- it was really funny. In the physio room on Monday, I went in there and it was very quiet. It's usually very loud, because it's a lot of banter and BS going on in there. But everybody just looked like crap, to be honest. Myself included. I just kind of said, I was like, man, it's quiet in here. And Andrew Novak was on the table and said, Yeah, probably because we got our faces kicked in these last two weeks. So, you know, first thing I thought of is, what are we going to be like in the end of May or that stretch of Augusta, RBC, Miami, Quail Hollow, PGA. Like it's just a crazy, crazy amount of not only big tournaments, but extremely difficult golf courses. And that's kind of what you're running into here. So I think it's going to be really, really important for me personally to mentally just, you know, recognizing that, and not forcing the issue or not making any mental mistakes out there. Because, you know, that's the thing, at least it is for me. So just trying to rest as often as possible and just manage my way around.

**Q. You mentioned the PGA. You played well at Aronimink in 2018, you were 12th or something like that. What do you remember about that course, and are you looking forward to going back? Do you think it suits you? Will you be able to take a peek at it before you get there?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would like to somehow to take a peek. Honestly, it was so wet and under water that I don't think it's a very fair representation of what the course is. I'm pretty sure they also had a pretty decent renovation since then. So I would assume, like most renovations for a major, it looks completely different, and it was done for some kind of reason. So I'll be going in there obviously, not completely blind, but I feel like I'll be going in there trying to learn the golf course quite a bit.

**Q. It's being held in Philadelphia. Philadelphia, New York, Boston it's a different kind of vibe, a different kind of crowd. Do you like northeast golf, do you remember visiting the Philadelphia area the last couple years, and do you take anything away from that?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I love it. I mean, I've won the playoff event, TPC Boston. That event used to, you know, when it would finish on Monday, it finished on Labor Day, like the crowds were wild. It's very, very passionate sports fans. I think you know you're going to get that in the northeast, and they're going to shoot it to you straight. That's kind of their MO in a way. The Truist last year, Philly Cricket Club, I loved. I thought the atmosphere and vibe at that event was awesome. I was fortunate to play well and have a really good chance to win there. The energy there, the fans, I thought they were great. I think any time -- I wish that we played up in the northeast more often. I really

enjoyed it when the playoff events would kind of go up in the Jersey, New York area, and then we would always good to Boston after that. I know it's not the northeast, but Chicago, like just the, it just felt like there's a lot of great golf courses, but it's also like the fans love to come out and, yeah, it's enjoyable, so, yes, I'm very excited to get back in front of 'em to play.

**Q. Don't know how much you had a chance to listen to or read about what Brian talked about a week ago at THE PLAYERS and if there's any big takeaway from that, but one thing that did come up was he specifically mentioned the Signature Events going to 120 players, and adding them. I'm wondering what you and maybe if you talked to some of your colleagues, peers, about that idea, how that is, because obviously that's kind of a shift from where we've been the last three or four years.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I haven't talked to anybody about it. Yeah, I think, I mean, look, it's hard because I think it's balancing trying to, I mean, not reshape or completely change what the TOUR looks like, but of tightening it up, if you will, or just making it more black and white, more right in front of you. I think it's weird, it's a strange situation of guys, you know, you have status, you're in some events, you're not in some events. When do I find out if I'm in this. Guys, like -- and that's strange, right. So probably trying to get a little bit more -- and it's also it's hard for the PGA TOUR to go to these sponsors asking for, you know, a lot of money to them, and they don't even know the kind of fields they're going to get because of who is going to be playing where, somebody might win some event, somebody might have something going on with their family. Like it's such a different, unique sport than any other sport for that reason. And so it's trying to, you can never perfect it, but trying to sharpen it and get it as good as you possibly can. So I think that there's some kind of version of making those fields bigger, I think, yeah, it's better. I think cuts are a part of our game. I think it's a big part of the history of golf. Yeah, I have a lot of faith in what Brian's doing and, yeah, I think he's very passionate about what he's doing as well.

**Q. In your own case, you did have a very small window where you were sort of on the outside looking in. The one year you just finished outside the top 70, which meant you were not fully exempt for those Signature Events. Do you recall what your mindset was then, and did you sort of then get a taste of maybe what -- because obviously we expect you to be in those normally.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it was extremely stressful. But also I'm extremely proud of the fact that I, it was a big deal

for me that I didn't have to rely on one exemption that year. I played my way into all of them. That was a big goal of mine. Because, first off, I hated having to ask, but I did ask. It's like I'm not shameful or like above that. I mean, I want to be playing in these tournaments. And, you know, the majority of tournaments, they were graceful and saying that, yes, if you need it, we'll have one. But I didn't get exemptions into some. So knowing that I needed to play into them was comforting, but also good for me. It's tough, man, because I understand the argument of, you know, giving it to the same guys, whatever. But how are you going to tell the company that's putting up 15, 20 million dollars that they can't have someone in the tournament because they feel like it's better for the ratings and better for their ticket sales and better for the event in general. That's a hard one for me to -- I see both sides a hundred percent on that. But I just think that sponsor exemptions are part of -- I mean, it's a massive part. What, are you going to tell Tiger Woods he can't play if he wants to play? Like, I'm sorry, but you're an idiot if that's what you think. Like, he needs to play in whatever he wants to play in, and that's better for the golf tournament and the game of golf. So it's a tough one to perfect, but we're working on it, I guess.

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