

Invited Celebrity Classic

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Irving, Texas, USA

Las Colinas Country Club

Justin Leonard

Press Conference



PRESENTED BY
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THE MODERATOR: Justin, Dallas obviously near and dear to you. Just some initial thoughts on being back here.

JUSTIN LEONARD: Nice to get back to Dallas. Staying with my folks this week. One of our daughters is at school at SMU, so we all had dinner last night, my sister, nephew, and it's fun. It's like back in kind of familiar surroundings. I still had to use the maps on my phone to get here this morning because it was a little bit of traffic, and just figuring out the best way.

But yeah, nice to be back. I played in this event last year and had a great time. I also played this golf course a bunch of years ago like when I was a teenager a few times. One of my friends that I played a lot of golf with, his dad was the superintendent here, so we would come over here on Mondays, and it's the first time -- last year was the first time I ever saw the clubhouse because we'd go park at the maintenance building and grab a golf cart and play 54 holes in a day.

Fun to kind of be back and that brings back some good memories, what little I remember about it. But yeah, it's just nice to be back.

Q. You did top 10 in your first event here last year. Just thoughts on the course?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, it can be challenging in spots. There's areas where you've got opportunities. It's so much of it, and Texas golf in general, just depends on the wind, and it looks like it's going to cool off a little bit starting Friday. Probably get more kind of a north wind, so almost opposite of what the normal kind of south or southeast wind is.

But not having played the golf course a whole lot, and Sunday last year we had some weather come in, and it was that similar wind. Just kind of thinking more about that kind of wind, a cooler wind than what we've got so far.

I haven't been on the golf course yet this year, so I'll play in the pro-am tomorrow afternoon.

But I think we did a good job last year of mapping things out, being prepared for the different conditions that we'll face. At least it looks fairly consistent over the weekend. It's going to be cooler, but I think the wind is going to be more kind of prevalent out of the north and not really strong.

Yeah, just looking forward to a good week.

Q. Looking forward to the forward, the celebrity inclusion, that kind of thing?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, it's fun. I played with John Lester last year in the pro-am, or actually I played with him one of the tournament days. Derek Lowe I played with in the pro-am. I played with Pudge Rodriguez in one of the tournament rounds. It's fun. It's fun to see these other athletes and how they -- and celebrities and how they enjoy playing this game and the fact that we can do it together. They've got their thing going on, we've got our thing going on, but it kind of mixes well.

Q. I thought it was interesting last week when somebody asked you about TV, the balance between TV and doing it out here and you said you weren't the type to do anything halfway, you wanted to focus on this. What was that process like and are you happy with the direction you chose?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I am. I'm enjoying being back and playing again. I enjoyed working with the crews at NBC and Golf Channel, and I was at the Masters for a day last week and took Luke, my 17 year old, into the Live From set and saw some of my old friends, got caught up a little bit with some of them in between -- during commercial breaks and stuff like that.

I enjoyed it, and it was a fun process. I was all in doing it.

As I neared 50 and played a few times that first season, I thought this was something that I enjoyed getting back into. Certainly wasn't my plan from the get-go when I stopped playing back in 2016, but I kind of -- like I got down a path

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and I don't look back, but I'm willing to kind of make some changes along the way.

This was the right decision for me and my family, and it's been fun.

Q. I was asked to ask you about thoughts on Nelly going for five in a row.

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, it's incredible. I think it goes back to her playing with Luke and I at the PNC.

No, we did get to play with her and Peter in the second round, and that was a lot of fun. The talent and all is right there for everyone to see, but she's just so nice, and she was great with me and with Luke. It's fun to see good people like that succeed and do something exceptionally well.

I know her sister a bit better because she lives and plays at the Bear's Club. I haven't seen her a little bit because she's fairly busy these days with the little one. But they're both great girls.

Not everybody, but I'm certainly rooting for her to go for five in a row and pick off another major this week.

Q. How are you feeling coming in as far as your game goes? Are you feeling pretty good and confident with things?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, I feel good. I've been working on my putting a good bit. I asked Stricker to take a look at it when we were in Palm Springs, which he did. I worked with Brad Faxon when I was at home and then saw Randy Smith yesterday. Feel like between the three, I'm going in the right direction getting back to doing things the way I do them when I putt well, and then I worked a little bit with Randy yesterday, one little thing in my balance, which was nice because I instantly -- I thought I was hitting it pretty good until we started working on it, and then I realized, well, I wasn't, because now I'm really hitting it good. Played nine holes over at Royal Oaks yesterday with my dad, which was a lot of fun.

Game feels good. A couple weeks off. We went to UVA and saw our oldest daughter for one of the weekends, and like I said, a little two-day trip to the Masters with Luke.

It's never boring in the Leonard household, but it was a good couple of weeks. But yeah, after the Masters I was ready to get out here and play. A couple weeks off is great, and it gives you some time to do things, but at the same time, I want to get back out and play.

Q. Do you remember the first time you saw Scottie Scheffler?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, he was 10, 12 years old. I can't remember exactly how old he was when they moved to Dallas, but it wasn't too far after that where he was practicing and working a little bit with Randy. I'd be out there practicing and he'd be hitting balls, usually in fairly close proximity to us. He'd come over and sit on something and hang out for 10, 15 minutes and then he'd go back to doing what he was doing.

I do know that I would go through wedges pretty regularly, and I remember at one point Randy asked me what I did with my old wedges, and I said they really just go in kind of a bag in the garage and at some point I'll get rid of them. He said, can I have these. I said, sure, and so a couple days later I was out there and I look over, and Scottie is using my wedges.

Hopefully someday he'll return the favor.

So yeah, we've known each other for quite some time.

Q. What do you make of what he's been able to do? How do you quantify the run he's on the last couple years?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, it's pretty remarkable to watch. You think about Jordan, the couple-year run that he had, Rory -- these guys have been consistent performers, but I'm talking Jordan was 14 and 15. Rory was kind of in that same. Jason Day had a great run through there. I think it's equivalent to that.

But it's two years now, and when is he slowing down? I don't know. It's fun to watch. He's an easy guy to root for.

I just hope he can continue to keep it going.

Q. When you would come back and play Nelson, Colonial, now playing here, do you put more pressure on yourself when it's a home event?

JUSTIN LEONARD: No, not really. I think there's just a little more going on. When you're on the road, you can really -- it's really easy to check out. You don't have to worry about checking the mailbox, walking the dogs, getting somebody to or from school, those kind of things. When you're at home, that gets a little harder because our two worlds collide. I'm from here but I don't get mail here and our dogs aren't here, so it's actually a little bit easier for me. The biggest thing is trying to get a few tickets, making sure my parents are taken care of and figure out which nights we're going out to eat and where that's going

to take place, which that's all good stuff.

Q. Just some thoughts on Jim Furyk and Mike Weir being named captains?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, I played a number of -- on teams with Jim. He's been so involved in the Ryder Cup and the Presidents Cup, more on the captain's side here in the last few years. He brings a lot of experience, and everybody really respects Jim for what he accomplished and is accomplishing in his playing career, and then the fact that he's been in that room with those guys at so many events.

I think Mike is very much the same way. I think that because he's been in the room so often, he knows those players very well, and starting back with Ernie and then Trevor and I think Mike -- obviously being in Canada, it's a natural, but I think regardless of where it was, he'd be a natural captain.

You know, they're both pretty soft-spoken, but when they speak, it means something, and everybody listens. I think they're both going to do a great job.

Q. Have you continued to follow the sports teams here?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, born and raised here, so I've never been the greatest -- a huge baseball fan. Kind of like golf, it's a little slow. But certainly the Cowboys, the Mavericks, and yes, you have to root for the Rangers here. I did watch a little bit of the World Series last year.

Fun to see. Look, it's a very good sports town, and there's a lot of very interesting personalities involved in it, and it makes for good entertainment.

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