

Constellation FURYK & FRIENDS presented by Circle K

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Timuquana Country Club

Justin Leonard

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us, Justin. Start to just, you start participated in Blessings in a Backpack, something that's near and dear to your heart. Can you just talk about that.

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, so we were introduced to Blessings in a Backpack through the PGA TOUR Wives Association 15 years ago, 20 years ago, something like that. We've been involved ever since. We helped pack bags and get some schools set up in we were in Dallas. We did the same thing when we lived in Colorado. Now we're doing it in Florida.

Our youngest son, Skylar, he's a freshman, and at some point they do where you go and you can sign up for clubs at the high school, and he decided to start his own. So he started the Blessings in a Backpack club in high school, and I think he's got something like 70 or 80 kids that help him out.

So it's something near and dear to our heart. It's something that our kids can easily participate in, and it's important for them also to participate because they're helping serve kids their own age and younger and things like that.

It's heartbreaking to hear the numbers of how many kids go home hungry on the weekends. So to be able to help with that means a lot to me and our family and certainly the PGA TOUR and PGA TOUR Champions.

Q. Did Skylar do that on his own?

JUSTIN LEONARD: He did.

Q. He formulated the plans and then told you later on?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Well, that's how I heard about it. I don't know if my wife had anything to do with it, but I think he was certainly driving the bus on it.

Q. What does that tell you about your kid, that he



recognizes that there's a need here? I'm sure some of his peers are involved at school and everything. We've got some hopes for kids these days, don't we.

JUSTIN LEONARD: I'm proud of him. Proud of him before he did this. We've done a couple mission trips in Africa and things like that. We always wanted to serve and try and let our kids know how important it is to have a servant's heart. To see him being proactive about it, as all our kids have been in whatever stage where they are, it's just great to see it.

Q. Is that one reason you come to this tournament, because you know Jim and Tabitha are raising funds for Backpack?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Well, I come to this tournament because they're raising money for so many different organizations. I came all those years when it was just a pro-am and the concerts and everything, because I know obviously they're very close friends of ours. I also know -- I can see the hard work that they put in, too, to giving back to their community and the surrounding areas.

Just having Blessings here and involved is just a bonus.

Q. I know the guys love the golf course here, but there's going to be a change in a couple years. Do you think that because of what Jim and Tabitha do and of course the way they run the golf tournament, the way it is run, kind of can translate from one venue to the next, do you think it won't change how much guys want to come and play here when it goes to a different course?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I think guys will continue to support this event regardless of where we play. I also trust Jim and Tabitha to find a golf course that they can do all the things they want to from a sponsor's standpoint, a golf course that we'll enjoy playing. Ultimately it's about supporting them and what they're trying to do.

To me, and I think to most everybody, look, this has been a great venue, and I'm sure the next venue will be great, as well.



Q. What was your role at the Presidents Cup? What did Jim ask you to do? Did you have certain players who were your responsibility?

JUSTIN LEONARD: So I would say my role was just keeping Jim kind of on point and trying to handle a little bit -- he's so detail oriented. He worked so hard. I would imagine his experience in 2018 in Paris may have affected the way he prepared. Not that he wasn't prepared, but I think he really had a mission on how he wanted things to go during the week, the communication with the players, not giving them any surprises during the week, those kind of things.

Really just -- he had a vision of how he wanted things to go, and it was our job to try and -- if we could relieve him of some things, whether it was interviews during the week, those kind of things, and then going to the players, we all kind of had some relationships with certain players, and there's certain players we felt like needed something or an assistant that they were very comfortable with, and so we tried to find those connections. Sometimes they were very natural. Other times -- like I walked in, I don't really know a lot of the players, their personalities and things like that. I know their games from watching them on TV, but I hadn't played with many of them. A lot of those guys weren't on TOUR yet when I stopped playing.

So anyway, I have a good relationship with Keegan Bradley, and I thought, you know what, I told him, I think that when he goes out, it would be pretty natural for me to be with him. Then there were some -- the matches he didn't play, I was with different matches, and on Sunday we kind of went through our order of things and tried to find those -- again, those same combination of players. We want them to be comfortable, so if they keep seeing different faces, for some players that's going to make a difference in how they perform, so we wanted to try and keep things as consistent as possible. So the way it worked out, I was able to go out with the first couple of matches, and then once they were done, kind of drop back. Just our communication between each other was really good during the week, and the information.

I would say it was probably more work than I thought it would be. There's a lot of meetings and a lot of planning, and we were always trying to think ahead.

Again, I think Jim and Tab both had a real clear vision of how they wanted the week to go, and I think, as with anything when you're dealing with 12 individuals and you're playing against 12 other great players, some different things can get thrown your way. But I felt like we really stayed on point throughout the whole week, and that's thanks to Jim.

Q. Do you want to be a captain?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I would love to. I would love to, if it's offered to me. I would gladly accept.

Q. When it was 5-0, what was the message to the guys? When it was 5-5 what was the message to the guys going forward? It didn't look like anybody got put off in any way by that because they came out Saturday and played well. Is it just kind of stay the course in both situations?

JUSTIN LEONARD: You asked Jim already? Can I ask what his answer was? I don't want to take away from --

Q. His answer was essentially in both situations we've still got a lot of golf to play.

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yes, that was the overwhelming message. There's a lot to play. There's a lot of points left. After Thursday, there's still a lot of points left, and after Friday that message became even more important.

We didn't blow things up after Friday. It came down to putting. The Internationals made the key putts during the day where we couldn't really get any momentum.

The Thursday matches were all very close. That could have easily been 3-2 or 2-3, either way. We just happened to win 18 three times and get the sweep. But the Friday matches, some of them were -- the Internationals won pretty easily.

Yeah, it was just, look, we're still in a good place. There's plenty of points to play for.

Saturday, even though there's one less match in each session, having two sessions you can really -- it's much easier to carry over momentum from the morning to the afternoon. So we just talked a lot about that, as well, and just supporting your teammates, for the players that weren't playing, get ready for the next session they were going to play, whether that was going to be Saturday afternoon or Sunday. Just focus on your match and go do what you do.

Q. How much input did you have in terms of the pairings? Did you discuss that with the other assistant captains and Jim before the pairings were --

JUSTIN LEONARD: We did. We started talking about pairings even before the team was fully selected. That's where our stats guys really played a key role in that.

Q. Can you give us some insight as to what the stats



people tell you to do?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I mean, they're analyzing all the strokes gained data and everything over the course of the last year and then more specifically this year. They can see trends in players' games.

Then with the information they have on the golf course, although it's a bit limited because Royal Montreal, it's not like a Quail Hollow where it's got a PGA TOUR event every year, and frankly, some of that data, it was probably a little bit skewed just because the tournaments that they've had there have been pretty spread out, and I feel like today's players just play a little differently than they did maybe 10 years ago or so. But they made every -- all the adjustments that they could to try and tailor make the information that we had on the golf course towards players today and the way they play, and then come up with pairings.

Some of the pairings didn't work because the golf balls that the players used were so far apart, and we didn't want somebody to have to make a drastic change in golf balls.

But by and large, we didn't go completely off their here's our No. 1 lineup, but we tried to stay very near the top of their suggestions and then take into account personalities. They know a lot of their personalities, as well, because they've been around these team events for the last few years.

But I went into it very skeptical as far as the whole stats thing, as far as getting our pairings from that. But as the week went on, as the time went on, like the week even, I started to really warm up to the idea, and then after spending the week with these guys, I understand.

The service that they provided I think is a big reason why we had so much success last week.

Q. I wanted to ask a question about the year that Ernie is having this year. Not every Hall of Famer has won multiple majors coming out on the Champions Tour and wins immediately. What do you think of the year Ernie is having and what that says about his competitive desire regardless of what tour he's playing on?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, I think Ernie has always been comfortable on the golf course, but I think maybe it takes a bit with the majority of our tournaments are three rounds and those kind of things, like to really get comfortable. I think a player like Ernie, once he wins once or twice, as we've seen, all of a sudden it seems like he's in the mix every week, and a lot of times he's coming out on top.

I see him a bit when we're at home. He works hard. I certainly see that.

I'm happy to see him have the success that he's had this year. He's been a great ambassador for this game and for our tour for a long time. I think his success is certainly deserved and well-earned.

Q. What are your expectations for yourself this week? How are you playing?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I was playing pretty well coming in or before last week, and then not touching a golf club for eight or nine days in the middle of the season, I'm trying to use it to my advantage and kind of get rested up and let the body heal and things like that. Fortunately I was able to get in the gym a little bit during the week, so that was good.

I started hitting balls Tuesday, and just trying to stay real simple and basic. After a couple days, it feels pretty good.

I think today getting on the golf course -- I'm going to go practice for a bit this morning, and then getting on the golf course I'll have a good sense of where I am. Kind of around that, how today goes, kind of come up with a little bit of strategy, maybe a little more conservative here on the first day or two and just kind of see where I am, really. I'm not sure exactly where I am. Everything feels pretty good. I was hitting it well before last week. Had a couple decent results in the last two tournaments I've played.

Just trying to make a push here towards the end of the year. But I wouldn't trade it -- the experience I had last week was so worth it. I was around a lot of high-level golf for seven days. I think I'm going to try and use some of that to my advantage, as well.

Q. What are the top two or three things you like about the Champions Tour?

JUSTIN LEONARD: It's just being around players that I've played junior golf, college golf, PGA TOUR with. Our venues and the cities we go really support our tour. And the competition. I enjoy putting the work in when I'm home. I enjoy having goals and things to work towards. It's not always about being on the golf course and practicing. It's working on some things, whether it's mentally or physically, those kind of things.

I enjoy getting into myself and just challenging myself.

Q. Geeking out on golf?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Right, pretty much.



