

The Ryder Cup

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Justin Thomas

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Welcome to the 43rd Ryder Cup here at Whistling Straits. We are joined by Justin Thomas. Welcome to your second Ryder Cup, first here in the United States.

Let's go back three years to Paris. You had a terrific record. What did you learn or experience there that you weren't counting on -- at that point you were a rookie. What might have happened there that surprised you about being part of a Ryder Cup team?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Probably -- I mean, I knew it was going to be a special week and we were all going to be together as a team, but just the brotherhood, the camaraderie. I mean, the moments in time spent in that team room, it's hard to explain.

Even though it's like last night, just getting together, you'd think that all of us are best friends the entire year. We hang out, we all live in the same place, and it's just a lot of fun.

It's great for all the girlfriends and wives to catch up, and it's great for all the players, especially with TOUR Championship being a couple weeks ago, being able to catch up from what they've been doing the last couple weeks, what they've been up to.

I don't know, I mean, France was obviously -- the outcome was not anything like we wanted, but I'm sure everybody -- even the guys that had been there, I mean, it's just like we play a stroke play tournament. You hope to learn from any experience you have, and I feel like I tried to learn from how to handle my emotions and adrenaline and everything like that that'll hopefully be helpful this week.

Q. You're an obvious candidate to be one of the playing leaders on Team USA because of your experience and your success. I'm curious if you agree with that, if you feel like that's a responsibility you have? And if yes, what does that mean to you? What kind of things do you do as a leader?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, my experience isn't really there. I've only played one Ryder Cup. I've been fortunate

to play in a lot of events and have some success in the individual events I've played, but in terms of a Ryder Cup, I mean, this is my first one in the States.

I'm looking to the captains. I'm looking to Jordan, Brooks, DJ, the guys that have played in the Ryder Cup in the States if I have any questions or anything like that.

My role, I'm looking at it on this team is whatever it needs to be. I will help the rookies or help the first-timers if they need it, if they want it. I'm still going to be myself. I'm still going to be sarcastic. I'm still going to have fun and needle people. That's just who I am.

At the end of the day my role on this team is just to try to be relaxed and go out and get a point whenever Strick wants me to go play.

Whatever they need from me, whatever they don't need from me, if I play five, if I play one, I'm just going to try to get as many points as I can and try to make the week as enjoyable as I can for everybody on the team.

Q. You've accomplished a lot of things on a lot of different stages; what did playing so well in Paris do for you confidence-wise?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it did a lot. I would have preferred to go 0-5 and us win the Cup, but it did a lot for me just to know that Captain Furyk had the confidence in me to play me that much, and to put me out first in singles was probably one of the best honors that I've ever received. Without him -- if he doesn't know that or if he does, it just was really cool.

I don't know, I mean, I took a lot from it, but like I said, it's a team event, and what I did in France is irrelevant because we didn't get it done as a team.

Like I said, I'd gladly go 0-5 this week if that meant we brought the Cup back on our soil.

Q. Just kind of curious from your experience in France what you feel like some of the secrets to success are as a rookie in this competition?

Obviously you've got six here; can that be an advantage because everybody is kind of wide-eyed and stoked, or can it be a disadvantage because you haven't experienced that first tee and everything?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, I think when you look at your rookies are a two-time major champion in Collin Morikawa or a FedExCup Champion in Patrick Cantlay, and a gold medalist in Xander Schauffele. When you're looking at guys like that that are your rookies, that says a lot about your team.

I think at the end of the day you can dive as deep as you want into the pairings, into who's sitting, who's playing, but at the end of the day whatever team plays the best is going to win. We have 12 unbelievable players, they have 12 unbelievable players, and it's really just who's going to go out there and get it and who's going to go out and execute the best.

I've watched many Ryder Cups on TV, and it's who makes the putts, who flips those matches, who grinds out the halves and who gets it done. I'd go to war with these 11 other guys and our captains like I'm going to do this week, and I have all the faith in the world in all the rookies. I think their experience proves that they are beyond rookies.

It's going to be a fun week. It was a fun week for me in France just in terms of the atmosphere and experience and all, and I'm sure the fact that it's on U.S. soil will help those nerves a little bit.

Q. When you said that last night you would have thought you guys were all best friends, I guess the question is are you all best friends, and why is it important that you at least feel that way?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, I don't know. It just feels -- not that we aren't friends off the course. It's just different. You're never -- not that we're forced to be in the same room, but we're obviously all eating in the team room together. We're watching the game together. We're playing ping-pong. We're signing the million flags together that we have to sign.

We're doing all these things that -- we just don't have those opportunities in individual events. Everyone has their own schedule, they're practicing and playing at different times, arriving at different times.

When we get together in normal events we have that same relationship, it's just we're not all of us are together at one time. The opportunity just doesn't present itself.

Yeah, we are. Obviously it's not like all 12 of us are just

sitting cross-legged around a circle on the floor just talking about life, but we're all in our -- just kind of bopping around the room and catching up here and there, and it's been fun.

Q. You're obviously having to wear the Ralph Lauren U.S. Team uniform this week. How was that handled in the background? Were there any problems, any discussions, and was it any distraction for you this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: My priorities are a lot more than the clothes I'm wearing this week. It's about trying to get a point for Team USA and earn as many as I can. It was never even a discussion until just now.

Q. Knowing you're close with Tiger, Stricker has made it clear that even though he's not here, he's still a part of the team. Just curious if you've spoken to him and what his message has been for you guys this week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, I got together with him a couple times last week. More so just going over to see how he's doing as a friend, more than as a vice captain or if he's even still considered that. I don't know.

Yeah, he's so into it. He obviously wants the best for our team. He wants the best for all of us. It means a lot to him.

I think people would be surprised -- obviously you all saw in Australia how much it meant to him, but just the amount of work and the amount of hours he's willing to spend to make sure that he feels like the team is prepared and as ready to go as possible is pretty cool.

At the end of the day he also understands that we're 12 of the best players in the world, and we know how to play golf. Sometimes less is more, so I think he's great at balancing that out.

It was more, I'm here if you need me kind of thing.

Q. I'm just curious, what do you think of the qualities that make for a good Ryder Cup teammate or playing partner?

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's a good question. I think -- I mean, the format is very dependent. Four-ball is obviously a lot easier. You're playing your own ball. Realistically you don't even have to talk to your partner. You kind of do your own thing and it's easier to get in a rhythm.

But foursomes I think it's pretty important to put two personalities together, two friends together, two guys that get along, maybe their games complement each other.

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For me at least what I've noticed is I've been fortunate to play -- my record is obviously good in team events, but you look at my partners in Jordan, Rickie and Tiger, I've been very fortunate to have some really good partners, and that's like the number one rule that caddies will tell you of having a good caddie career is have a good player.

It's just one of those things.

We have such a deep, good team that it's not like anybody is a weak link on our team, and it's just about getting the energy similar I would say, and two guys that want to play together, two guys that want to go to battle out there for each other, that would take a bullet for each other, and I think we have a team room that's full of that.

I think that's what makes it exciting for these pairings because there's so many options.

Q. The Ryder Cup could have likely been played last year, but that would have meant without fans. What does it mean to have the fans here this week, and what role do they play in this event?

JUSTIN THOMAS: They play a huge role. Like I said, I haven't experienced one on U.S. soil, but I'm very excited to. I think all of us partook in a little bit of a -- I guess a poll last year on how we would want -- if the Ryder Cup was to happen, how we would want it. Would we rather play it with no fans, would we rather play it with half fans, or just cancel it. My number one answer was play it with full fans or nothing else.

It's a huge advantage to play in front of your home crowd, and it's also what makes the event so special. It would have been a shame to play this without fans or even with very, very limited fans. This is one of the biggest sporting events in the world, and it's a huge deal for the PGA. It's a big deal for us.

I think they did the right thing in pushing it back a year to make sure that not only us players, but everybody could experience this for what it's worth.

Q. How stoked are you to potentially again reunite with Jordan in a pairing, and if something were to prompt Captain Stricker to have to break that up, would you be receptive to that idea?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm receptive for whatever is best for the team. If it means that Jordan and I play every match together, if it means that we split up, everybody is on board with what is best for the team, and I think that's what is most important.

You're going to -- that's the thing; yeah, on paper it's pretty easy to just put matches out, we've got these teams, we've got these four teams, we've got these four teams, but things change. Guys, maybe something happens, maybe they tweak something or they're just not playing good or they're tired or one guy wants to go, whatever it might be.

Things change. I think that's something that Strick has the ability to do, and he's such a great captain that he's able to adapt on the run.

I'm very excited to have the opportunity to play with Jordan because he's obviously a great buddy of mine and we get along so well, but I think we understand each other's games well to know when we're needed, when we're not needed, and pretty much just stay out of each other's way, because we're both pretty good players and hopefully can go get some points for us this week.

Q. You mentioned how nerve-racking that first tee can be. Curious when the nerves hit you. Does it hit you when you reach the tee, when you're walking to the tee, when you're warming up? When does it actually arrive?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For me it was walking to the tee. France had just an absolutely absurd setup there on the first tee, and there was a pretty big bridge I think that kind of went from the chipping green that would go over, that would come kind of right down to the left of the first tee and walk on.

Jordan was great with me because it being my first match and him playing a couple, he'd been in my shoes before and he probably knew the things I was feeling.

I remember it like it was yesterday. We were walking across the bridge and it was four-ball the first match, and we talked about -- four-ball is pretty kind of lenient on who goes first, who doesn't, but he was just like, Do you want to go first or me, and I was like, I'm going, and he's like, You got it.

He understood that. He's like, You need to do what you're comfortable with in this moment, and he knew it was going to take a couple holes for me to settle in and I rode my horse until I finally got comfortable.

But it is, it's a bizarre feeling that's hard to explain, but I'm pretty excited to experience it again in a couple days.

THE MODERATOR: Justin, thanks for spending some time with us. Enjoy your day here.

