

Travelers Championship

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Justin Thomas

Press Conference



TRAVELERS
CHAMPIONSHIP



THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome to Justin Thomas to the interview room at the Travelers Championship. Justin, you're one of six multiple winners this season on the PGA TOUR and you're coming off four consecutive top-25 finishes. As far as the state of your game, how are you feeling coming into this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm feeling pretty good. I didn't exactly finish the week how I would have liked to last week, but you know, I had a lot more positives than negatives. I felt like overall last week and had some stuff to do at the beginning of this week, so didn't exactly get the normal preparation I would get in, but that's what I have this afternoon for, and by this afternoon I feel like I'll be in pretty good shape.

THE MODERATOR: You're making your fifth start here at Travelers this year. What keeps you coming back to this tournament?

JUSTIN THOMAS: This is a great tournament. I think this -- so many events and all the events we play are incredible, but this is kind of one of those underrated ones that I think until people come to and play do they realize how great it is. The Travelers staff, everyone on the committee, they just treat us so well. The fans, they get an unbelievable fan showing here. The field is getting very impressive, which I think is a testimony to them, and I think like a lot of guys like Jordan and Rory, guys that never played here but once they came they realized how great of a tournament it is, and it's one that I've really enjoyed, and it has an even more special place to me since I got an exemption as an amateur.

Q. You mentioned that you got an exemption here. Can you relate to the three young guys who got exemptions like Doug Ghim and the other guys who are making their pro debut here and what they're going through?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it wasn't too long ago. I mean, I played after my freshman year, so I was -- I guess that was in the summer of '12, so six years ago, which is crazy. But it's just a cool golf course because it's not like -- you don't have to hit it crazy far. Not that pretty much all the top college kids hit it just as far if not farther than most of us out here on TOUR, but even if you're not, if you're kind of not as much of a developed player I guess you could say or just in terms of if you haven't even grown all the way yet, whatever you want

to call it, but this course you can play. You see all types of variety of winners here and guys that play well. It really is just kind of whoever plays the best.

But it's a cool tournament. This along with the John Deere, I think both of them have great reputations of giving young guys an opportunity to start their career and their professional career, and they were both tremendous to me, and that stuff doesn't go unnoticed. It is really cool because some potential great story lines can come from it.

Q. Can you describe what your strategy is like between majors, between the U.S. Open and the Open Championship? Jordan used this tournament last year to kind of jump start himself towards what he did in the British Open. How do you use these weeks, and what is your strategy?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, you know, it's just another tournament. I'm trying -- I'm here because I feel like I have a chance to win this golf tournament, and I feel like it's a place that fits my eye well, and I do feel like I'll win at some point in my career here. Hopefully multiple times, but hopefully once, as well. It's a place that I like, and it's -- I'm not here thinking about the Open. I'm not playing this to get my game ready for the Open. It's totally, completely different golf.

But that being said, any time you have the opportunity to get into contention, you can learn from that and use it in future events. Hopefully I'll be able to learn from a positive experience of some sort this week.

Q. Justin, Phil came out this morning and issued an apology, said that the anger got the best of him over the weekend at Shinnecock. I wonder what your reaction was to everything that went down and the subsequent reaction to what he did?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I didn't look into it probably near as much as everybody else did. I was more worried about how I was going to try to win the golf tournament on Sunday while all that was going on, and I wasn't -- I try not to read a whole lot or watch a whole lot of TV during the majors, especially any type of golf-related stuff, just because of the amount of talking that's going on and banter.

But yeah, I mean, obviously he came out and he felt that he shouldn't have, and I guess what he said was --

he shouldn't have done it, he was a little angry or something. So I think he covers it all in what happened.

But in terms of it actually, my thoughts, I don't know, I was never really too worried about it. I was just kind of worried about myself.

Q. What are some of the challenges that TPC River Highlands presents to you, and how are you going to prepare for those?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's a course that you kind of -- when you play it, like you go play on a day like today when you get the pins in the middle of the greens and there's no pressure on anything, it's a really easy golf course. The pins aren't near the slopes, but once the tournament starts, they kind of start tucking the pins a little bit and you start seeing the contours of the greens kind of being used to your disadvantage because of being this short of a golf course, they've always done -- at least when I played, a tremendous job of setting up the golf course to where it rewards good golf and you can get after it if you're driving the ball well and have control of your irons, but if you're not driving it well, you don't get it in the right spots around the greens, it is tough to get up-and-down and it is hard to make pars. That's something that I think is really rare nowadays, but it's also really hard on a golf course design to have that done, so this place does a great job of that.

Q. Jordan was in here yesterday talking about his putting and Tiger has talked about some of the issues he's had putting. When putting goes sideways, how hard is it to not over-think that part of the game when it kind of gets away from you a little bit?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's extremely difficult. It's by far the most mental part of golf, I think. Just because you can putt well for whatever the period of time is and not make anything -- and in you guys' shoes, no offense, but it's viewed to you as bad putting. Sometimes it is bad putting, but for us, 60, 70 percent of the time it's not bad putts. We're hitting good putts, we're just not making putts, not reading them properly, or the speed just isn't quite right. Playing in the afternoon on greens like last week or the West Coast or places that get bumpy, I mean, it's pretty hard to make some putts late in the day. There's a lot of factors that go into it that are more than are probably talked about. But we all know that Jordan has the putting capability that he has, and same with Tiger, and they're two of the best putters to ever play the game. Jordan has made some putts in my face when I'm playing with him. I have no doubt that they'll be putting it great again, and just like anything, it takes time and just kind of getting that inner confidence back.

Q. As someone who will have a chance to try to defend a major later this year, what do you think is the biggest challenge of that, and how impressed are you that Brooks was able to do so?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, the biggest challenge of it is truly just winning again. It's hard to win any tournament at all the entire year, but the fact of winning it since the year prior with all the extra things you have to do that week, I mean, firsthand I know in Malaysia when I went back to Malaysia that next year I had a lot more media. I was being pulled a lot more different ways. But you're glad to have it happen, but it's understood because you're the one that won last year. Everybody kind of wants to expect it out of you and kind of wants a piece of you, I guess you could say. Not only are you trying to get ready for a tournament, but you have to kind of allow that in your schedule, so that kind of makes it hard to be prepared the exact amount that you want to be. But let alone a major, it's really impressive. But someone like Brooks who is as confident and even keel as he is, it doesn't surprise me by any means.

Q. What do you know so far about Bellerive?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I had media day about a month ago, so I went and played it for the first time. It's a good course. It's a good, kind of old-school place. It was fairly soft when I played it, so there were a lot of doglegs where I could just hit it out and then hit it into the greens with mid irons. It's just a totally depends on the setup in terms of how firm, how fast, how firm the fairways will be because if those fairways are firm, they're going to be hard to hit, and from the looks of it, that rough is going to be pretty healthy.

I feel like it'll be a -- it could potentially be a pretty similar setup to kind of a Quail in terms of a score-wise to where it could be pretty easy to shoot 3- or 4-over, but you know, a good round is a couple under. I don't know, I've only played one round on it.

Q. It was announced at this tournament last year about the partnership with Massage Envy and all that. People talk often about the mental approach to the game, but in terms of the physical aspect of the game, and you're a big proponent of stretching and all that stuff, aren't you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, absolutely. I've learned the last couple years it's just as important as the practice that I put in and everything else I do. I told like Tom Lovelady who lives with me, he's a rookie on TOUR this year, it's often hard coming out here and getting a physio guy or paying a trainer, whatever it may be, because it's a lot of money, but at the same time, it's like, dude, you're going to play 30, 32 events this year hopefully, and if your body is not in the correct shape, if you're not feeling well, then about half of those are a

waste. You're going to make up that money in one week if you're feeling good.

It's something to where it's so, so important, and I truly think that's why so many people are hitting it farther now. I obviously don't know that because I wasn't a part of it, but I would guess to say that a lot of guys back in the day weren't exactly stretching and working out and having physio guys before and after and deep tissue and cupping and needling, everything to get their bodies to feel as good as they can to get the most out of what they can, and that's what I've been doing the last couple years. I've put a good 15 pounds on, which I thought I needed to do. I was very, very skinny, so to put good weight on but to continue to be flexible and strong in the right parts of my body is I feel like a big part of why I've been playing well.

Q. In developing the field here, several players have mentioned that people like Andy Bessette have made the effort to go to other tournaments and develop personal relationships with the players. How much does that affect whether you play a tournament or not, and how does what they do here differ from other places?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's hard for me to say because I love this tournament so much that even if I didn't see him at all the entire year, I would still want to come most likely. But I love Andy. He's a great guy. Nathan, I mean, just the entire staff is -- like I said, when I was an amateur here, the fact that they gave me an exemption, I know how hard it is for that to happen and how big of a deal it is for an amateur to be given an exemption. I developed a relationship, even though Nathan is an Auburn guy, I let that go pretty quickly.

Just seeing them week in and week out helps definitely for other guys, I'm sure. I remember one tournament this year they saw something in the locker room, actually I think it was at Quail Hollow -- it was there. This year they had kind of like a little station of snacks and peanut butter and jellies that you could make, and Andy and Nathan are like, man, that's good, why don't we do that. So it's little things like that that other tournament directors may not think that it's a big deal to us. I mean, it's a pretty big deal.

Q. When you go to a tournament like last week where you're just trying to save par and then come to a tournament here where obviously you get a chance to kind of flex your scoring muscles, is that much of an adjustment? Do you feel like you kind of get the shackles taken off a little bit?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it's still golf. You're still -- whether it's even par or 12-under or 25-under, you're just trying to shoot as low as you can. It definitely is different, and a little less exhausting at the end of the

day. Hopefully hitting somewhere between 14 to 16, 17 greens a round and maybe a two-putt birdie here and there or wedging a couple close and just kind of cruising around in 64 or 65, whereas that wasn't going to happen in a place like last week. But at the end of the day, you're still trying to shoot as low as you can. So in terms of that adjustment, it's not too different.

But it's pretty easy to go to sleep every night at a U.S. Open because you're pretty tired.

Q. I know you're close with some of the other guys out here at the tournament this week; anything you and your buddies do while you're here together?

JUSTIN THOMAS: We might go see some movies. I know Jordan and Smylie and I talked about going to see the Incredibles II, so we might have to go give that a try. But no, at least for me, I don't do very much during tournament weeks. I wake up, go to the course, practice, maybe work out in the afternoon if I have time, see physio at some point in the day, and it takes up a lot of the day. Other than that, and then throw in your standard meals that you have to have or should have, pretty ready to go to bed after that.