

FINAL ROUND INTERVIEW August 5, 2018

JUSTIN THOMAS 9 -15)



MICHAEL BALIKER: Like to welcome the winner of the 2018 World Golf Championships Bridgestone Invitational, Justin Thomas, to the interview room.

JT, first of all, your first World Golf Championships victory came close, very close in Mexico earlier in the year. Just first talk about how sweet it is to finally get one of those out of the way and add that to your resume.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it feels nice. I've been knocking on the door this year between Mexico and the Match Play. I felt like I was very close and it was kind of one of the few things left that I felt I needed to knock off or felt that would have been nice to add to the resume, for sure. To win on a golf course like this, a championship golf course and always against a very tough field, it just felt great. I really, really played well all week.

MICHAEL BALIKER: And just briefly, before we get into questions, walking up the 18th there, having the family and the grandparents around, you mentioned it on the green, but just what does it mean to you to see them knowing you have the victory locked up?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it was pretty special. I can't really put it into words, honestly. When I had my putt, I kind of marked it and I turned around and I just happened to see my parents, saw my grandma and grandpa and I just got a huge knot in my throat and I just had to put my head down. I never have gotten like that on the golf course before. You just don't know if they're ever going to see me win if I don't win here, so it was pretty cool to get it done.

Q. Justin, when you have the lead like that, do you take more pride in not making a mistake coming down the stretch, which is I'm sure what you were thinking, or is it just the fact you closed this out?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I take a lot of pride in how I played today. I was very nervous going into today. I told Jimmy that on the chipping green. I said, I don't know why or if it's really been that long or what, but I'm nervous today. I think that you kind of get that 2, 3, 4 shot lead, it's just -- I don't know, it's different than 1. You feel like 1, you know you have to play well. With a 3-shot lead, I obviously knew that I needed to play well, but you kind of have a little bit of wiggle room and you feel like you maybe play a little too conservative, but I was able to kind of dwell on past learning experiences and you always try to get it higher. My goal going into today, I was trying to get it into 18 under because I knew if I got to that, I didn't really think anybody could catch me.

I played well enough to do that, I just didn't really make any putts today, but I just kept hitting

green after green. And if I hit missed the fairway, I was putting it on the correct side of the rough so I was able to have an angle into the green. We just kind of plotted our day around and, once J-Day got within two on 13, that birdie there was huge to kind of separate it, and then he made a couple bogeys and we were able to coast coming in.

Q. I believe you shared a text from your grandmother when you were going to the French Open. Could you share what that was again? And also just totally separate, what was different this week than the last few weeks? What came together for you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'll read it verbatim for you if you want it.

She said, "Dad told me you were on your way to France and that you had been sick all week. Hope you have some good shit-kicking antibiotics. Hit them good across the pond and be well."

That's grandma right there.

Q. What did you say back to her?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know. I think I said like, haha, or okay or something. I mean, what do you say back to that when your grandma says that?

Q. What was different this week, what came together for you in your game?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm just in a great place mentally right now, I just was so patient and calm all week. I mean, I think I made six bogeys all week, something like that, which is pretty good around this place as many birdies as I feel like I make. Kind of had a little bit of a loose day yesterday, I felt like, with the amount of bogeys I made, but I played really well. I drove the ball well. If I missed fairways, like I said, I was missing them on the right side and I knew that going into the tee shot. I was trying, like a hole like 11 is a perfect example. Obviously I wasn't trying to snipe hook it that far left, but I knew the left rough is better than the right edge of the fairway because of where that pin sits. I was trying to keep it up that left side.

Jimmy did an unbelievable job of keeping me calm, especially after telling him I was nervous to start. That puts a lot of pressure on him to say the right things and he did that today.

Q. To what extent is your great mental place that you're in that you just alluded to a result of the meeting that you had Tuesday with your team? How much did that form your week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I think it potentially helped a lot. But at the end of the day, if I'm not in the right place myself, I'm not going to be in the right place.

Yeah, Jimmy is now going to know better things to say to me, or my dad's going to know

things that I want to hear, but if I'm angry or crabby, then I'm going to be angry or crabby, you know what I mean?

I don't know. Everybody knows just some days, some weeks you wake up and you're happy and you're in a good spot and some weeks you don't. But yeah, I think I was just able to get a lot off of my chest that I felt that I needed to or I wanted to, and I think Jimmy was able to do the same and that's something that I stressed to him. It's no hard feelings in this relationship. We're both in this for the same reason. We want me and him to perform the best that we can. So for that to happen, we need to be honest with each other, and brutally honest at times. Not that we were on Tuesday, but we were just able to kind of let some things out that we felt that we needed to.

Q. This is a really long time ago, I realize, but if you're nervous starting the round and then the first shot you hit is into a bunker with a big lip and a bunch of trees in the way, was hooking a pitching wedge part of the plan there? Was there any risk there?

JUSTIN THOMAS: There's definitely some risk, but if the wind would have been off the left, it wouldn't have done that. Because it was a wedge, it's going to have more spin, and with more spin it's going to curve more, and I felt I could definitely get it in that right bunker. If I caught it cleanly, it was going to hook. I didn't have to worry about blading it like into the people. If I bladed it, it was just going to hit the lip and go in the fairway, or if I chunked it, it was going to stay in the fairway.

But I felt like, should I have done that? Maybe not, but just out of the bunker I feel like on that up-slope I can hook it a lot and I did. When Jimmy went to rake that, I'm like, Wait till you see how much I had to hook that thing when you go over there. Maybe it's a good thing that he didn't get over there in time.

Q. (No microphone.)

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was a good par. If you miss that fairway, you're most likely going to be not grinding, but you're going to be trying to make a par. I hit a bad tee shot. I didn't hit that club very well on the range, but I was able to hit some good ones as the day went on. But yeah, making par, that definitely settled me.

Q. What do you think it was like for your grandfather playing in the PGA almost 60 years ago here and now watching you win?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It had to be pretty cool. That thing with my grandpa is he's not emotional, he's very right in front of you, straight laced, like a lot of older people. He's very blunt and very honest. It's pretty funny sometimes. I'll play well and maybe just not putt very well and he'll be like, oh, you just couldn't make anything, huh? I'm like, yeah, I couldn't, I know, thanks. But just, I truly don't know. I think my grandma's going to be a lot more likely to express how she felt about it than my grandpa, that's just the kind of person that he is. But I hadn't seen him smile or be that happy maybe ever. It was pretty cool to be the reason

that he was like that.

Q. I guess all the emotion was almost coming from you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was. I don't know, it just -- like I said, you don't know if I don't win today, if they ever get to see me win. It was a lot, I hate to say pressure, but it was. I wanted to win with them here so bad. I mean, they just mean so much to me and they've been so influential my whole life. Yeah, it was definitely an emotional moment.

Q. Technical question of sorts, I think you switched to a new driver at the U.S. Open or after the U.S. Open and wondering how long, if at all, it took to get used to that. Did that take time, what was that process like, and where are you now with it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I switched to a new driver at the U.S. Open, the new Titleist TS3, I believe it is. Yeah, I liked it right away. It was a little bit faster, which everybody likes. For me, my struggles with the driver's always been strike, hitting a toe ball because I like to cut the ball with the driver. So when you're setting up for a cut and you toe it and it goes left, that's never good. So we've really been working hard trying to figure out why that is. Obviously it's me, I mean I'm the one swinging it, but with the technology and the different things you can do, you can just change so much.

We got together with the guys -- actually got together with one of the guys at the French Open and we were talking and then again at the British and it doesn't make any sense, but it worked, making it an eighth of an inch shorter. And you obviously have to change the weight a little bit. I don't know what they did. It's made all -- it's made a huge difference. I'm hitting it in the center of the club and, I mean, I drove it -- I hadn't had that feeling in a while like I had this week. When I'm driving it well, I hit those drives like on 8 and 9 and 18 and I just swing as hard as I can and it feels like it's going to do what I want and that's a comfortable feeling, especially here at Akron or Bellerive.

Q. Justin, safe to say that you feel happier with your game and more confident going into the PGA this week than you did at this time a year ago? And if so, what does that mean for your game going into this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I played really well at this tournament last year. I putted horrendously. I've always had a hard time putting these greens, I don't know what it is. They are poa annua, they're severe, they get pretty fast, so that has something to go into it. But there's some people out there making putts, I just wasn't one of them. You know, I just had one really hot putting day this week, so I think that was really just the biggest difference.

Yeah, I felt going into PGA pretty good last year. The results hadn't showed it from the last couple events, but again, I was playing well, just had one bad day there at the British and had a bad putting week here. That's why I switched putting grips. It's been a good change thus far.

Q. Justin, so you stepped up to the 18th hole with a big lead and you ripped almost a 400 yard drive down the middle of the fairway. Is this what we're going to be expecting heading into the PGA and the rest of the season, an impressive drive?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I hope so. It's a tee shot I've never really liked that much, it just never really fit my eye, it's a great hole. I've always had a hard time because, like I said, I like to work the ball left to right if the hole asks for a left-to-right shot. It's a little easier with a four-shot lead than probably a one-shot lead, but I was able to aim it up that left side. Like I said, swung as hard as I could and the ball came down about on the line that I wanted. But yeah, that was probably the hardest drive that I hit this week. And I had a little bit of adrenaline going, so to answer your question, I hope that I have a lot more of those next week, yes.

Q. Everybody talks about your father and your grandfather because of the golf connection. But how are you like your grandmother? She sounds like a pistol.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, she's a beauty. We used to get in trouble all the time when I was a kid because we'd just pester each other. She'd get me in trouble because she was like a little dog, she'd get me all riled up, then I'd poke her or something like that and then I'd get in trouble.

She's great. She's very charismatic, she's happy, she's always go with the flow. To see someone, you know, at her age walking out there on a walker on this hilly golf course, I'm sure she's going to sleep well tonight. My poor grandpa, if he's driving home, he's going to get probably a minute and a half of her awake because she will fall asleep right away. Yeah, she's a great woman. She's just very happy, and so hopefully I kind of get those sarcastic, like that text message you saw, and kind of happiness from her.

Q. Considering the history of this place and probably the last PGA TOUR event here, does that add anything? I know it's already a prestigious tournament, but does that mean more to you?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm bummed, I wish it was here every year now obviously. I mean, any win is special. It's an extreme accomplishment to win a PGA TOUR event. To be on this run that we've been the last, whatever, two years or year and a half, whatever it may be, we've put a lot of hard work in so it's not like it's been gifted to us.

My whole team, we've all been working really hard to get to this spot, but it is, it's a huge golf tournament, it's a great field. Anytime -- to me, it means a lot to win on a great golf course. This is a great designed golf course. It's right in front of you, it's not tricked up. Like I kind of said out on the green, you look at the list of winners and it's not a coincidence. So it's pretty cool to have my name added to those. But to win the last event here at Firestone, it's pretty cool.

MICHAEL BALIKER: With that, Justin, congratulations.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thanks.