

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
10 October 2018



JUSTIN THOMAS

MODERATOR: Like to welcome Justin Thomas to the CIMB classic media centre. Two-time champion here in three appearances. What is it about this place that you found such a liking to?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm not really sure, to be honest. It's just a place that I've obviously played well. I'm comfortable. I think being a little bit of a longer hitter you have an advantage, but I mean, the fact of the matter is that I've just played well the years I played here. I think my wedge game is a strong suit of mine and you have a lot of wedges out here, so I've been able to take advantage of that.

MODERATOR: How key were those two victories to start your career?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, this is always going to be a special place to me. This is always going to be the place I got my first PGA TOUR victory and that's very, very special. Every time I look at that trophy in my office at home, it brings back a lot of great memories, anytime I see videos or clips of it. It was a very instrumental part of my career, for sure.

Q. Justin, you had two wins last year, but that really doesn't compare to the five you had the year before, so --

JUSTIN THOMAS: I had three last year, by the way.

Q. Three?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm just kidding.

Q. How does it compare -- if you really have to compare your season, you played really well, you went to the World No. 1 ranking as well. So how do you explain to general golf fans why you won five the year before and just two despite playing so well throughout the year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. Well, anytime you win three times in a season, it's still a pretty good season. Obviously not winning a major was a big difference and not winning the FedExCup, but I played plenty well enough last year to win the same amount of times. You know, when you win that many times in a year, you have a lot of things go your way. You have a couple hot streaks and I just never really had any. I played really consistent good golf kind of throughout the year and I just didn't have as many hot weeks like I did in '16-'17.

But again, if I win three times on Tour or at least three times on Tour every year, I would say

it's definitely a good year. But the majors are the big thing for me, so I would say that was the biggest difference.

Q. Can I also ask you, I know you posted on your Instagram about the goals you had for the season and how many of them you achieved. There were certain stats that you mentioned. Can I ask you what kind of improvement -- I know you must be having some thoughts on improvement, and when you see your stats, what kind of a percentage would really make you feel happy if you improve on almost all the stats that you really look at?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For me, if I can improve my driving accuracy just by a little bit. You know, hit one or two more fairways a round or even if I average one more fairway a round, it doesn't seem like a lot, but over the grand scheme of things over the course of a year that's a big deal. As far as I hit it, if I'm able to do that, it's a huge difference.

I got better last year than I was the year before, which is something I try to do every year. I want to get better every single year. But there's so many different -- I mean, I could say I want to -- I feel like I can get better in every aspect of my game. I struck the ball beautifully last year, my iron game was very good I would say in terms of statistically, but my short game can always get better, my driving can always get better, my putting can always get better. I know that doesn't really give you a very specific answer, but at the end of the day I still continue to work on everything to try to get everything just a little bit better.

Q. Thanks for helping make (inaudible) a great event. How much fun was it to see Tiger win the TOUR Championship after so many years of not winning?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it was really cool to see him win. I obviously wish I would have been the one walking up 18 with the two-shot lead or one-shot lead. It's great for golf having him back. It's great for him. He's been through so much the last 10 years, I can never come close to imagining it. I'm sure there's been many points in his life, his career when he didn't think he would get back to this point.

As a friend, I'm more happy for him than I am for golf. I'm very happy to have him back for golf, but just knowing him as a person, I'm really, really happy for him because I know how hard he's worked, I know how much he wants it. I know how much he wants to at least give it another run for us young guys as he calls us. It was pretty cool to see him get it done in Atlanta.

Q. Slightly unpleasant question that concerns the Ryder Cup, what do you have to say, because you were one of the involved parties when Patrick Reed said that Jordan didn't want to play with him and you were paired with him. Jim Furyk says that this was decided almost a couple weeks in advance. What are your thoughts on that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, my thoughts stay very similar to what I've said to everybody, it's so easy to look at the captains and say it's their fault, but at the end of the day we didn't play

well enough. The Europeans played exponentially better than we did, that's why they beat us as bad they did.

Yeah, it's easy to look at pairings and say, well, we should have done this or we could have done that, but it doesn't matter if you put the two winningest guys of all time together, if they don't play well, they're going to lose.

Yeah, that was something obviously that had been talked about in advance but all I was worried about was I knew that I was going to play with Jordan and we were worrying about taking care of our point and taking care of our match because it is a team event and it's a team week and we're all worried about each other, but that's kind of our thing is we do our job. So you do your job and Jordan and I's job was to go out and get a point and that's what we were fortunate enough to at least get three out of four. But no, everybody has their own thoughts and feelings, but at the end of the day we just didn't play well enough.

Q. You won here twice, but now the golf course is brand new so it's totally different. So how do you fancy your chances this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I would like to still think that I have a good chance. It is a different -- it's the same golf course, nothing about it's changed. It's just the grass, the fairways are different, the conditions are different. I mean, the fact that we're going to be playing the ball down is a huge difference. I don't think people understand how different that's going to make it as opposed to every time you hit the fairway you have a great lie. You put it on a tee the last couple years basically. When you miss a green, when you're on the green, you're going to be -- we did the same thing and now we're going to have to play it as it lies. You get a bad lie around the green, in the fairway, it's an easy chip turns hard.

So little things like that are going to make, I mean, probably a shot to two and a half shots difference a day over the course of the scoring average. It's firmer, the greens are firmer so the fairways are going to be harder to hit. But at the end of the day, it's still a very short golf course. We have par 5s to take advantage of and scores are still going to be low, but 3 or 4 under's going to get you a lot more than it did the last couple years.

Q. So the fact that they're using similar grasses as they do at the PLAYERS Championship, does that really help with the familiarity?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, bermuda's something I play on in Florida a lot and we play quite often on Tour. Hats off goes to the staff. Tearing a course up or re-grassing, resurfacing a place, it takes a lot of work, it takes a lot of time and people that have never been here have no idea that it was ever anything different. I mean, it truly speaks to everybody that put in the work they did because, I mean, I can't even get over how good it looks. It's not that I ever had any doubt, it's just hard to do and it's really hard to make it look as good as they have and be in as good of shape as they have. It's nice out there.

Q. You've won in Asia during the fall season the last two years, one here and one in

Korea. (Inaudible)

JUSTIN THOMAS: For me, I always feel it's important to play in the fall because you don't want to get too far behind. These are two events, no cut, they're big purses, great fields to where you're able to get some points, you're able to make a lot of money, you're able to get a lot of world ranking points early or at least the opportunity to do so.

For me, yeah, it would be great to take two or three months off and not play any golf or anything, but these are courses and places I obviously enjoy coming and I've had success at, and because of that it's huge to be able to get off to a good start because you're not behind the eight-ball. Once you get to that kind of January, February, March, you don't feel like you're as pressed to play well. Obviously if you don't play well in these, then you're still in that situation, but you feel one out of two weeks, hopefully two out of two that you can play well enough to move high enough in the FedExCup.

Q. Just a fun question: What do you do on the long flight here on the plane to keep your --

JUSTIN THOMAS: Sleep. Sleep as much as possible. I slept for nine and a half hours on the first flight and probably three and a half on the second flight. I left Saturday night or Saturday afternoon because we flew out of New York, so we flew to New York at about 2:00 on Saturday and I arrived here 9:00 a.m. on Monday. It was a long day.

Q. JT, I think compared to last year, this year coming to this week you're well rested, fresher as compared to last year where you had to play the TOUR Championship and Presidents Cup. So does that help in any way?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, it's essentially the same. I still played TOUR Championship, Presidents Cup, had a week off, then here. This was the same; I went TOUR Championship, Ryder Cup, week off, then here.

I feel fresher and I would like to hope that that's from the work that I've put in off the course or off weeks, you know, in my work in the gym and making sure I'm staying rested. I'm still tired, don't get me wrong, but I felt last year when I got here I was pretty out of it. I'm excited for these two weeks. I think I have an opportunity to play well and hopefully knock off a win or two, but at least give myself chances.

MODERATOR: Best of luck this week, Justin. Thanks for coming in.