

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
19 October 2022

JUSTIN THOMAS



MICHAEL BALIKER: We'll go ahead and get started with Justin Thomas here in the interview room at THE CJ CUP in South Carolina.

Justin, 200th start on TOUR this week. I know you saw it on social media the other day, but is that something you really reflected on or thought about or was that kind of your realization?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I definitely didn't think about it or I didn't know or haven't paid attention. Yeah, it's just one of those things that it sneaks up on you. Everybody -- it's the saying everybody says, how much time flies out here. But that is, yeah, it's pretty bizarre this is my 200th start. Not really much else to say besides that.

MICHAEL BALIKER: You're a two-time winner of this event, obviously on Jeju, but coming here to Congaree this week you just played 18 holes in the pro-am, what are some of your key takeaways so far?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, the course is really cool, I've really enjoyed it, I think it's very unique and can play a lot of different ways depending on how firm and fast it gets, or the wind directions I think can change a lot of the clubs off tees. The course is in fantastic shape, but the greens are very, very good, can get very quick. So it doesn't look like we have a lot of wind in the forecast, so that won't let it dry out too much. Yeah, it's got a mixture of some, you know, a couple short gettable holes, but I had over 245 into two separate par 4s today and I definitely haven't had that happen in a while. It's a good test.

Q. What did you hit?

JUSTIN THOMAS: What's that?

Q. What did you hit on those 245-yard shots?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I hit 5-wood on both of them. I probably would have hit a 3-wood on one of them, but I had a tree in my way so I had to turn a 5-wood around it.

Q. And the last time you hit a fairway metal into a par-4 without wind would be age 12?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, not that long.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Thirteen?

JUSTIN THOMAS: We've had a couple of crazy setups, I'm sure I've hit some 5-woods before, but not 245, 255 into par 4s ever.

Q. With the season with the FedExCup, Presidents Cup, majors over, with a wedding looming, what is your motivation for this time of the year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: To play well. I mean, to be perfectly honest, I don't know if -- irritated is not the right word. I guess you could just say hungry. I feel like I have a lot of guys ahead of me in the world rankings and it's not that I don't appreciate it, but I would rather them not be there. It's nothing on them, but it's more of a me problem than it is a them problem.

Like I said, I just, I'm very hungry to start winning more golf tournaments. I felt for the majority of the year last year I played some really solid consistent golf, but I just didn't win enough. You have to win more to be at the top of the rankings and I just didn't do that. Just need to practice more and keep hammering it, and I think that's something to try to get off to a good start for the season this week.

Q. I was actually going to follow up on that. I think last year you took a lot of us by surprise when you won THE PLAYERS but you said you're really quite disappointed with your year. This year you won with a major, but it still doesn't sound like you're all that content with the way you played.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, if you told me every year the rest of my career I'd won one tournament and it was a major every year, I probably would take that. But it's just, I don't know, I think y'all know I don't necessarily put a ceiling or a limit on the things that I feel like I can achieve. And I also understand that this game is brutal and is very difficult, but also that the amount of quality and depth of field that we're playing against is just getting better and better and it's harder to win.

But that being said, I still feel that I'm capable of winning multiple times a year every year and it's just sharpening up on a couple things and just executing better when I need to and making those putts when I need to, hitting those shots when I need to. I feel like that's just what I didn't do the last two years that I have done in years past.

Yeah, a major makes it a great year, but I would have loved for it to have been a major and a couple more.

Q. Your time for reflection is probably after the wedding, I'm guessing, but is there anything you sense you need to tighten up in particular?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Honestly, just more. I think I just need to -- I mean, I work hard, I practice a lot, I take it very seriously, but I just think maybe just need to do a little bit more. I don't need to revamp anything or change anything, it's such a fine line out here.

Like I said, I feel like I was very close last year and played a lot of really good golf, but just maybe that little thing here or there of where I didn't quite have that confidence that maybe just a little bit more repetition, a little bit more quality practice, if you will, could do it. At the end of the day, I just keep putting myself in position to try to win golf tournaments and it will happen and just hope to get on one of those runs like you see guys do every so often.

Q. Just to kind of stay on a negative theme for a little bit, the high is pretty obvious. Is there one tournament or moment that sticks in your craw when you look back at last year? Is there a mulligan you'd like to have for a final round?

JUSTIN THOMAS: One specific shot?

Q. One Sunday, if you will.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, although it wasn't necessarily in 2022 during the season, the ZOZO that I think it was at Sherwood, was that 2021? No, that was 2020.

Just kidding, take that back. Clearly I'm over it, it doesn't bother me at all.

There's a couple. I mean, it was just little things of, you know, I feel like I didn't maybe start off Sundays well. Like I started maybe 2, 3, 4 back. I felt like Tampa I had a really good chance to win. I played with Sam and he won, he obviously played great, shot 6 or 7 under on Sunday, but I was right there with him and I felt I played just as well as he did. He made the putts that I needed to make to win the golf tournament. That's one I would say that I feel like I should have won or had a better chance to win. It was the same type of thing of I was there and I maybe just put too much pressure on myself to get it done as opposed to just letting it happen like I've done more so in the past.

Q. Through your U.S. team play, it seems like you built a good relationship with Freddie Couples. Curious to get your reaction to what he did on Sunday, and were you able to see any of it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, yeah, I was following a little bit and then was watching the -- that Chiefs-Bills game was on and like I schedule my whole day of practice around it because I couldn't wait to watch it.

I think he was on 17 or 18 and Tiger called me and he's like, Are you watching this? I'm like, Yeah, pretty good game. He's like, No, Freddie's 11 under and he's playing 18.

Last I looked he was like 9 or 10 under, he was winning by a million. No offense to Fred, love him to death, but he was going to win. I was more interested in watching the football game. So I turned it on and watched him stripe it off 18 tee, stiff an iron shot and make the putt.

Talked to him some after. He jokes this is the best putting week of his life. We kept saying to

him, you keep playing like that, you'll be just fine at the Masters next year, you'll be able to start playing TOUR events again.

No, he's the best. He's so fun to be around and just joke with. I was -- I mean, it's pretty cool to do what he did at what, 63 years old? I should say 63 years young. We're all happy for him.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Any other questions for Justin? J.T., have a great week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you.