

**PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE**  
**September 13, 2023**

**JUSTIN THOMAS**



---

**DOUG MILNE:** We will go ahead and get started. We would like to welcome Justin Thomas to the interview room here at the Fortinet Championship.

Justin, thanks for joining us. You're making your sixth start here at the Fortinet Championship with top-10 finishes in each of your last three starts. With that said, just a few thoughts on the decision to come back and play this week.

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** Yeah, I like this golf course, I like this tournament. I mean, obviously like Napa as well. It's pretty hard not to like.

It just, it hasn't like -- unfortunately, a lot of tournaments in the past, it just hasn't necessarily fit schedule-wise. With the way the season ended last year a little earlier, I felt like I didn't -- I just didn't want to take that long off of competitive golf. Had an opportunity to come to a place that I really liked, and it worked out even better after getting picked for the Ryder Cup to get a little -- you know, get some competition under my belt before going there.

I had some nice time off, but also had some nice weeks' practice. Yeah, I haven't gone this long without competitive golf in a while, so I'm excited.

**DOUG MILNE:** OK. And Max was just in a few minutes ago and he ended up talking a bit about you. He's like, it's a testament to how good of a player Justin Thomas is, he finishes 71st in the FedExCup, which isn't bad, but there's always been just such the high expectations from you as well as the people that follow you.

How much are you looking forward to kind of moving forward with the Ryder Cup coming up and so forth and kind of getting back to what you're kind of demanding of yourself?

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** Yeah, I'm excited. Anytime you, you know, when you're going forward or moving, I don't want to say moving on, but you have opportunities to grow and get better. Yeah, I definitely am hard on myself, but I kind of reminded myself some of that same stuff that Max said, which is very nice of him, by the way.

Yeah, the fact that I feel like I have been held, not only because of myself but everybody else's expectations of me, held to a high standard, that clearly means that somebody thinks something decent of me as a golfer. So that's a good way to look at it. That's pretty much what I tried to do at the end of the year is look at everything as a positive. Yeah, I mean, it was never near as bad as it always seemed like it was, and yeah, I'm excited for these next couple months and tournaments here and there that I'm playing in and once we get rolling in '24.

**Q. Obviously we saw on social media you posting about working on your swing. What kind of specific things have you been working on there over the last month to kind of get more consistent?**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** I'm just honestly trying to get it -- just get it in similar positions that I had it when I was swinging and hitting it my best, I feel like 2017, 2018, 2019 I guess my best ball-striking years and when I was winning the most golf tournaments. I had a lot more width then and I just -- my swing was a little bit shorter. I felt like because of that, it was in a consistent, way more consistent repeatable place coming down. I just got away from some of that.

There were some things that I was trying to change that I ended up basically overdoing or overexaggerating too early and it just got me in some tough spots. I felt like the club was getting too steep going back and then I had to reroute it going down. I said last year I feel like I have really good hands that I can make that work for a day or two, but that's not exactly realistic to do for four days let alone trying to win golf tournaments at the highest level.

So yeah, it's really just looked at so, so, so much old video and just trying to see where it was, see where it was at the end of the season and what are the current, I guess if you will, feels or triggers or whatever you want to call it to get me back in similar-ish positions. So it was just a lot of balls, a lot of repetition to try to kind of get it back in those slots, if you will.

**Q. Over the last month there's been various reports, some contradictory, of how much you're kind of owning your own swing, how much you're still working with your dad, how much you're working with your putting coach. Are you still working a lot with your dad, still working with your putting coach? Where are you at currently?**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** Yeah, some things definitely got lost in translation and incorrect, to be perfectly honest.

Yeah, John Graham and I are not working together anymore. It was a very -- we had a great conversation and I mean, it's a testament to him, but he understood. He's probably harder on himself than I am on myself for him. I felt like we just -- we had gotten to a point where everything was fundamentally or mechanically or on the putting green was as good as it could get. Basically, what I told him was he can't go out and make the putts for me, I have to figure that out, and that's something only I can do.

It's something where I grew up just going out and practicing and hitting putts and figuring out how to get it in the hole. I didn't necessarily care how it looked, I didn't -- I just -- all that mattered was getting the ball in the hole as fast as I can, and that's more what I want to do. I know there's a lot of really knowledgeable people out there, John included, that down the road if I feel like it gets to a point where I need to see somebody then I can, but the hope is that I don't need to.

In terms of my dad, the owning and accountability is just the part that I feel like I lost a little bit in myself. I think the Wyndham was a big week for me because I was by myself and I -- I've always taken great pride in being able to adjust both in practice but also in tournament play on the run if things aren't going well. I feel like I've been really good at figuring it out and making changes on the course and just kind of tweaking and changing things until something clicks. I just feel like I lost that a little bit.

I am and was very -- I mean, I am very lucky to have a team that's very, very involved, but I just think for me personally, I had them -- they were there too often to where I became dependent on them and then I just lost all ownership, all accountability to where when things were going wrong I was looking to them to answer the questions instead of I'm the one that needs to figure it out at some point.

So that's just kind of -- it's more like how I feel like it was in 2017, 2018 when I was playing my best golf. My dad came out a handful of times a year, more so because he was working. But he can come out any and all as he wants as a dad, but there's just going to be some weeks where if things are good, I don't necessarily need a coach, and I think that's more of just where I want things. Like hey, I'm -- we can exchange texts, we'll work, you know, when we're home and when it's needed, but when things are great, I don't need to have somebody there with me hitting balls or putting all the time because then it's like I'm just going to end up finding something that's not even there.

It's a really long explanation to what you said, but that's just the reality. Nothing is as extreme as it is as much as it's just me being me again and trying to just dig it out of the dirt and take ownership and take accountability and try to figure out how to shoot as low as I can again.

**Q. Because you had so much success, two PGAs and you're on the curve up, something like that happens, obviously we, and -- the question is what's wrong, and you get that a lot, all athletes do when they have a problem. Was that a major concern where people kept asking you, hey, what's the matter, what's the matter?**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** Concern, no.

Don't take this the wrong way: Annoying, yes.

It is, and again, it's not that big a deal. It wasn't that bad. It just was, you know, like you said, I was very fortunate to play some really, really good golf. And I played some really good golf last year, I just didn't have those couple wins in a year. I didn't finish off a couple tournaments I felt like I should have. It's a very, very, very fine line out here and I just was on the other side of that line one year.

Yeah, when you're constantly being told, being reminded, it's pretty easy to convince yourself that you're not doing things that well, but I'm very lucky to have a great support system and great team around me to remind me that that's not the case.

And also, I have a lot of belief in myself that I'm not as far off as I think. All it takes is one week, one stretch, one whatever you want to call it that could just completely flip everything and nobody even talks or remembers it anymore.

**Q. I asked Max the same line of questions. Can you look two or three, four months in advance from now, and what do you make of the new season with the different formats, the special events, the other kinds of events? What's your perspective on what that means to golf?**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** I mean, I don't think it's going to be much different than this past season was. We had our elevated events, and I think -- I mean, to me it was -- last year was a great example in a couple different ways of just how it can happen, right?

And I think it was frustrating because being -- being in the position I was/am, it's hard to talk to a lot of membership about it because they feel it's, oh, of course the rich get richer, you get this, of course you get this. It's like, I didn't play well last year, I'm not in the elevated events, I have to earn my way in whether it's through world ranking, whether it's through qualifying in certain events, trying to get sponsor exemption. Like that's the reality and that's golf.

Look at Adam Schenk. He was in the top-5 of the FedExCup for the season with a couple holes left, like that is the reality.

So you can look at it two ways. Is it like you can complain and talk about how of course everybody gets that or you can go do what Adam Schenk did. Patrick Rodgers, one of my best friends for a long time and he never made it to the BMW and he made it to the BMW for the first time and now he's in the elevated events You can view or look at it as this is a great opportunity for me to go play well and get in these events, or you can just look at it the other way around.

But at the end of the day, it brings all the best golfers into the same place at the same time and that's what's most important because that's the best product, that's what fans want to see, that's who we want to play against, and I think in the end it's going to be what's best for golf.

**Q. Justin, welcome to Napa and Silverado. How important is it for you to use this week to, you know, assert your game, get on that leaderboard and use that as a -- to propel you on to that Ryder Cup? You know, to have this week, you know, here in Napa where you've played so very, very well, is that in your mind?**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** Not really. I don't think it's that important. I think -- I mean, now that I've been picked, I don't have to prove anything. I don't -- it's just more about I'm here to play well in a golf tournament and play well and try to give myself a chance and get in contention.

I mean, I know when I don't play competitively for two or three weeks I'm a little rusty competitively, so I'm sure after a month and a half it's going to be -- it's going to be a challenge to get back into it, but it's something that I'm excited for. I mean, did I not touch a golf club for two weeks. My clubs just sat in the floor in my garage after Wyndham, and I was really excited to go practice and play golf again because I knew I was playing in this tournament.

I'm not necessarily putting -- I put enough pressure on myself already to try to play well, I don't need to add to it to try to propel the season or play well for the Ryder Cup or anything. Like I said, I'm fortunate where I'm already on the Ryder Cup team so I don't need to prove anything for that. I'm just going to go out here this week and just try to play as well as I can.

**Q. Justin, how much did losing in Paris hurt?**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** Yeah, it hurt a lot. It's not fun watching the other team celebrate in front of you. It's just, it's a bummer because, you know, all of you work so hard and you do everything together as a team and you play for your team, but at the same time you lose as a team. So we were all unfortunately the losers that week.

It's a different kind of hurt. I remember being -- I don't know why I specifically remember being next to Brooks I think maybe Alex Noren or someone made a long putt on 18, I forget who he was playing, and they had already won and that kind of started the celebrations, if you will, for them. Brooks just being like, I've only been on one of these and it was winning, and that is a lot more fun than this is here. It's something you don't forget and it sucks.

**Q. How much do you think the experience of playing in multiple Ryder Cups helps you in particular?**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** I think it helps a lot. I think I just, I try to explain to people that it's nerves I've never had in golf. I mean, winning two majors, 15 times, like it doesn't hold a candle to how nervous I've been in Ryder Cups and how nervous I was on the first tee in Paris. It's a different, it's a totally different feeling. And it's butterflies, it's exciting butterflies, but it's -- it's something that I feel like I can use not only for myself, but I want to help the guys.

I remember how people were to me in '17 in the Presidents Cup and then '18 in the Ryder Cup of -- I mean, I was fortunate with Tiger being a captain. And Jordan obviously was super helpful. He was the most relatable just because of age and the way that we are, but also he had played in enough to where I felt like I could -- he was going to shoot me straight. He wasn't going to maybe give me something a captain might to kind of hype me up or whatever it may be, so he was very helpful. That's kind of the same thing what I want to be to any rookie or anyone who would be uncomfortable on our team there.

**Q. Obviously you go over to Rome last week, you get a look at the course. We heard a lot about 2018 Le Golf National and how that course was set up specifically, kind of maybe take away what some of the Americans are good at. Now having seen that**

**course and being able to play it, you played in 2018, can you just kind of compare the two courses and what your thoughts were?**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** Well, it's the same architect, to start, so it looks very similar. But I played the French Open the year that the Ryder Cup was in Paris and they didn't set the course up any tougher for the Ryder Cup. Le Golf National's a tough golf course, narrow fairways, very long rough.

That's all I kept telling the guys is this is exactly what this place is, and other than the length of the rough in Rome, I would say it's the same thing. You have some narrow fairways and some extremely penal rough, but that's what we know we're going to get over there, so it's not a surprise and it's nothing like we got over there and we're like, oh, my gosh, I can't believe it's like this. You know what you're getting into and you know what you have to do, so it's just about going out and executing and just try to ball-strike our way the best we can and make the putts when we need to.

**Q. You're doing some driver shaft testing this week. You don't switch driver shafts a lot. Curious how that went and if you're looking to make a switch this week with the driver.**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** I did some testing with JJ, they came a couple weeks ago. I felt like I've -- I wanted a little -- I wanted a longer driver option to have. I wanted something to where maybe I travel with it every week and it's like maybe I use it five times a year, maybe I use it once, whatever. It's just three-fourths of an inch longer, but it's an instant 2 or 3 club speed and it goes quite a bit further.

It was just something I wanted to have. I felt like -- we kind of screwed around and he sent me some stuff in the mail, but hadn't done like a proper fitting for one, because I know my driver's great, it works how I want it to. So we found one, two, to stretch three options and I've driven it really, really well with the longer driver actually the last two weeks using it.

So I don't know. I mean, I'm going to go hit some balls and make a decision. It will be most likely just end up using my gamer, but it's just something that I've -- I just wanted to have more than anything, and I was hitting it really good the last couple weeks and I'm like, well, maybe we'll end up playing this more than we thought, but we'll see.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** I mean, it's an instant 3 to 5. You know, when I hit it hard, hit that hard high one, it's a 15-yarder, which is a nice thing obviously to have.

**Q. J.T., I've been very impressed over the last couple months just kind of watching you carry yourself through all of this Ryder Cup stuff. Just kind of wondering now that you are on the team and you've got that spot secured, if you can kind of reflect on what these last couple months have been like, kind of a position you've never been**

**in before.**

**JUSTIN THOMAS:** Yeah, it was brutal. I told Zach after the fact that I compared it to like if you -- if you had an ex-girlfriend that you were trying to -- you were trying to find any excuse you could to reach out to them to get in contact, that's pretty much how I felt like with Zach. You know, I just -- I understood it wasn't going to be something where I text him and he's like, hey, just to let you know, we're at like a 60 percent -- no, that's not what I was looking for in any way, shape or form.

It is, it's very tough when you can't do anything about it, especially I literally couldn't do anything about it. Basically all the other picks besides Brooks had the Playoffs to play in to where they could prove themselves a little bit more or solidify their spot a little bit more and I just had to sit at home. Yeah, it was brutal.

It was like when Zach called, it was a lot of emotions, but like a relief was almost the first thing, and excitement. It was a lot. I had a lot of sleepless nights and then at one point it just kind of finally hit me, I had accepted the fact whatever was going to happen was going to happen, and I was OK with that. And I was always going to be supportive regardless of what happened. I'm just very excited, fortunate, happy that it ended the way that it did.

**DOUG MILNE:** All right. J.T., thank you for your time as always. We do appreciate it.