

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 28, 2017



JUSTIN THOMAS

JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas into the interview room, making his first start here at the Hero World Challenge. Justin, welcome to Albany. Get some comments on being here for the first time.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I'm glad to be here. Obviously you're doing something right if you're playing in this tournament in this part of the year. I have yet to be on the golf course. I just practiced yesterday before the rain came in and I practiced some this morning and going to go out here in a little bit. I'm excited to see the course. Anytime you're in the Bahamas it's usually a good time, so looking forward to hopefully a good week.

JOHN BUSH: Speaking of doing things right, you definitely have this season, five wins, win the FedExCup title. Just comment a little bit about the season that you've had.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, the season obviously was a great one. It's not anything you kind of go into the year expecting to win a certain amount of times or win my first major or do this or that, but I felt like I had that in me, I was capable of doing it and it was nice to see all the hard work that everyone on my team had been doing pay off. So I just feel like I got a lot of confidence from this year and hopefully can kind of build on that and use the rest of this offseason to my advantage and then have a hopefully solid week this week and start off again in Hawaii.

Q. What would be the difference playing with Tiger in a competitive event versus practicing with him back home?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know, I've never played with him in a competitive event, so it's hard to honestly answer that question. Like any tournament round, we're kind of doing our own thing. I won't be as talkative, I'm sure he won't, either, especially in a twosome. In a threesome, if one person hits it offline or something, usually the other two are kind of walking similar, but at times when it's just a twosome you're with your caddie and you're kind of doing your own thing. So I don't know, I guess we'll find out.

Q. How big a deal is that to you given that there is probably a time you wondered if you would ever get the chance?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's cool. To me it's just really cool that he asked me a couple weeks ago, kind of brought it up and kind of joked with him telling him I had to think about it a little bit. But no, it's a cool deal. Like I said, I'm excited to be at this tournament and have an opportunity to play well and kind of end the year hopefully on a solid note after the success this year.

Q. Justin, you and Tiger both hinted at the fact that you guys have gotten together and you played, whether it's little games at his place or wherever you play in south Florida. Can you kind of tell us how much have you guys played together, what have you seen from his game, are you guys playing actual games where you're keeping score, where you're playing against each other, just fooling around?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, we've only played a handful of times. It felt like when he started to play more this year was kind of when I was in Asia, and then when he was playing I wanted nothing to do with golf so I wasn't playing yet. Probably played more so last year.

But yeah, I mean, it's just what you've been hearing from everybody. He looks good, but I think just his demeanor and how positive and upbeat he sounds when he talks about how he feels with his golf game is more important than anything. The fact that he can just go through life let alone golf pain free is -- for us is -- you know, you don't want to see any of your friends hurt or be in pain, so it's nice to hear that he's been doing so well.

Q. Keep that theme going.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Anybody want to ask about my --

Q. Sorry to do this to you. What's your very earliest memory of him, and secondly, how much did you growing up, I guess you would have been a teenager, did you search out clips of him on YouTube and so forth?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I still do, if that changes anything. No, the PGA at Valhalla in 2000 was the first real memory I have probably just because I was there and being -- I remember just being in the clubhouse when he had that putt to get into a playoff with Bob May, just watching on TV. The little delay like as soon as he hit it, on TV you could just hear the crowd go nuts outside.

I don't know, as a seven-year-old it's pretty cool to see that great of a show, the back nine that those two guys put on, and for Tiger to come back and get in that playoff and win was awesome. Like a lot of people or kids, whatever you want to call it, my age that play golf, we grew up in that era, so it's pretty fun to watch.

Q. Do you feel like he can be what that version of Tiger was or is it just --

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know, I never played against that, that person. So it's just all I know is in terms of watching him actually play golf is what I've seen. I mean, yeah, I've watched him on TV but until you're there and you stand and you watch the golf shots, you hear the sound it makes, you watch the putts, chips, then you really get an idea, but I guess we'll just wait to have to see.

Q. Going back-to-back last year in Hawaii was such a big part of you getting

momentum and such a big year. How do you build toward that from now to that point, and what's the biggest challenge you see in following up a monster season?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, to just answer that, probably just the challenge of following it up. I'm not going into this year thinking I have to win five times in a major and Player of the Year and FedExCup for it to be a great year. Yeah, that would be a great year, but I'm just putting all expectations aside from what people are going to have of me, what I may have of myself. I think it's pretty obvious my expectations are high and I expect a lot of myself, but a lot more goes into it. Just the process of the tournaments you play. I mean, I had a stretch last year where I didn't play very well -- or finish very well but I thought I was playing better than the results were showing. A couple years ago I probably would you have lost my cool just gotten impatient. Instead I stayed patient and I rolled off maybe the best month of golf probably I ever played starting with the PGA, and going to the PGA and then the Playoffs going sixth, first, something and then second. So without that patience I wouldn't have had that, so I just have to continue to keep that patience this year whatever may happen.

And then to answer your first question, I'm just excited to get -- I mean Kapalua's probably my favorite tournament ever. Whenever you're in a small field like this it's just a cool feeling. But Hawaii is similar to this, it has a great vibe, a great feel, very laid back, relaxed and it's a fun course to play. I have enough time to try to get ready and prepared for that and just attempt to start the year off as well as I can, whatever it may be.

Q. Do you feel you showed up there pretty sharp or did you kind of work your way in when you got there?

JUSTIN THOMAS: A little bit of both just because I think -- I mean nobody I think is going to be getting there really sharp. I mean, Christmas, I don't know how other people spend their Christmas but I like spending it with my family and not really doing a lot of golf and hanging out with my cousins that I never get to see and my aunts and uncles that I don't get to spend that quality time with to me. That's important to men and I enjoy those couple days away from the game. Then when I get there, a lot like this week, I get there and I take those couple days very seriously and I use them to my advantage to get as prepared as I can.

Q. Justin, a similar sort of question that Jeff just asked and you probably part answered my question but looking ahead to 2018, will you keep a similar sort of schedule, will you not go to courses that you went to this year, will you change some of the tournaments you play, and also, would you maybe consider playing a little bit more in Europe with the Ryder Cup coming up in September?

JUSTIN THOMAS: In terms of scheduling, it will be pretty similar. I like the number of events I played this year. In terms of exact events, I don't know if I'll change anything or not haven't really thought that far. I've thought about it a little bit but haven't truly sat down and gone through it week by week or what I want to do. I know I'm starting with two weeks in Hawaii, I know that one for sure, but other than that, the rest is up in the air.

I haven't really thought about Europe. I would love to go play in Rory's event at some point in my career. It's just a very, very tough time in the schedule in terms of there's a couple tournaments that are over here in the States that I really enjoy that are around that time. I think it's, what, close to the U.S. Open maybe? I don't know, that might be completely wrong.

Q. Two weeks before The Open?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For me being over there that long, that, I'm not sure, but I definitely at some point I would love to take on -- I shouldn't say a lot, but some European Tour events or just across the world.

But I still feel I have a lot to prove here first. Yeah, I had a great year here last year and won seven times, but there are still a lot of things I want to accomplish here; majors, win tournaments I haven't won, set records if possible before I focus more on traveling and winning in different countries.

Q. Justin, have you had a chance to sit and think about this year? Is there anything that stands out, like what would be the highlight for you? Second part is I think at East Lake, you said that as far as reloading for next year, you were going to Jack and Tiger and Jordan maybe about how they followed up great years with great years. Did you get any piece of advice that stands out?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I did, but I don't really want to share it because I don't want other people to know it. It's not groundbreaking. It's pretty obvious I think that many people could tell, but at the end of the day it's just golf. Yeah, there's a lot that goes into it, but it's still low score still wins so I think that's kind of the main thing. What was the first?

Q. Next year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know, I haven't really -- the entire year never really sunk in, I don't know why. I think because of how quick the turnaround was after the FedExCup, and not winning in Atlanta was a little different. I mean, obviously I was extremely pleased to win the FedExCup, but not winning in Atlanta and win the FedExCup, it just had a different feeling because I was disappointed I didn't win and obviously extremely excited I won that.

So it was different. I don't know if that had anything to do with it, but I just never really had any time. And by the time I was done with Korea, my mind was so far off of anything from golf that maybe it just never really sunk in. I don't know, it was weird. I was expecting -- not that I wasn't excited but I was expecting to be more happy about it and excited. But I think just how quick everything went, it never really sunk in.

I think the most impressive win that I had was Korea. I don't know, I will never in my life know how I won that event. I mean, my game wasn't really that great. I was very, very fatigued physically and mentally and I had nothing left, I really just had nothing left in the

tank. It was like maybe my ninth or 10th or 10 or 11 weeks in a row and all that travel, I was just like, man, I don't know how I'm going to play this week.

Then I got off to that good start and I just remember telling Jimmy on 13 on Sunday, my body just gave out, like my legs just turned into Jello and I was like, Dude, we've got to get this thing in the house, I've got nothing left in me. I was sitting down between shots and I just was trying to get it in.

I remember I hit that 5-wood in regulation and I looked at Jimmy, I'm like, Dude, we've got to make this putt, I cannot go extra holes, like I really don't know if I can. I missed it and like jeez, I've got to go play more holes.

Yeah, it was a great year and the FedExCup's great, but I will never know how I won that tournament.

Q. How would you say your game evolves year to year, and what is the last significant change you've made to your swing?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would say my game evolves the most probably just in a maturity. I don't know, I'd be interested to hear what you think, if you think I've gotten more mature, Doug.

But I think that I have just in terms of just course management when I'm out there and not making those stupid mistakes. I think the weeks that I play well when I'm playing smart, I just don't make as many bogeys because of that. Obviously short game and execution helps with that, but just not being overly aggressive and really just frankly stupid on the golf course has helped me a lot in terms of my success.

But swing change, I don't know, that's tough because I've always I feel like had the same kind of problems, just the same stuff I go back to. I've tried to get it in a more consistent, lot better spot kind of halfway back on the backswing because from there it's a lot easier for me to kind of get it more in the slot. And then the length of my swing sometimes will change and fluctuate. So that doesn't really answer your question, but I kind of go back and forth between different things so they're kind of my checkpoints, I think, for when I'm playing well.

Q. You don't change anything?

JUSTIN THOMAS: As long as I'm hitting it well or well enough, then I don't change too much. My dad would be the first one to tell you how many times I've looked at swing videos and I just get disgusted and I'm hitting it good, and I try to change something and I start hitting it bad. I think I've finally just gotten over that and the fact that there's many different ways to get the ball in the hole and I'm just trying to make sure I do it faster than everybody else.

Q. Justin, is there any Alabama match-up in a championship game that would wrest

you from that second Hawaii event?

JUSTIN THOMAS: No. Unlike a lot of schools, we play in that quite often so I'm pretty used to that game.

Q. You would never want to be at that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I would, I would love to at some point. I would love to go to a playoff game and a championship game. I've been to a couple SEC championships and it's great. I love my Alabama football, but I like the chance to win a golf tournament a lot more.

Q. You obviously took a lot of Tiger questions right off the bat. I'm just curious from your standpoint having watched him more than been around him much over the years, why do you think we still care? Not just us, but people, fans, other players, obviously a lot of interest in him coming back again.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, the same reason that, you know, when Michael Jordan came back to play basketball. When you're one of the greatest of all time to play your sport and just do things that people can't and haven't done before and you just have such a huge fan base, you have so many -- you've just done things that nobody has done and that's what's made it fun to watch.

It's just funny, they ask that question and I'm sitting here at his event talking about it. This event obviously wouldn't be here if it wasn't for him. If he hadn't done everything he's done, we wouldn't have the sponsors we have. If it wasn't for him, we wouldn't be playing for the amount of money that we're playing for if it wasn't for him. Just the amount that people outside of golf, if they had any idea the amount, that kind of we have to thank him for that.

Obviously there's a lot of other players, but there's nobody that moves the needle like him, even now. And if he had 15 wins and two majors, then yeah, people wouldn't care as much, but he has 79 and 14 majors. I mean, I'm probably just as excited to watch it as you are. I just get a front row seat to it on Thursday, but I'm also looking forward to trying to kick his ass, to be perfectly honest.

JOHN BUSH: Justin Thomas, best of luck this week.