

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
February 19, 2019



JUSTIN THOMAS

MICHAEL BALIKER: JT, hopefully third time's the charm here in Mexico City, finishing tied for fifth in 2017 and second in 2018 after coming back from 11 on the weekend to get into a playoff. I guess first question, what about this place seems to bring out the best in your game?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm not really sure because it's been a weird two years because I wasn't necessarily playing great, really was searching for something the entire tournament, and then I seem to find something or at least I kind of got it around. It's a cool little golf course. It's all right in front of you, there's nothing tricky to it. You can play the course a lot of different ways, I feel like. Off the tee you can be aggressive and take some of the doglegs or kind of hit it to where most of the people hit it and then go from there.

Really, at this altitude it's just all about staying hydrated and staying rested and getting the numbers right.

MICHAEL BALIKER: Speaking of which, last week being a long week, now that you're here, how are you feeling mentally, physically in preparation for Thursday?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I feel a little tired still, I noticed that this morning when I stood up, but it will be good come Thursday. I did nothing yesterday, just got some treatment. I'm just going to play nine holes today and do some more treatment and just kind of take it easy. Probably play nine again tomorrow. You know, come Thursday, should be good to go, or hopefully at least.

Q. What's the first time in your pro career that you felt like you played before a really big gallery, a lot of people out there watching you and what was that like? What would have been the occasion?

JUSTIN THOMAS: The first time I did? I played in the second-to-last group at Riviera my rookie year with Bubba and Angel Cabrera, and that was -- oh, no, that's not true. I played the final -- well, the final group at Phoenix but it was Martin Laird and Burger, and I don't think anyone knew who Burger or I was. I would say Riviera was the first kind of golf crowd that was out there.

Q. Was that an ego boost?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Well, I hit my first tee shot out of bounds at Riviera, so I think that kind of speaks for itself. Because of that tee shot alone, I never stand up on that tee and don't at least look at it and it gives me some kind of fear. Yeah, that one scarred me for life.

That tournament in itself, I specifically remember I think I was 5 under, I was in like fifth or sixth going into the weekend and I think 6 under was leading. I remember thinking I probably need to get to 12 or something like that to win, just being a rookie thinking that's what I need to do, and 6 under ended up being a playoff come Sunday. I remember learning a lot from that. Yeah, it was a nerve-wracking experience, but it was one that hopefully helped me for the better.

Q. How much of a boost is it the fact that the thermometer's going to be 80 every day and how much of a big difference because you've been until final group the last two starts and they were both raw days. What's the biggest difference playing in a raw day and what we're going to get this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It will be nice. I mean, the thing I'm most excited about is hopefully going to sleep Saturday and waking up and playing the fourth round on Sunday. We obviously didn't have to deal with that in Phoenix, but last week was one of the most bizarre weeks I've been a part of. You don't know what day it is, you don't know what round you're in and it was a lot.

And the weather just made it obviously difficult, but it was difficult for everybody, it's not like it was just me. It adds a lot of other factors into it, whether it's kind of getting moisture around the -- kind of on the clubface on your second shots, kind of get balls kind of squared off line, or you had some mud balls. The greens were really soft, but then if it would rain, they'd get a little bit skiddy. All of us really had to factor a lot of different things in. Knock on wood, we've been lucky, we've had good weather here the last couple years and hopefully again this year because I'm sure a lot of us that played the last couple weeks are ready for it.

Q. You're 36 hours removed from a pretty difficult defeat. Do you forget easily or does it linger?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It will bother me the rest of my life, 100 percent it will. There are tournaments I didn't win my rookie year that still bother me and that was a lot worse than that, so I'm sure that will bother me. But in terms of being over it, it's done with. I feel like I know what I did, I just didn't -- I played well, I just didn't make the putts and I just made the mistakes that in the past that I usually don't do when I'm playing with a lead. I never make that many bogeys, and I have in the past. And that's how you lose golf tournaments with a four-shot lead, you make a lot of bogeys and I'm basically spotting the rest of the field all those shots. Yeah, it's something I'm over. I'm over it.

And in terms of teeing it up this week, it's not like I'm going to be putting my tee in the ground on Thursday and still be pissed off that I didn't win on Sunday, but in terms of little things like whether it's being on a flight or just sitting at home, yeah, it will bother me forever, I'm sure.

Q. That was actually sort of where I was going. You guys obviously, every player has one that got away or more than one that got away. I was just curious sort of the timing of the different stages that you go through. Right off the bat you're probably pretty angry. How long does it take to sort of get to a place of, okay, here's what I'm supposed to learn from that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I was never really angry, I was more shocked and upset. When I finished I was fine. Like I said, I was shocked. I drove to the airport and I think when I was driving to the airport it finally was kind of sinking in. I lost a golf tournament. It's not like I had somebody in my family passed away or had something major happened to my health or something severe. Life's going to move on, you know. There's a chance I could win this week and nobody would talk about it ever again. It's just one of those things that a bigger deal could be made out of it if you want, but I know what I did wrong and Jimmy and I know what we both need to improve on to not let it happen again. We feel confident if we have a four-shot lead teeing up here on Sunday that we'll be able to get it done.

Q. To follow up on that, do you think better players like yourself are better at getting over stuff like that? Like you said, it happens to everybody, but it's how you react to it.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't think it necessarily has to do with the caliber of the player, I think it's just the strength of their mental game. There's plenty of great players that maybe weren't as there mentally that stuff like that can affect them forever or potentially change their career. But I would like to think I'm a little bit stronger than that, that this isn't going to have an impact on my career. I had a great week, I played phenomenal golf pretty much the entire week. Who knows what happens if a couple things go my way here or there or vice versa. But yeah, I think it's just really how you take it mentally as opposed to the caliber player you are.

Q. Justin, no one has a better score cumulatively on this golf course than you last two years. Given what I'm assuming is motivation coming off Riviera and you said you were searching those last two tournaments for something, you're playing well, so what are your expectations now this week here?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's no different than any other week. I mean, I feel comfortable enough on this golf course and I feel good enough about my game that even if I'm not playing my best, I should have a chance to at least have a chance to win on Sunday. I mean, that's my goal every week I tee it up is to have a chance to win on the back nine, and I've done a great job of that this year.

I've had a lot of chances. I definitely haven't gotten it done -- haven't gotten it done yet, which is a bit frustrating, but hopefully -- sorry, I'm having a hard time concentrating.

Hopefully it's just something that will change as the year goes on. Yeah, I like the golf course, I feel comfortable on it, I'm playing well. But it's a WGC, there's a lot of great players

that are hungry and ready to try to win. I need to go out and when I tee it up on Thursday be ready to go.

Q. Having been here before, do you get dialed right back in pretty quickly or is there still a little bit of an adjustment getting used to the altitude and how far the ball flies? Does it take a day, or right back to the way it was when you left?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, we've written down each year how far each club goes and stuff like that. I mean, I've already done a little bit of work on TrackMan to try to figure it out. I mean, we have a good system. We know what times of days it does what and what trajectories do what and this and that. I feel like there's no real formula. It's just, you know, you just kind of have to figure it out based on what the shot gives you. We have a good idea of what it is.

The hardest part is truthfully losing your breath through a bag of balls if you're not taking your time. If you just kind of hit like you do at home, hit a shot, get another ball and hit another shot. You can't walk and talk at the same time out here, it's pretty unbelievable. I would say it's just as important to be rested and to be fresh mentally and physically as it is to know how far the ball's going.

Q. Is it as simple as some places it's just one club less or --

JUSTIN THOMAS: No, it's a lot different, yeah. I would say, but I feel we have a pretty good idea on it and I don't really want to give anybody else the advantage.

Q. Along the same lines, because last week was such an extreme with the ball not going anywhere, can you compare a 5-iron last week to what you think a 5-iron's going to do this week yardage-wise?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I didn't hit any 5-irons this morning so I have to think. A 6-iron at home, I think about 200 yards. Last week I was probably hitting -- in the mornings when we were warming up for the restarts, we were going about 180, and this week could be anywhere from 230 to 240 just depending on the height I hit it, how hard I hit it and whatnot.

I would say the weirdest part is when you're 250 yards away and you look down at your ball and you look up and the pin's that far away, and you look back down and you have a pretty decent lofted iron in your hand. I think that's the hardest part is getting accustomed to that. We've done a good job the last couple years. Especially a hole like 6, that par 5 where you're hitting over water. You could have 300 yards to the hole and I just pull out a 5-wood and you can't even see anything, you're over water, but if you hit it right, that's the right club. That's the hardest part is just trusting it sometimes.

Q. (No microphone.)

JUSTIN THOMAS: It was a 6-iron.

Q. How far did that go?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think it was 240, something like that. It landed probably six, seven short.

Q. Isn't that great just to be able to have it listed, yeah, hole-in-one with a 240 6-iron?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, well, no offense to them, but the people at home, obviously the Tour's going to eat that up and say, yeah, I made a hole-in-one with a 6-iron from 240-something yards, and the people at home are like, "Oh, the guy hits it so far," and not knowing anything. So I'm sure they'll eat it up again, the drives that we're going to hit this week, how far they're going to go. Nobody can really brag about how far they hit it this week, we're at almost 8,000 feet elevation.

Q. Short guys will.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Weber was loving it on the range. Him and Pauly were all hyped up.

Q. You've gotten to play in front of fans all over the world. Talk about what makes the fans here in Mexico so special and unique?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's great, they're very passionate. A lot of kids come out, which is great just to be able to try to grow the game for the better. To get them to come out and watch us and hopefully learn a thing or two and hopefully become role models to some of them, which is a big deal to myself. Seems like, obviously this only being the third year, but the crowds were better last year than they were the year prior. I'm sure they'll be better this year, especially with that Tiger guy being here. I'm sure that'll draw a couple fans.

It's great. It's a great job that the Tour does in playing in different countries and different parts of the world to grow the game, just to reach different audiences. Yeah, I think they do a great job here.

Q. Since somebody brought up the hole-in-one, what was your reaction to hearing it narrated by the soccer announcers?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Probably the same as everybody else's. It was pretty funny, it was pretty cool, it was entertaining. I wish I could speak Spanish so I knew exactly what was being said. I think that yelling "goal" or whatever is pretty universal to anybody, they know that's something good, at least in sport. So it was pretty funny to watch, listen to.

Q. You had the hole-in-one two years, but last year obviously the 18th hole, in the fairway did you think you -- I mean where you stood, did you have to make that, and not that you were thinking "I've got to make," and did you think that you maybe had won?

JUSTIN THOMAS: After bogeying 17, I felt like birdie would maybe get us in a playoff. I mean, holing out would have a better chance at a playoff. I knew those guys had some easier holes coming in. That pin on 17 is very, very difficult. It doesn't take anything away, it's very difficult for a right-hander hitting a hook into that pin versus a lefty. I knew that Phil, especially as much spin as he can generate, that was going to be another birdie chance for him.

I knew that any possible birdie that I could get, it was going to be huge. Jimmy and I talked about making it in the fairway, but it's not like something, okay, we need to make this to get into a playoff. That would make the story a little bit cooler, but it wouldn't be true.

Yeah, it was something, they had so much golf left, I didn't know. Obviously I hoped that I would have won outright, but I felt like after making that, I was going to probably have a good chance at a playoff. And then once Phil birdied 16, I was just hoping that I was going to be in a playoff.

Q. Do you spend more time thinking about your wins or your losses?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I hate to lose more than I like to win, if that answers the question.

Q. Would you rather lose to J.B. Holmes or Kevin Techakanokboon?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't care. They'd both suck that I lost, so it doesn't really matter to me.