

**PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
NOVEMBER 3, 2021**



JUSTIN THOMAS

DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome world No. 7 Justin Thomas to the interview room here at the World Wide Technology Championship at Mayakoba.

JT, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. We know you're busy so we'll move quickly. Just a few comments, you're making your third start here coming off a top-20 last year, largely credited to that 62 in the third round. If I could just take you back for a quick reflection on that and just some thoughts on being back here in Mexico this week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's a really fun track, it's a cool course. It's all right in front of you. You have to drive it well, and especially being on the water like this, you can get a lot of wind, and with the holes kind of sitting down through the trees, you can't feel a lot of the crosswinds when you get on a lot of tee boxes. The ball can really move a lot, so you need to have control of your flight, control of your trajectory and what you're doing and short enough to where if you are hitting it well, you can make a lot of birdies. It's a place that I do feel like I can play well, but you can get exposed pretty quickly for not playing well. So been working hard the last week to put the ball in the fairway and working our wedges to give ourselves a lot of birdie chances, so we'll see what we've got.

DOUG MILNE: One more question from me, then we'll open it up. You're making your second start of the season coming off a tie for 18th at THE CJ CUP. Just kind of assess the state of your game as you feel you're heading into the week with.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, you know, like I said, I really, really worked hard last week. I mean, I tried to not take this event lightly, I tried to not just think of it as a vacation, although it's kind of hard to at times as beautiful as it is and maybe wanting to cut practice sessions short to go hang at the beach or the pool.

I feel like this is a great opportunity to come here and try to get a win before Kapalua and just start the season off well. And my game is close. It feels like it's just rusty is really all it is. It's the aspect of not playing as many competitive rounds, which this time of year I think a lot of guys are so I'm not alone in that, unlike Vegas. It took me a little bit to kind of get in that mindset and that zone. Hopefully it will just happen a little bit quicker this week to where I'll be able to learn from that, so I think I'll be able to learn from that and hopefully get the momentum going a little bit earlier this week.

Q. Question about your buddy Mike Visacki. He's had a pretty good little run, he's in the Q-School, Korn Ferry Tour Q-School final stage this week. I just was wondering what your thoughts are on his progress as a player having kind of witnessed it mostly from afar, but I guess you guys played together last week.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah. You know, I don't -- I mean, fortunately, whether it's spending time with him or just kind of being in touch with him, and him and his dad, it's kind of getting to learn the story a little bit more.

He's obviously a grinder, he's a fighter, he's been playing and trying for a while. I learned about he's kind of had some back issues that happened a handful of years ago at Q-School and stuff like that. That's the hard part about this game is that things don't happen just because you think they should and I think that's something that not only for him but a lot of guys, they feel like they deserve to get to -- deserve to get status whether how hard they worked or because of how good of a story it is, and golf doesn't really care. Sports, that's not how it works. It might work out in the end if you do play well.

But he's a really good player. I never played with him, I just obviously have seen and heard. We were going to play a practice round at Colonial last year until the rain-out, but he's only like three hours away, so he drove to Jupiter and we played last week on I think it was Friday and I was really impressed. He drives the ball really well, hits his irons really solid. You can tell he's the kind of guy to where if his wedges and chipping and putting are good, then he's got a chance to really have a good career, professional career.

I'm obviously pulling for him. I went through Q-School, I went through all that, it's very stressful and it's pressure filled. There's a lot of guys I'm pulling for, but I'll definitely be hoping for the best for him.

Q. With the news of Greg Norman being the new CEO of LIV Golf Investments, it feels like this thing is becoming real, they'll have tournaments next year. You've stated in the past that you're happy where you are on the PGA TOUR. I'm just curious, what was your reaction to the news that broke last week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I didn't know about it. I heard rumors, but I didn't know that that news broke. Again, just because I heard over the last handful of months, it wasn't I guess a surprise. I mean, I'm probably least in the know of any of the top however many ranked players in the world. I'm focused on what I'm doing out here.

Obviously I'm trying to listen and talk to players and people and hear as much as I can, but at the same time, what's most important right now is my career on the PGA TOUR and me playing well in Mexico this week. I think that's just kind of the route that I'm trying to take it.

And yeah, I know Greg a little bit. I know that this has kind of been a vision and a hope of his for a while, at least from what I understand. I know he's excited and the guys that are excited to potentially go do it are probably even more so. Like I said, I'm worried about what I'm doing out here at the moment.

Q. And in his remarks afterwards, he basically said that he feels like maybe stars aren't compensated well enough in the current structure. Do you feel like that's the

case on the PGA TOUR?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Maybe in the past, but I think with stuff like the Player Impact Program and purses and everything going up, I think it's becoming that way, because it doesn't matter what you do or what sport you play or whatever it is, there's always going to be a handful or a group of guys that push the revenue or push the interest.

There's plenty of guys and plenty of stories out here, but for me to come out here and say that I hold the same weight as Tiger Woods or I hold the same weight as Phil Mickelson, that's just not realistic. Guys should be compensated for that and I think that's really what is it is.

It's great for us because then it's giving us an extra incentive to be more impactful in the game of golf. It's only going to help us because we're going to grow our brands, we're going to potentially reach out to different listeners, whether it's inside of golf or outside of golf. That will just not only help us, but help the entire game of golf. I think it's getting that way to where it is taking care of that.

And I understand what he's saying, but yeah, I think that was something that maybe wasn't addressed as much in the past, but is so -- is a lot now.

Q. What took so long, do you think, in terms of you guys feeling like you're making movements toward getting compensated the way top players should? What took so long, or did it take some outside challenge for it to happen?

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's a good question. I don't know.

I think all of this has been -- has been better for me personally just, and I think a lot of us just to understand and have conversations with the Tour, with our agents, with other players because at the end of the day, if the PGA TOUR's winning, we're also winning. If we're winning, the PGA -- we want to all grow together.

And I think that's kind of been the main thing that's come out of this is, look, we can better our product and we can get better because of stuff like this, we can learn from it. I just think that a lot of it was honestly the players not knowing and also maybe the Tour not understanding that it could be done differently and that the players even felt that way.

I know for one, my first couple years I felt like I didn't necessarily have the place or the voice to go to a Jay Monahan, to go to an Andy Pazder to say how I feel about what things are going on in the Tour, when in reality, it sounds disrespectful to say but they work for us, you know what I mean? It doesn't matter if you're the 120th ranked player on the FedExCup or the second, if you have a problem and you think it should be changed, you should go voice that opinion to the Tour and that's their job to try to fulfill that or at least give you an answer.

I think all of this that's kind of happened outside of the PGA TOUR has created a lot of

questions from the players to where the Tour's done a great job of answering it, but also answering that maybe we have the opportunity to better our product.

Q. I thought you were supposed to voice your problems to the media? When did that change?

JUSTIN THOMAS: That's two totally different problems (Laughs.)

Q. One last thing -- I was just kidding -- if you are one of the big stars, and I'm going to just call you that so you don't have to do it yourself, A, how many of you are there, without naming names, just give me a ballpark figure in your opinion, and secondly, what does it take for someone to become one of you, one of them, whatever?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'd say there's probably 10 to 15. I think there's a lot of guys that are huge and big impacts on the Tour, but I don't know necessarily -- I think at least I know for myself, there was a big difference in my career and I'm still -- again, I'm not even remotely as far along as if you want to call it the stardom as I would like to be, but there's a big difference of being recognized in the golf world and being recognized outside of the golf world. I think that's kind of the -- what differentiates the two categories, if you will, at least in my opinion.

I just remember it's like, yeah, getting your first cover maybe of a golf magazine, it's like, oh, that's great, but it's like I would hope that I've done enough in golf to where I'm recognized in golf, you know what I'm saying? You want to be able to meet someone here this week in another country or whatever it might be, or someone that's outside the sport of golf to like, oh, wow, that's so-and-so, you play golf, you're on the PGA TOUR. I think that's kind of where you're in that 10 to 15 ballpark range in my opinion.

Q. Just wanted to talk about your irons a little bit. Are you still in the 621.JT?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I am.

Q. Cool. And my understanding, correct me if I'm wrong, is that they're kind of based on the modifications to the 620 MB that you wanted to see, sort of the way that that's set was adjusted for you; is that true?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, yeah. It was really cool just because I've obviously -- the guys at Titleist have not only asked myself but other players, but they want to make sure that the iron you're using is catering to you, or if there's any kind of subtle changes, and clearly mine have a lot less offset than others, it's just something that I've liked.

But I've used the same set of irons ever since I got into that set, I haven't changed. It's worked for me. I've tried to be a person where I don't change just to change. If it's working, just keep using it.

Then when Titleist came to me last year, they're like -- they know that I love irons, I love the look of them, the feel of them, how they perform and react. They came to me and said let's create one, anything that you want to change. Obviously I loved it, everything about it already, but the changes are so minor, if any, but it just was about getting the best feeling iron, the best sounding iron. It's one of those clubs that obviously you have to hit it properly for it to be that way, but one of those ones where you kind of hear it and you turn around like, what is that, you know what I mean? You have those kind of handful of guys and clubs, whatever that might be, that make that sound.

That was something that we went through some testing of different even grinds and millings and stuff that's way, way past my pay grade, but they did, they'd hand to me that I would try. And yeah, I'm obviously very pleased with the result that came of it. They look awesome.

Q. Yeah. So you feel like they're similar to but kind of an improvement on the 620 MB? Is that kind of how you characterize them?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, extremely similar, definitely to the ones that I used. It seems like it just has a little bit of a cleaner look. And a lot of it could be me just trying to find more just because it's new and really it's not that different.

That's the thing that I think Titleist does such a great job is that they know literally through the bag and the golf ball is that all their product is really good clearly from the sake of how many people use it, but when they come out with something new, they just make minor, minor, minor, subtle tweaks to where if something's really good and you have a lot of guys in a driver or 3-wood, you don't want to come out with a new driver, 3-wood that's completely different because clearly everybody liked it. And that's kind of the same thing with the irons. So many people liked them, myself included, they didn't want to remodel it or revamp it, they just wanted to find little tiny ways that they could improve it to where the guys would have an easy transition and also be excited to see them.

Q. So it's just kind of this back and forth process of tweaking and refinement and that's kind of how you got to this point?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, yeah. Pretty much I'd be on the range and JJ from Titleist would kind of see when I'm loose and he'd stand behind me and he'd hand me a 6-iron and I'd hit a couple, and he's like how'd you like it, and I'm like, yeah, it's good, and he's like, perfect. And then the next week he'd be like, try this one, and then finally we came to one that we liked.

Q. JT, I know the success of the American Ryder Cup team is just barely in the rearview, but I was wondering if you can look ahead to the Presidents Cup next year, 2022, and just speak to the international side that you guys will be taking on. Especially this fall we've seen wins from Sungjae Im and Hideki and Lucas Herbert last week. If you could comment on the international side and what you guys could be facing next year.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't want to speak for the team considering I need to make it first, that's the most important part. I mean, I think the international side is only getting better and better. I think that was proven in Australia. It was an unbelievable tournament, an unbelievable competition between the two of us. It's not only great for us, it's great for the tournament, it's great for everything.

I think the Internationals aren't looking to do anything but continue to improve. Even in past years, again I've only played in two, it's not like you look at the team lightly no matter who's on the team just because team U.S. may have more accolades and wins put together, that doesn't mean that -- you go put me against Sungjae Im and I know he's going to be extremely difficult to beat. Same with Hideki, same with so many guys on their team.

Yeah, I think it's going to be a great -- I know it's going to be a great venue in Quail Hollow. That's a great place for a lot of noise and the trees and roars, and Charlotte does a great job of kind of rallying behind any kind of sports. Yeah, I need to make the team first, but I'm excited for the opportunity to play against them.

Q. Justin. I would like to write about the evolution of golf and golfers, and with that in mind I will like to ask you, what do you think has changed in the way golf is start from the start of your career until now. Second, how do you think the players' mentality has changed across the years? Thank you.

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think the way the game's been taught has changed just through -- I mean, now it's very clearly about just hitting it as far as you can. Doesn't matter, people can make the argument about equipment all they want, or golf ball, but at the end of the day, if you give me a microphone and a rock, I'm going to figure out how to hit it as far as I possibly can.

That's just how it is. That's how a lot of the teaching is now because I know for myself, I tried to hit it as far as I could when I was a kid because, one, I was really small and I needed to, and once I kind of grew and got stronger, how hard I swung and how hard I hit it then evolved into me hitting it relatively far. So I think that's a good way to teach younger kids. You still -- I just would say that all the science and math behind hitting up on it and different techniques to hit it far, that just wasn't a thing necessarily when I was growing up, so I would say that's changed.

Sorry, I don't remember the second part of your question. What was it?

Q. Yes, about changing the mentality of players.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I just think, kind of similar to what I said, a lot of guys are taking more of a hit it far kind of method and I think guys understand that if you drive it really far and really straight, it's a huge advantage. There's still many guys that are more old school, but I think that's just a little bit different than how the game used to be played.

Q. Talk a bit about what you found out about last year about coming here to Mayakoba, what you like most about the golf course, why you think more top players are coming back to this tournament every year. This is the best field that Mayakoba's ever had.

And also, from my understanding you are really close to Abraham Ancer. And he has won already, the WGC in Memphis that was a huge win, a huge win for Mexico. He's getting better, the top-10, FedExCup last year. What do you see in his game and where do you think he can go forward from here?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, in terms of the golf tournament, it's a special place. Like I kind of said earlier, it's beautiful. I keep saying every time I've come here, this is now my third time, that I want to come not for a golf tournament because I'd love to vacation here and get to enjoy it a little bit more. It's obviously a work week this week.

The golf course is fun, you can make a lot of birdies, but it's also challenging when it gets windier if you're not hitting fairways. It's great for families, whether you have kids or girlfriend, wife, whatever it is. It's a fun place to come. It's easy to come, to travel to. It's not terribly far away from a lot of places on the east coast.

In terms of Abraham, I haven't actually played with him very much, but I just obviously see his name up on the leaderboard every single week and he is -- it's extremely impressive how he's done as well as he has. He's very old school, just hit the fairway. He's kind of reminds of like a Zach Johnson to where he plays within himself, he doesn't try to do anything more than what he has, but he's really, really, really good at what he can do and he knows that. I think that's something that a lot of -- you don't want to say shorter hitters, but what a lot of players that maybe don't have the 320-yard carry getting in trouble like, I have to hit it far, I have to do this, when Abe knows what he has is plenty good enough and he's proven that and he just continues to get it better and better.

He's obviously such a good dude and so well liked out here. I haven't heard anybody that's said anything negative or bad about him, and I certainly wouldn't. I look forward to spending some more time with him and I'm sure battling it out with him some. I'm sure Mexico's very proud of everything he's done for the game of golf for the country.

Q. What's your favorite Mexican food? Tacos? What's the favorite that you have?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Tequila. Does that count?

Q. What letter grade would you give your year up to this point?

JUSTIN THOMAS: 2021? I assume not the season.

Q. Correct, the year.

JUSTIN THOMAS: C at best, c-minus. I would say it has not been a very good year at all I would say. Definitely haven't closed out as many tournaments. As good of finishes I've had, I feel like I should have won more than once and played a lot better in the majors. Yeah, other than that, no, it's been great.

Q. When you look at the world rankings and see yourself No. 7, what do you think?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I haven't looked at it. I obviously know just from hearing, but I also know it's very bunched, that I'm one or two tournaments away from being in the top two or three again. It's all about runs out here. Jon's been on an unbelievable run, DJ got on an unbelievable run, Brooks was on one, Collin's been on one. Everybody gets on these runs of the top players. And I know that I'm due and ready for another one, it's just a matter of when it will happen. I just need to stay in the right mind frame for it because, you know, like I kind of said earlier, this game doesn't necessarily owe you anything. I've just got to keep working and putting myself there, and once I get on a little bit of a run, the world ranking stuff will take care of itself.

Q. How's your dad doing?

JUSTIN THOMAS: He's good, he's good.

DOUG MILNE: JT, that's all we've got. Thank you for your time.