

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
September 7, 2022

JUSTIN LEONARD



Q. Justin, how does it feel to be in St. Louis? I know you're an ambassador for Ascension. Just to be here this week and playing, I want to say it's your third Champions event?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Second. Yeah, it's great. I'm excited to be here. All of the dates that I'm playing have been circled, highlighted, whatever you can do to make it bolder and stand out on the calendar. So excited to be here.

St. Louis, it's a great sports town and I've heard some amazing things about the event. I was here last night for the draw party. The governor, lieutenant governor were both here. It's going to be a great turnout. I'm excited about the week finally to get here.

My second event, you know, working towards kind of balancing two things right now, but the last 10 days or so have been pretty golf intensive and the lack of skin on my fingers is proof. Put a lot of energy to get in here and try to be ready to play.

Q. What is the state of your game right now? How do you feel about it?

JUSTIN LEONARD: Well, we'll find out on Friday. It feels pretty good, I would say better than it did back at the Senior PLAYERS just because I've had a little more time and a sense of what I need to do with my game after playing that first time.

I worked the three Playoff events, I got home for a couple days in between right before the TOUR Championship and basically drove home from the airport, dropped my suitcase off, kissed my wife and went to the golf course.

And then the last 10 days or so that I was home working really hard but also trying to play, get out on the golf course. I think that was one of the things I wasn't able to do as much in my lead-in for my first event. So try to get on the golf course and hit different shots and those kind of things and kind of get back into those -- the mindset of playing competitively and what I need to do to get my game ready.

Q. When you're balancing those two, it's got to be a big difference from when you played on the regular Tour. Is that going to be the biggest challenge for you?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I think the biggest challenge is, yes, trying to be good at two things at the same time. I'm pretty good at compartmentalizing, so fortunately I had a bit of time this summer to work on my game and then pour myself back into doing TV there in August. Now I've got the Presidents Cup here in a couple weeks I'll be working and then back into this

kind of mindset for the last two regular season events.

It's a little bit of a juggling act, but I knew going in and I enjoy both things. It's a great crew at NBC, but I've really enjoyed also getting back into playing and practicing and putting the work in myself on a golf course. It's something that I didn't really know I had missed until I jumped back in here in the last few months. So just trying to embrace the process really.

Q. What did you learn from your (inaudible)?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I learned that I can't give myself an out. I mean, I talked myself right into shooting 73-77 because I haven't been able to practice as much, it's my first tournament in a long time, all those things were playing in my head and I played like it.

So I think I'm coming in here with a bit of a different mindset of it's golf. Yes, these guys are really good, but I've been watching the best players in the world for the last six years and I've been taking some things from that in that there's no need to be perfect because nobody is. I've yet to see a perfect round and I've seen plenty of 62s and 63s on very difficult golf courses and they weren't perfect, so why should I try to be.

I think also just the things that I need to work on, scoring. From a swing standpoint, everything was fine, but it's the little fine tuning of getting on a golf course and hitting the ball to a certain number and those kind of things. You don't necessarily do that on the driving range. So trying to get more -- think more -- instead of golf swing and technique, think more, OK, how am I going to score. That's something I didn't do very well the first couple days in Akron. Then the last -- on Friday night I had a little "come to Jesus" with myself and talking with my wife and my kids there at the dinner table and I said, you know, it's a game, it's a game I've played all my life. Yeah, I haven't played it a lot recently, but still just go out and play. And I did play better. I think just changing the mindset, taking some things that I've learned and we'll see what it adds up to this week.

Q. How do you do that when you're home practicing (inaudible)?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I think just getting in the mindset. The nice thing about being down in Florida is there's some really good golf courses that are difficult and there's a lot of great players. So I look up and down the range, I see Tom Gillis, I see Alex Noren, I see Matt Fitzpatrick, those guys. It's inspiring, honestly, to watch their work ethic and to put the time in.

The biggest thing is like all the things that I used to do with my time off -- pay bills, you read articles -- that has to be highly compressed because now I've got -- I need to spend sometimes three, sometimes it's five or six hours at the golf course during the day whereas that wasn't really built into my kind of routine. So kind of understanding and redoing my routine a bit is something also that I'm learning how to handle.

Q. What will your schedule be after the Presidents Cup?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I'm going to play the FURYK & FRIENDS Constellation Energy and then I'm going to play the next week at the SAS and hopefully play my way in. Whatever I'm in from there on out, I will play because Presidents Cup's my last event with NBC this year. So just get very golf focused after the Presidents Cup.

Q. Thoughts on this golf course? Have you had a chance to get out there?

JUSTIN LEONARD: I haven't seen it yet. I got here last night, did an event here at the putting green, hit maybe 30 balls on the range.

But the guys really enjoyed it last year. I know there was a lot of rain over the Labor Day weekend, but seems to be drying out. I think our weather's going to help. I've heard a lot of really good things.

Q. Do you think your game can adjust to this course or at least play your way to a decent round?

JUSTIN LEONARD: No, I'm not concerned about trying to figure the golf course out. I'm playing today and tomorrow. With my TV work, I've gotten pretty good at understanding a golf course with one trip around without playing it. So being able to play it is a pretty big advantage rather than just driving around in a cart looking at a yardage book.

Now, when I do that I get out and walk the greens and things like that, but certainly being able to get on the golf course twice, I've got a great caddie in Shawn Segars and he does the same thing, he understands how to break down a golf course.

The nice thing when I'm doing TV, I've got to figure out how 156 players are going to play it or whatever the field size is. Here, I only need to figure out how I'm going to play the golf course, so that makes it a bit easier.

Q. I'm glad to hear you kissed your wife before you went out on the golf course.

JUSTIN LEONARD: Always.

Q. Good move. (Question about connection to Ascension and the charities.)

JUSTIN LEONARD: Yeah, it's been a great relationship so far. It's really starting this week as far as my involvement getting to know some of the people involved.

The charity element here is fantastic. I mean, I heard last night that the little putting event that we did last night for charity raised almost \$100,000. They I think sold a couple spots for -- to be team captains for the legends event on Saturday afternoon.

The charity tie-in here is incredible as it is across the board on PGA Tour and PGA Tour

Champions. Glad to see that that's going to continue. I know there was talk of the Tour maybe changing its tax status, but it doesn't look like that's going to be the case.

We go to a lot of great areas and the cool thing is that when we leave an area, hopefully, I think it's pretty much unanimously better than when we got there as far as the charity dollars that are raised that go to the communities.

I played with a couple or a PGA Junior League player last night at the putting deal, Caleb, and he was awesome. To know like we're here, it's not just about us, it's about what we're able to do with the communities. It's companies like Ascension and Emerson that makes that happen each and every week.