

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 30, 2022



JUSTIN THOMAS

JACK RYAN: We would like to welcome Justin Thomas into the interview room here at the Hero World Challenge.

Justin, a lot of weather to deal with today, but as we look ahead to the rest of the week, what are you looking forward to accomplishing this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, hopefully the course will dry up quite a bit. That was -- that was some serious rain in that pro-am, so I'm bummed for the ams that had to go through it after being here.

Yeah, I mean, there's only so much that Albany can do with the conditions and weather they were given. Hopefully get a little wind and some nice weather and dry it up and we can produce some good golf this weekend.

JACK RYAN: Just the one start on Tour during the fall portion of the season. How would you -- how do you feel like your game is coming into the week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I feel like my game's in a pretty good spot. I had a very good amount of time off, more than normal. Although I played very poorly at THE CJ CUP, you know, although I feel like I practiced very hard, I put in a lot of hard work in different areas the last week and a half or so, but not playing in a tournament for a while there's always a little bit of rust you have to knock off. The hope and the goal is to knock it off as quickly as possible and just try to get into a little bit of a rhythm and make a bunch of birdies, because that's what you have to do out here.

Q. I saw the announcement yesterday that, I think it was yesterday, that you and Jon Rahm are going to be participating in the TGL. With that and your sunscreen, you're doing a lot of stuff off the golf course. Was that always the plan, or sort of like now that you've had success and have a platform, those things are more appealing to you now, or has that always been the plan to sort of broaden like you have?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, I think it's maybe a big picture, it's always in the plan somewhat, but in terms of what it is, you just don't know the opportunities that you're going to have.

I mean, no, if you would have told me when I was 18 years old, hey, you're going to have a sunscreen line because you're going to have melanoma when you're 24, I would have been like nah, I'm good, I'd rather not have melanoma, but just the way things unfold. And obviously it is what it is for that situation and having a sunscreen brand, but it's like I'm trying to raise awareness and benefit other people who don't maybe realize that they do have skin



cancer Or that they should get checked more often. The amount of people I've had that reach out and say they wouldn't have until they heard from me in my situation and then they caught themselves. That's the kind of stuff I'm trying to do.

It's the same thing with that, if you have an opportunity to be involved in something that's unique, that's cool, that more importantly for me is I'm passionate about. I'm never going to invest in a company, I'm never going to be a part of something, I never want to have my name attached to something if it's not something I'm passionate about, I want to use, I want to be involved with and think is going to benefit whatever area that's in, if that makes sense. I've been very fortunate to play some good golf to get me in some good positions and it's been fun the last couple years.

Q. A couple questions. What specifically appeals to you about playing in the Monday night tech-infused golf league, and then what are you looking forward to with playing with Jordan against Tiger in a 12-hole match and how much trash talk do you think is going to be involved in that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: What was the first part? The fans are a little loud.

Q. What appeals to you about the Monday night tech-infused golf week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I think -- I mean, I'll answer the easy one first, the obvious one first. Jordan and I are very excited, an opportunity for us to play against Tiger and Rory in a scenario situation like that. I think we all are obviously very close and we have an opportunity to just honestly go out like we would us four, go play a practice round and have some kind of match. I'm sure it will be very entertaining. It's just going to be fun for us. Even if it wasn't an event on TV, us four would have a blast going out and playing 12 holes together let alone under the lights to what sounds like a really cool golf course. So yeah, it will be a blast.

Yeah, I think for -- I mean, for the Monday night league, I think it's just something that, again, the game of golf is doing so well right now, I think, with obviously we've had some things change the last whatever you want to call it, year or so. Even now I think the game of golf is still doing really, really well and for us to try to take advantage of these opportunities to just widen the horizons and just get the people that are interested and involved in golf outside of golf. I think it's -- that's what a lot of it is. We have a lot of, a handful I would call it of players that are maybe recognized globally, whereas we have a lot of guys that should be thrown in that same kind of category and I feel like this is something that will bring in a totally different entertaining, fun, both for the players, for the people that are physically there watching and the people that are watching on TV, just some more enjoyment and excitement to the game that will hopefully just continue to take it up and up.

Q. Justin, Tiger was here yesterday and obviously very disappointed that he's not able to play this week. You have been inspired and motivated by Tiger, and your peers. What do you guys do to motivate Tiger in moments like this when he has



to -- after the accident or now when he is not able to? Are you guys just pulling his legs and just making him feel better, or what are you guys doing?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Was that a pun, pulling his legs?

Sorry, I couldn't resist.

No, I mean, first and foremost, it doesn't matter who he is, I just want to be there as his friend. He's obviously very different in terms of stubbornness and how he's always gone about everything. And he's -- I mean, there's a reason he's the GOAT is that his mental side of him is unlike anything I've ever seen of anybody I've ever known.

So there's not really a whole lot I can bring to the table on that side. You just want to be there as a friend, you want to be supportive. I want him to know that I can help in any way that I can, which he obviously has a team for that, he's got everybody involved.

But myself and any of us, it's just reaching out and telling him we're thinking about him, whether it's at home, we go hit balls, we play golf, we work out, whatever it is. It's not necessarily just doing it to -- obviously it also helps to keep his spirits up with what's going on, but you just want to hang out with him because he's a friend. Hopefully he can just keep his spirits up high and continue to improve and get back out here this year.

Q. Just wondered, in very general terms, how do you look at a year like this where you're a major champion, you and Rory and Tony had a nice go in Canada, but that was really about it?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, I had a very solid beginning of the year. I think I had, I don't know, I had a handful of top-3s or top-5s, but it's just a lot of my best play was prior to the PGA. So I think if you took beginning of the season to PGA, I would argue that I played better than anybody. I would say that yeah, a lot -- not a lot, but more people had more wins than I did. But in terms of playing golf, I felt that I was playing just as well if not better than anybody.

But unfortunately that doesn't really get you trophies or points or money. You have to go out and you have to execute the shots when you need to and hit a shot and make the putts and make the mental decisions, all that, and I just wasn't doing that as well last year.

It is tough. I've gone back and forth because, yeah, as a whole if you just -- first thing that comes to my mind when I think about the year is I think it was pretty average, but I won a major championship. If you told me every year the rest of my career I did what I did last year, I'd be hard pressed to not take that, but me knowing what I feel like I can do and win multiple times a year, that part's frustrating, but I have to try to look at the positives and realize I won a major championship and had good things happen.

Q. There's always been a question of whether it can be a great year without winning a

major. I think Tiger once said if you won a major, regardless, it's been a great year. Agree or disagree?

JUSTIN THOMAS: If he says it, then I'm -- yeah, it's a great year. He's done it all, so it was a great year. It wasn't just average, it was great.

Q. J.T., how complete is your understanding of the PIP and how that list is compiled or do you just kind of look at it when it comes out and move on?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I have a pretty good understanding. I have enough of an understanding like anything that if you played really good golf, everything's going to take care of itself. I think that's on our side or my side what was frustrating before. I know the criteria's changing now or changed with the social media aspect because everybody just thought it was a social media contest, and that's annoying because it's -- yeah, it was one of the categories, but it's not like the 150th ranked player in the world, the guy who's not won any tournaments, not finished in the top-10 at all can just go be funny, be good on social media and he's in the top-10 of the PIP. Like that's just not how it works.

It's for the people that are selling the tickets. It's for the people that are the reason NBC, CBS, like all these people are signing, wanting these TV deals. The reason why you all sit in these press conferences, they're the names and the pictures on tickets each week, the people that are selling everything.

I do know that like everything in the world, everything in this sport and other sports, if you perform well, you're going to be -- you're going to benefit in that.

So I don't know if that really answers your question. I have a pretty good idea of what the formula or whatever, what the categories are. I couldn't probably give you a very intelligent description of them all, but I have somewhat of an idea.

Q. And kind of a different question, Tiger was in here yesterday talking about sort of what he's doing with Rory off the golf course as far as leadership goes. How would you describe him as a leader when it comes to what he's doing off the course?

JUSTIN THOMAS: For Tiger? Yeah, wow, I think he -- he's probably been busier this year than he ever has any of the years he's played and that's just of the stuff I know, let alone the amount of meetings, calls that I don't know.

I think some of y'all might understand, but I had no idea -- I know I have and my mom has talked to him a bunch about his foundation. I mean, the amount of hours and time that he spends every year on his foundation is unbelievable. I think obviously it's grown and become as big and they've raised however much money they have and have all these buildings, whatever it is and continue to build, but it's a lot, it's a toll on you. He's done it for a long time and I honestly think he doesn't even get enough credit for that sometimes.



As a player who's playing on this tour and having someone like him going to bat for you and speaking on your behalf and knowing that everything he's saying has myself and all of my peers' best interests in mind is pretty cool, because he's Tiger Woods, he doesn't need to do that. Who knows how much longer he's going to play. Who knows, you know, what his future is going to hold, but he knows how much the PGA TOUR has done for him and what the Tour has meant to him and he wants to continue to see it be the best product and the best place to play in the world and he's put in a lot of work to make sure that's true.

Q. Justin, two separate things. One, I'll just follow on Tiger real quick. Obviously he didn't win this year, he wasn't that competitive, but just where do you rank him returning at all? And you probably know as well as anybody what he was dealing with off the course that a lot of people don't see. To the rest of us it was kind of a surprise he played the Masters and just from there on just to be able to do what he did.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, yeah, there was plenty of times I didn't think he was going to be playing a tournament last year. But him, well, he made the cut in the Masters, he made the cut in the PGA. It's pretty insane actually. To make the cut at Augusta for how he felt early in the year, it's mind blowing, honestly.

I can't put it into words how much his mind just works in his favor compared to everybody else and how much better it is than everybody else's. He's a different person when he gets out there, and especially at Augusta, all the good vibes and memories and everything he has. When that focus clicks on, it's a different person.

Q. The other thing was just your reaction to what the Tour recently did with the access for college players. I think in your case you would have benefited from that had it been in place at the time. Wondered if you might have had any role in helping them sort of sort that out?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I think it goes hand in hand with what a lot of us said, is that with the changes that the Tour is kind of going through and has gone through this past call it six months, it's all just to get the best product possible. That's what we want, that's what you guys want, that's what the fans at home want, what the people buying tickets want. That's just what everybody wants. For that, you need some of the best amateur college players that are coming out to be part of it.

For me, obviously, yeah, I would have loved that, but at the same time I truly do think a big reason of the success that I had at 23, 24, 25 years old was because of the route that I went. I had to go through Q-School, I had to earn my Web.com then, now Korn Ferry card, had to play a season on the Korn Ferry, had to earn my card. I didn't win and I learned how to win at the professional level. I had a lot of close calls that I just didn't -- that I learned from. I learned how to travel, how to just everything that comes with being a professional golfer. I was 20 years old, 21 years old my first year as a pro and I don't think I would have handled that very well on the PGA TOUR, to be honest.



So do I think I would have been OK? Yeah, but I don't know if I would have had the success as early as I did without going the route that I did. Now, that's not saying other kids can't do it, but I'm just speaking for me personally.

Q. I'm curious what your impression of Cam Young's ascent has been for a guy that had no status not too long ago and is obviously now here this week and almost won a couple majors last year.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Cam is extremely impressive. He's just very much right here. He's kind D.J.-like of just even keel, never gets high, never gets low.

I played with him in the final group on Sunday at Riviera last year and I remember -- I knew he was a rookie and never met him, never played with him and I remember the first hole he hit in the front bunker in two. I think Joaquin had a pretty big lead, four-, five-shot lead, something like that and he left that in the bunker. I remember thinking like this is, like for a rookie, final group of a big event, like this is about the worst start you could think of. He hit that one out to about 12 feet and made it for par. I remember kind of thinking like oh, wow, that's pretty impressive.

A couple holes go by, makes another birdie. All of a sudden we're on like 14 and he's like two back. I just looked at Bones, I'm like, this kid's really good, he's handled this moment unbelievably. And he continued to do that the rest of the year.

It's clear that when he putts well, he's got a very good chance to win. He hits it so far and so flush. He's one of those guys that you listen to him hit irons and it's a different sound than a lot of other guys. Yeah, I think he's going to have an unbelievable career.

Q. Justin, I just spoke to Viktor Hovland. Next year you guys might need to play a bit more than you usually do. What kind of an impact will you have on the preparation ahead of the majors?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, for me it's not really too different in terms of the number of events. It would be very similar to what I've played basically every year except for 2020, so it's not really a big difference for me. I'll have to add a couple events maybe that I didn't play in previous years. It's not really a big difference, at least for me personally. I think there's 30 or 35 events on the PGA TOUR I would love to play but I just can't play due to scheduling and that's still going to be the case. You know, just going to try to get as prepared and ready for each and every one of them as I can.

Q. You mentioned all the things that you learned going up through Korn Ferry. What did you learn this year?

JUSTIN THOMAS: What did I learn this year? Probably to not be so hard on myself. I felt like I was really hard on myself this year. Kind of like I was saying to Doug, I felt like beginning of the year I was playing as good or better than anybody and I just had no wins to



show for it. I felt like when you're in those rolls, those rhythms like Scottie got on last year, like Rory's on right now, you see Rahm get on them like I was on however many years ago, winning comes easier than it should and sometimes you just feel like that should happen every time and that's just not the case.

I put myself in position quite a few times in the beginning of the year, I just didn't -- I didn't shoot the scores when I needed to or hit the shots or make the putts when I needed to in previous years. And I think I put so much pressure on myself to do it and then I just, I almost wanted it too bad versus just trusting in myself and believing that I've worked hard enough, I've put in enough time that I just have to go play golf, just stay present, stay in the moment and just kind of let it happen as opposed to making it happen, if that makes sense.

Q. I had just two quick ones off topic. Were you at all nervous on your wedding day?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not really, no, I wasn't.

Q. Second question is what is the most money you've ever spent on a sporting ticket?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Most money I've ever spent on a sporting ticket?

JACK RYAN: Do you still pay for those?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I was going to say, I don't really pay for tickets anymore, Doug.

That's not true. I went -- I went to -- I actually went to a Predators game and we sat in a suite and found out I got charged for it, so that one.

Q. (No microphone.)

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I did. I still would have gone, but a little heads-up would have been nice.

Q. Justin, I asked Tiger and Rory about this before. Do you see any peace restored between LIV Tour and PGA TOUR and do you think Tiger will play big role in doing that?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Do I see any peace right now?

Q. Yes.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Definitely not. I think they've made that pretty well known it's not -- it doesn't seem they don't really want peace.

I still get along with -- I mean I've talked to plenty of them, I see some of them, the guys that

are playing on LIV, but it doesn't seem that they really want peace.

And I'm also really not too worried about it. Those guys, they're doing their thing and we're out here trying to do ours and play well. We have great leadership in Tiger and Rory, what they're trying to lead the group of guys out here to create a great product out here on the PGA TOUR. You know, we've been the best tour for a very, very long time and we plan on continuing to be that. I'm excited about the future. I know that they are, too. Yeah, it is what it is.

JACK RYAN: Justin, thank you very much for your time.

