

PRE-TOURNAMENT PRESS CONFERENCE
October 22, 2024



JUSTIN THOMAS

MODERATOR: We want to welcome Justin Thomas to the ZOZO CHAMPIONSHIP media center.

Justin, thanks for your time. Your first start in Narashino since 2019. How much are you looking forward to competing in this championship?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I'm very excited. Obviously 2019 wasn't the best of years with the typhoon coming through. That was hands down the most rain I think I've ever seen in my life in the span of a day. I'm very excited to be back and play in front of the Japanese fans and play a great golf course.

MODERATOR: Speaking of the golf course, you've had a look at that Narashino the last couple of days. How's it looking out there and has it changed much in the past five years?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's quite a bit different just because it's not under water to start (Laughs.) The course is in unbelievable shape. It feels like not a blade of grass is out of place. The fairways have a little bit of run to them. The greens are very, very fast. Yeah, so hopefully I see the forecast has gotten a little better, so knock on wood, hopefully it will stay like that and we'll get some great weather this week. The course is really, really going to play nicely.

MODERATOR: You've had some time off since the Tour Championship. Just give us a glimpse of how you spent the last few weeks back home.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's been quite a bit of time off. I was champing at the bit to get here. The time off is nice, but if I don't compete for a long time, I get not bored but I want to get back and play in tournaments again.

So had a good mixture of a little bit of time off and got to spend some time with some family and some friends, but I've also been working really hard. I've been excited to practice and been really excited for the opportunity to play and compete this week. Although it's been an enjoyable time off, I'm very happy to be back and play in a tournament again.

Q. We are happy to have you back in Japan. Is Japan a special place for you or do you have any good memories or is there anything you're looking forward to in Japan?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Thank you, I'm very glad to be back. It's just a great opportunity for us to come play in front of different fans. I mean, how excited everybody is to see so many of us that play on Tour, it's really cool. I mean, they make us feel very welcome and so excited for

us to be here. Hopefully we can kind of use a week like this to continue to grow the game of golf and inspire some little kids or even adults, whatever it is, to want to play and pursue the game.

Yeah, the couple times I've been in Japan and different places, areas, I've really enjoyed. I'm hoping to and looking forward to creating more great memories this week.

Q. Justin, you've had four wins in Asia already, so Japan might be a good spot to get your fifth?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, that's exactly right. I had a lot of success in Asia. Don't worry, I definitely thought about that. Yeah, I don't know what it is. I played some good golf and won some tournaments kind of this time of year and I guess in this part of the world. Yeah, like I said, I'm excited to be back and have an opportunity to hopefully get my fifth victory in Asia, a new place for me.

Q. You're expecting a baby in November, so what's your mindset for this week before you become a dad?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, any golf shot or situation I am in this week, it's not going to be anything close to as hard as it's going to be in a month or so when our little one comes.

Yeah, we're very fortunate with the timing of being able -- for me being able to come here. Yeah, I think reality will probably set in when I'm flying home and then when I get home because it will be getting in crunch time. I know my wife's going to be an unbelievable mom and I'm excited for the opportunity to raise a little girl. It's going to be great. But this week I'm focused on business and trying to win a golf tournament. Then it's time to go home and get ready to be a dad.

Q. Are you mentally prepared for becoming a dad?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't think you ever are (laughs.) All I know is I'll be as ready as I possibly can and we're going to make the most out of every situation we can. I can't tell you honestly if I'm ready because I've never done it before. I'll let you know in a couple months. It will be a challenge in different ways, but one that we're excited for.

Q. Welcome back to Japan. I have a question about your equipment. How's the new GT driver going and any new clubs in the bag this week?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's been great. I've liked it and I've had an opportunity at home to just spend a little time I feel like kind of fine tuning, tweaking some stuff, messing with some different shafts. I put a new shaft in at Tour Championship and I felt like I saw some good progress. It was more just kind of learning of certain kind of tendencies of more so like my swing, of different -- of honestly kind of something as little as how the ball's teed up. If I'm (inaudible) I can sometimes get it going both directions a little better or my center strike isn't

as consistent. Anyway, I have really, really liked the driver. I've seen some good consistency. I've been driving it well, which is extremely important at a course like this.

Equipment-wise, I don't have anything new in the bag, I don't think, no.

Q. And lastly, around these places, golf courses in Japan, what shots do you need to have in the bag?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Whatever gets it in the fairway. The places I've played in Japan, it's extremely important to drive the ball in the fairway. This course is a great example. I think you look at the scores each day and you'll see some people shoot, you know, 5, 6, 7 under and you'll see some really good players shoot 4, 5, 6 over. I think it's really hard.

With the rough as long as it is and greens as severe as they are, it's just a very hard place to try to salvage up-and-downs and make pars all day. I think ball-striking is a premium in being able to hit the fairways and then control where you hit it on the greens. Just take advantage of opportunities when you can.

Q. Hi, Justin. After much anticipation, TGL announced its schedule this week. Can you talk about how excited you are for this and what fans should expect for the launch of 2025?

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it's going to be -- I think it's going to be obviously different, but it will be exciting for all of us just because it is, it's not our -- we play golf a lot of different places in the world, different grasses, different fields in front of different fans, but we've never done anything like this. So it's going to be something that is going to kind of bring a different light and different just I would say hype and vision around a golf competition. It's not your standard go out and play 72 holes and low score wins. I think it will be exciting for fans to watch and I think it will be an opportunity for us to enjoy. It's obviously not the grind of a normal tournament week, but we're all very, very competitive and try to beat each other and try to win.

It's hard to say really what to expect because, again, it's very new to all of us and something different. I think it will bring some great coverage and new light to a golf competition, if you will.

MODERATOR: When you think of 2019, what moment in the week stands out about Tiger's win back then in this event? Don't say typhoon.

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, I mean, yeah, it was a very obviously historic moment, historic week. It was very fitting because it was unfortunate to have that happen to the event in terms of I think the fans weren't able to come out maybe a day or two and then maybe it was limited, just having to take a day off. The tournament didn't get the hype and the buzz and the atmosphere it deserved, but naturally anything that Tiger wins is going to amplify that.

I think him having that historic win brought that energy and just gave the tournament kind of the recognition I feel like it deserved, or deserves.

MODERATOR: You played with Tiger quite a bit at the Presidents Cup that year in 2019. What part of his game really stood out at that moment in time?

JUSTIN THOMAS: He was playing really, really well. I'd say that was the best I've seen him play of all the times that we played together. Just watching him kind of pick his way around Royal Melbourne and shaping shots and just hitting the ball miles in the air and kind of hitting it low, running it around different places. He was in such a focused state and just in such a zone, I was very, very fortunate to get to watch that live and be his partner not only because it was cool to watch, but he was playing so well it was going to be hard for him to lose a match. So I was on the right end of that as a partner. It was definitely a week, but two matches that I won't forget playing with him that week.

Q. Is there any specific reason you came back to Japan since 2019?

JUSTIN THOMAS: I've wanted to. It's an event, like I've said, I really like and I like the golf course. It's just unfortunately we can't play in everything is kind of the best I would describe it and it just hasn't worked out scheduling wise. I'm glad it did this year. Yeah, like I said, I'm very excited to be back and hopefully it won't be as long between visits back to Japan as it was this past time.

Q. Apologies, this is a little out of left field, but looking back to THE PLAYERS Championship this year, what do you remember about you played with Scottie round 1 and 2, what do you remember about him battling through that injury and how impressive it was him being able to still win?

JUSTIN THOMAS: It didn't really come up until our third hole on Friday. I just remember he hit this tee shot and it was like the most absurd follow-through I've ever seen and I was audibly laughing because I thought it was just one of his patented follow-throughs only to find out it was his neck and I actually felt pretty bad.

It was pretty cool and I honestly felt like I learned a lot because it reminded -- it just reminded me of watching somebody kind of get their way around a golf course when they don't have their best stuff. That's something I feel like I have been and am very good at at times. I think over the course of a long career, winning tournaments, winning big tournaments when you don't have your best stuff is a really, really big accomplishment and it makes you internally -- it just brings a lot of confidence I would say. Watching that firsthand, watching him just truly plot his way around the course and not taking on anything that he shouldn't was impressive, but to do that at a tournament like THE PLAYERS is even more so.

MODERATOR: Justin, thanks for your time and good luck this week.