

# U.S. Open Championship 2017

Saturday, June 17, 2017

## Justin Thomas

Press Conference



**Q. It is my pleasure to welcome to the interview room at the 2017 U.S. Open Championship Justin Thomas, who fired a 9-under 63 to record the lowest score in the 117-year championship history at the U.S. Open. Justin, can you talk a little bit about your round? Nine birdies, you finished with the eagle, two bogeys. Can you just sum it up in a few words?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Fun, I know that. Yeah, it was obviously an awesome day. It was one of those, my game has felt pretty good all week. It just was trying to take advantage of the opportunities I had and when it was a tougher hole or tougher pin, just come take my medicine or make a par.

Jimmy and I kind of said that on 3 because that was one that was a tough pin. But we knew we were just trying to miss it in the right spot sort of thing. The front nine, to end with those three birdies just kind of turned an average or a decent nine into a great nine to where I could kind of get some momentum going into the back and try to post a great number out there.

Obviously, the finish was awesome. I'd love to have another one of those.

BETH MAJOR: For historical context, the 9-under 63 is the lowest round in relation to par in championship history. It bests the 8-under 63 final round score shot by Johnny Miller in the 1973 U.S. Open at Oakmont Country Club. It's also the first time someone has shot 63 in the third round. It's the fifth 63 in championship history. But, again, the first time someone has finished at 9-under. Justin is currently 11-under for the championship, and holds a two-stroke lead. We will open it to questions.

**Q. Justin, I'm sure everything is just sinking in, but when you reflect on your accomplishment, this is a tournament that's been played, this is the 117th U.S. Open. Just give us an inside glimpse of what's going on in there right now as you reflect?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not a lot, unfortunately. I'm sorry to tell you that (laughing). I don't think -- I'm not sure when it's going to sink in or when I'm going to realize what I did. I know one thing, if it happened tomorrow and the result is what I want it to be, then I'd probably have a little different feeling. But I'm just so excited to give myself a great chance to win this golf tournament.

I felt like my game has been good enough to compete in the majors this year. So to be able to do so and have a chance tomorrow is just going to be great.

**Q. Friends joke you've never won on the U.S. mainland proper, as it were. How special would it be to do it this time around?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I mean, it would be special because it's a U.S. Open, not because it's on the mainland. I mean, that's something that's kind of funny to me. People will say that, and I just say having four PGA TOUR wins at 23, when I had them, was pretty great. I don't know. I mean, there's not really much I can say. Usually people that are saying that are just kind of looking for something to talk about sort of thing. But I feel confident at some point I'll get one on the mainland.

**Q. With the leaderboard the way it was, how much was a 63 even on your mind over the last hole? And secondly, what kind of challenge is it for you tomorrow to kind of get back to fourth round trying to win?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, 63 was never on my mind. Throughout the day when I had -- let's see. I hit that tee shot on 15. That would have gotten me to 7. This is terrible, but I was thinking, if I make this, I birdie the last three, I shoot 62, all-time major record, and I can get that one down there, so that kind of ruined that.

But it was funny because I forget what hole it was, but I remember telling Jimmy, I looked at the leaderboard, and there were ten people at 7- or 8-under, and I was like man, there are a lot of people at 7- or 8-under right now. It's pretty jam packed. It's not like I was trying to pull away from them or do anything, I was just trying to continue to play my game and play good golf.

Yeah, tomorrow's going to be fun. I'm excited. I don't really know what to say, I guess, sort of thing. It's great to be in the position that I am versus before I had that good finish. Any more under par you can get is obviously better. I'm just excited for tomorrow.

**Q. Do you continue to stay on the gas tomorrow? Or do you just take what the course gives you tomorrow?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, being this soft, birdies are going to happen. You never know how the USGA is

going to set it up tomorrow. It was definitely conducive for good scores today. You could get after it a little bit. It's just it doesn't matter how long, how whatever the course is. When you give us soft greens, good greens and not much wind, you know there are going to be some good scores. I was just happy that I was the one that was able to take advantage of it today.

But it's going to be weird. I don't know what I'm going to feel tonight, if I'm going to sleep well. I'm sure I won't sleep in. I usually don't. So I pretty much docking that for tomorrow, and figure I have no chance to sleep in. But I know I'm going to be nervous, but it's a good nervous, that's why I play to get myself in this position. And I'm excited for the opportunity to see what happens.

**Q. Are the Wisconsin fans different than at other venues?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's hard to say just because the U.S. Open is always so loud. But, I mean, they're great. I was blown away by the support that I got today and this week. It was really cool to be honest. To feel like I had that many, I don't know if they were faking or what they were doing, but I liked it. They made me feel like they were pulling for me and helping me through that finish.

Yeah, the roars in a major in a U.S. Open are really tough to compare to anything. Just to hear all the people yelling my name and cheering me on between holes and in between shots is pretty special, so it's a lot of fun.

**Q. Players have talked in here the last few days about being able to stick with their game plans and how comfortable they feel at a U.S. Open, this U.S. Open. Is a U.S. Open supposed to be comfortable, and why is this one apparently that way?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I feel like the U.S. Open is supposed to be very uncomfortable. I think it's kind of what the USGA and U.S. Open is known for is making you kind of hate yourself and hate golf and just really struggle out there. I don't mean that in a bad way.

It's just, it's fun. We have one event a year. This one's different because it's soft. But like Oakmont last year, as soft as it was, it's still so brutal and so hard to play. It is what it is. But, yeah, sticking to game plans is obviously important in any position that you get in.

But yeah, it's different being like this. Just being in a U.S. Open and seeing and hearing so many birdies, usually those roars are for pars and stuff like that. But it's fun.

As soft as it is, the scores still aren't very low as a

whole. A lot of tournaments through 54 holes this soft, 15- to 20-under would be winning.

**Q. 18 was great, but can you talk about your second shot on 12? It seemed like a very difficult situation, and do you believe your lead will hold by the end of the day?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: First off, I don't know if it will hold solo lead. Obviously I'd love for it to, but I don't know. It's hard to say. It's just so soft that 15 is obviously easy.

16 is not a very difficult pin if you hit a good shot. 17's a tough pin. 18's a tough pin. But as soft as it is, and 14 obviously being a par 5, so you don't know.

I don't think anyone will get to 12 or better, but they might.

Oh, you said 12, right? Okay. 12, yeah, I hit tee shot where I seem to hit it every time I've played that hole so far. I just double crossed it in that left rough. I was fortunate enough to get a pretty good lie. I knew with that back pin that long was fine. Just pretty much tried to trickle it over the back or miss the right bunker, because I knew it's not too difficult of a bunker shot.

I think I had 144-front maybe, so I just kind of opened up a 9-iron to make sure it got up in the air off the downslope. It came out a little top spin. That's just one of those. It was a great shot, but it was lucky and fortunate to get it where it did. Wouldn't be talking about it if I didn't make the putt. So that was nice.

**Q. It looked like you had iron in to 3-wood out at 18. What was the final determining factor that pushed you over to hitting the 3-wood for the second shot?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: So yesterday I was five yards closer, I think. Pin was obviously a little different. I had 287-front yesterday. I think I had 293, so I guess six yards closer. I had 293 front today, a little less wind. It just, if it would have been firm, I probably would have hit 2-iron because I could have roasted a little hook in 2-iron and got it with the slope. But I felt like if I overcooked it and got in that left bunker, like a 40 or 50 yard bunker shot that would have been tough. If I blasted it through, it wouldn't have been good.

I knew with a 3-wood, it was sitting good to where if I smoked it, I decided all I tried to do is tried to overcut it. If I did overcut it, I could hit it perfect. If it gets a little spiny, comes up in the front of the bunker, it's fine. If I overcut it in the right fairway, it's fine. I can't go through slicing it that much. So I just with the wind dying down a little bit, I still was 310 hole. I still obviously needed to nuke it. But I just felt like I could get it up in the air enough to hold the green as soft as they were. And it

came out nicely.

**Q. You've had so many different memorable shots today. What do you think you'll walk away from as the most memorable one when you think back on this round?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: The 3-wood on 18. That was pretty sweet.

**Q. Justin, walking back from 18 to scoring or sitting in scoring, what was your initial reaction to shooting the score that you shot?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Walking from the green or from the scoring? I was excited to take the lead. I was excited to shoot 63. I had no idea that 9-under was the best ever in an Open, so that was pretty cool once I saw my card. The guys at the scoring table told me that, so I was pretty pumped about that.

I don't know. Obviously, it hasn't set in what happened today. I was in a great zone out there. I was hitting it well, I was putting it well, I had some great up-and-downs. So it just kind of everything has been flowing. So I'm sure once I sit down and relax tonight it will maybe set in a little bit more.

**Q. Justin, how did you figure out that putt on No. 5 there?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, that was a bummer. I mean, the putt wasn't a bummer, but my second shot, just because I still don't know how it stayed there. Without the rain last night, it would have come down. But it's so steep there. I mean, you could see my ball trickling on the green, and that probably would have gone six to eight to ten feet past.

I was trying to get over the fact of how mad I was that I didn't have an eight-footer for birdie like I felt like I should have. But it just was one of those that you try to find the high point. Just find the fall line. I was kind of going around and I knew you'd rather miss those putts a little high than low just because they're going to kind of get up the slope and lose speed as opposed to gain speed. That was my main goal is to try to get it up there and get it in a good spot to make a second putt. Once it started rolling, it looked good. That was definitely a bonus.

**Q. You mentioned how traditionally difficult the U.S. Open is. Anyone that knows the history of the game knows that. We're seeing so many rounds under par here, guys firing birdies all over the place, a record setting number of guys under par. Today a 63. Is it good for the U.S. Open to have this wide open of a tournament?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, as long as it's a good tournament, it's good for the U.S. Open and the USGA.

I don't think it's -- whether it's 20-under or 20-over, as long as for them they want a good tournament and an action-packed leaderboard. I mean, to be selfish, I hope it isn't, and I have a day like I did today.

But you don't know what's going to happen. That's the thing. You get some wind. You don't get anymore rain, you get some tough pins, it's going to get more baked out. It's going to get harder. If you're not hitting it well, it's still hard to hit it under par. It's still Erin Hills. It's still a U.S. Open. Obviously, the scores are low, but we're playing well. When it's soft, no wind, and we're playing well, we're going to shoot low scores.

**Q. You shot a 59. You hold the 36-hole scoring record. The 54-hole scoring record, the 72-hole scoring record on TOUR. Now you shot 9-under at the U.S. Open. When everything is clicking, are you the best player in the world?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: No reason to answer that. I can't win with the answer to that question.

**Q. Just wondering, where does Erin Hills rank for you in terms of its natural beauty and design?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: It's up there with Kapalua in the hardest walk, I know that. It's long and a lot of terrain. But it's such a cool course standing on the tee.

A hole like 3, that hole to me kind of epitomizes a U.S. Open. When you look down and you can see the fescue kind of lining the fairways and the severe slopes and the greens really far away, and you've got the bunkers that have the fescue coming out of it, and you can see the slopes on the green and the change of color, that's cool to me.

I love golf course architecture. I would love at some point in my career to be doing that and get involved in it. But it's a spread-out course. I'm sure the spectators may not like walking it and spectating as much as other courses. But it's cool. You get a nice day out there, you get some great scenes. You get on a couple tees like on 5, on 15, you can see a lot of the course, so that's pretty cool to kind of see the crowd and stuff. It's a great track.

**Q. From an historical point of view, would you mind going over your birdies and bogeys, club selection?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Sure, Doug, of course I can. The first hole I hit a good drive out there. I had, I don't know what I had in. But I had a 2-iron short of the greens, easy up-and-down, so chipped that one about two feet, made birdie.

2, at the tee up, I was trying to hit a low one to hit the down slope and run down on the green or the up slope

like I did. The greens being that soft, that was a pretty easy chip. So chipped that one up close, tapped in for birdie.

4, I had a hard time with that hole this week. So I felt like the fairway was pretty wide. Past that bunker with a driver, and I felt like I was driving it pretty well, so I tried to hit driver today, and I just heeled it. It went in the right fescue. I thought it was a good lie to where it was going to come out normal, and I hit a full sand wedge. It jumped 20 yards to the worst possible place that you could think of. So I was just trying to make bogey there. So knocked in a two-putter for bogey.

Then 5, I hit driver, wedge, ball just stayed up there in the fringe and kind of made that freakish putt there.

7, hit driver, 4-iron, and hit a sand wedge. I tried to leave it below the hole, and I didn't. I put it right above the hole, but I got a great read off Randolph there. So he made it easy on me and made that one.

Then hit a great drive on 8. I thought I'd play that hole 4-over going into today, so I was trying to do something par better.

I actually watched the coverage this morning a little bit and saw Zach Johnson, how he hit a chip out and hit a wedge in there. It went up that slope and almost went in. I had like 160 -- what did I have there? I think I had 167 or 164, and I really was just trying to chip a 9-iron because honestly, it was a perfect pitching wedge, but I would have hated myself if I mis-hit it and came up short of that slope. So I was trying to run something up that slope like I did. Came down there, tap in.

And then 9, just tried to play smart there and put it in the middle of the green. Hit it 18, 20 feet past and made that putt.

10, I just got a little out of focus. We had to wait a little bit on the fairway there, probably a good five or eight minutes, and just got out of my routine and out of my rhythm I was in. I just didn't hit a good 6-iron, I hit an even worse putt. I putted right off the green. So I missed that par putt. Made bogey there.

And 12, double crossed the drive in the fescue. Just kind of chopped the 9-iron trying to get it over the green or on the green. Came out better than expected and rolled up the slope to probably 10, 8, 10 feet up the hill and made a good putt there.

And 15, I think it was 275-maybe-hole, and it was just a perfect -- being a little into the wind like that, it was a perfect high hole, cut 3-wood.

Kind of like 18, I was just trying to really overcut it if

anything because it would have been an easy up-and-down. I just hit it perfect. I really hit a pretty poor putt there. But to make birdie was nice.

Hit a great drive on 17. Kind of between 8- and 9-iron. Just hit 8-iron long. Tried to hit it just long, left of the hole to give myself a putt. Read that one really well. That was probably one of my better reads of the day. Made that putt.

Then I think I've talked about 18, so you got that one.

**Q. Chatting with your dad after the round, he said records are meaningful to you. Do you remember as a kid kind of chasing them? Were there any significant marks or milestones you attained that seemed really important at the time?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: As a junior golfer?

**Q. Yeah.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Not that I can think of. I did some things in college that were cool like for Alabama. But that's the thing. There is no record books in junior golf or anything like that, if that makes sense. Well, I guess I maybe had a couple course records, but nothing really.

Winning two tournaments in one day was probably my best feat as a junior golfer. There's no record book for it, but I was pretty proud of that one.

**Q. Justin, Johnny Miller's not on the broadcast today, but he's at a lot of TOUR events. Next time you see him, what do you think you'll say to him?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I don't know, but I'll be pretty happy. That's definitely for sure. I wish he was calling it just to hear what he would have said. Yeah, it's a tremendous honor to tie him. I don't know, just whatever's in my head at the time.

**Q. Justin, your hometown has been in the headlines a lot this week with sports. I'm sure you keep up with that. The city of Louisville, state of Kentucky, Kenny has come so close, Kenny Perry, JB has been there a couple times. Have you thought about over the course of your career, what it would mean to bring one home to Louisville from for the state of Kentucky?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: I probably can't put it into words. Anytime I can do something to represent Louisville and represent Kentucky is huge. To go back to my high school and get the support that I do or go home to my dad's course and get the support I do, you really can't put it into words.

My junior AGGA event was at my home course this year, and being out there and hanging out with all the

kids and the parents and having my name attached to something in my home city, in my home course is pretty special. I mean, that's something I've always kind of strived for is to be the state and the city's best athlete, golfer, whatever it may be.

But it's more than just golf. I want to be known as a great person in Louisville. I want to be known as a role model for the kids and whatever it can be. But, yeah, I would love more than anything to be able to share that with Louisville.

**Q. Just wondering what you learned from your 59, the way you backed that up with a 64 in Hawaii and how that can help you tomorrow?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it definitely can help, just because it's similar-type stuff, low round and history and stuff like that. But obviously I enjoyed going low. When I get it going, I don't fear, like I used to, kind of stalling. I like, let's get to 8, let's get to 9, whatever it is. But I don't know.

Like I said earlier, I don't know what tomorrow's going to be like. I don't know how I'm going to feel, but I'm excited for it.

**Q. How important was responding well to the bogey at 11 to setting the stage for the rest of the round? Did you do anything to make sure that that didn't carry over to further holes?**

JUSTIN THOMAS: On 10?

**Q. Yeah.**

JUSTIN THOMAS: Yeah, it was -- I mean, that was a bummer. It stunk. It wasn't a very good bogey. I wasn't obviously happy about it. But bogeys happen and if you let it go with you or let it stay with you, then it's even worse than the bogey. I was playing well. I obviously hit a bad first putt. I hit a good second putt. But I just missed the speed on the first putt. If I two-putt that, I make par and it's no big deal.

But bogey on a hole like 10 isn't the end of the world. It's probably averaging 4, 3 or something like that. So I had made enough birdies to where it wasn't a big deal, and I knew I had a lot of birdie holes coming in.

So I was trying to stay upbeat, stay positive. Keep trying to hit fairways, hit greens, and give myself looks on the greens, and I was able to do so.

BETH MAJOR: Justin Thomas, championship record 9-under 63 at Erin Hills today. Justin, congratulations.