

# Justin Thomas

## Thwarts All Comers to Claim PGA Championship

By Paul Prendergast

“ Justin Thomas  
This means a lot. My Grandpa was a PGA of America member. So is my Dad. I'm glad to have a Wanamaker Trophy to share between the three of us.



Streeter Locka/Getty Images



Ross Kimball/Getty Images

Justin Thomas on the 18th green after claiming his first Major at Quail Hollow Club.

Newly-minted U.S. PGA Champion Justin Thomas might have almost heard the cheers from Malaysia after he tapped in for his breakthrough Major victory, with a two-shot win at a re-designed Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, N.C.

Cheers for their two-time CIMB Classic winner, cheers that he will return to defend again but with added status as a reigning Major Champion.

It should be a great week in Kuala Lumpur in October but enough self-indulgence for a moment.

A dour affair certainly sprang to life over the back nine on Sunday with a collective of players vying for their first Major title with only South African Louis Oosthuizen among them, having tasted such success before.

Oosthuizen gave a wonderful account of himself, but it was Thomas who outlasted all comers with a closing three-under-par 68 to finish on eight-under 276, two shots ahead of runners-

up, Francesco Molinari (67), Patrick Reed (67) and Oosthuizen (70).

“This means a lot,” Thomas said, “My Grandpa was a PGA of America member. So is my Dad.

“I'm glad to have a Wanamaker Trophy to share between the three of us.”

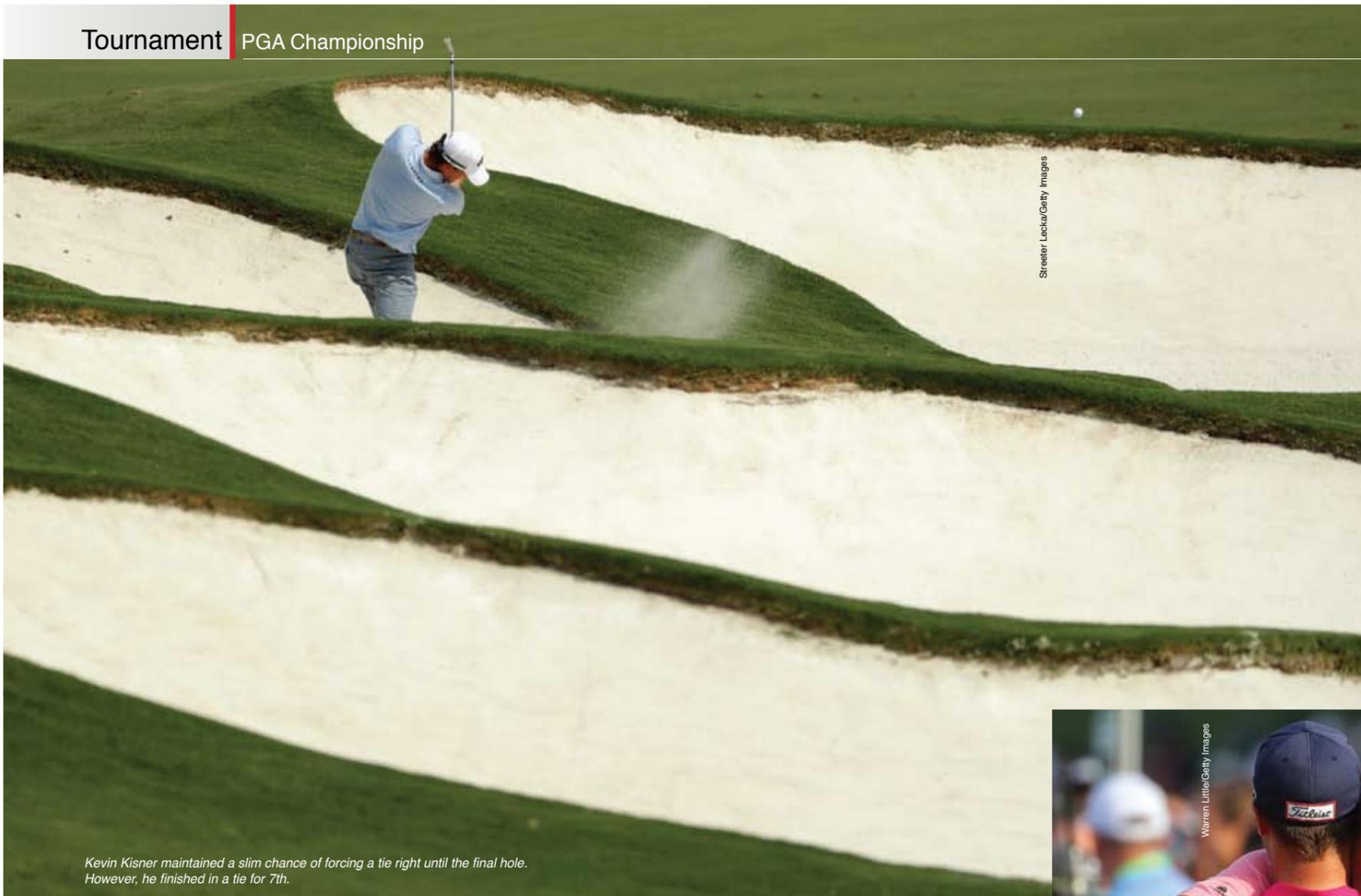
Mum, Dad and other family members and some of his closest Tour pals in Jordan Spieth and Rickie Fowler, were all close by as the 24-year-old sealed the deal with a closing hole bogey that mattered little in the ultimate scheme of things.

A trio of birdies, that even Thomas

would agree were on the ‘good fortune’ side of the ledger, eventually vaulted him clear and provided the padding that allowed for a safe bogey on the difficult closing hole.

At the 10th hole, Thomas looked to have left a birdie putt clinging on the edge, only to have the ball topple into the cup a small eternity later.

Thomas gleefully accepted his good fortune as it matched the birdie of his playing partner, and then leader Hideki Matsuyama, and provided a small blow to the Japanese’ own chances to lift his first Major title.



Streeker Leckie/Getty Images

Kevin Kisner maintained a slim chance of forcing a tie right until the final hole. However, he finished in a tie for 7th.



Ross Kinnaird/Getty Images

Francesco Molinari closed with a round of 67 to finish in a tie for second with Patrick Reed and Louis Oosthuizen.



Streeker Leckie/Getty Images

(l-r) Thomas, Rickie Fowler and caddie Joe Skovron, wait on the sixth tee during the third round.

“Once it got there, I felt it would go in but it didn’t so I acted like a child and had a tantrum. Suddenly it went in and I didn’t look so dumb,” Thomas laughed.

Another blow to his nearest competitors occurred at the short 13th, where Thomas chipped for birdie from off the green.

By the time Thomas made just the fourth birdie of the day on the treacherous long 17th – the middle hole of the so-called ‘Green Mile’ finish at Quail Hollow – the horse had bolted and the challenges of long-time leaders Matsuyama and Kevin Kisner were put to bed.

“To make a birdie at 17 was beyond a bonus,” Thomas enthused, “My aim was to be patient all day.

“I didn’t do that at the U.S. Open this year and so didn’t have my best stuff. I just needed to be more patient.”

The very short bounce-back from the potential scar tissue incurred at Erin Hills this year – where Thomas shot a



Warren Little/Getty Images

Thomas hugs his father, Mike, after putting the finishing touches on his first Major victory.

championship-equalling low round of 63 on Saturday only to close with a deflating 75 to barely remain in the Top-10 behind champion Brooks Koepka – is the stuff champions are made of.

Thomas’ prodigious talent has never been in question, but for most, recovery from events like this quite often take a little more time.

At a similar young age, Rory McIlroy



Ross Kinnaird/Getty Images

Fans along the 16th hole.

failed to let the agony of a closing round 80 at the 2010 Masters Tournament crush his spirit and came out in the very next Major to romp the field by eight to claim his first Major at the U.S. Open at Congressional.

Thomas has emulated McIlroy’s feat by also climbing the mountain just two months on from the pain of Erin Hills.

“The experience (at Erin Hills) helped

me though. Any time you can be in the final groups is great,” Thomas said.

“This week felt different. I was comfortable with where my game was and with the prep I had put in. I felt like I was ready. It just was about going out and doing it.”

Coming off his outstanding victory the previous week at the Bridgestone Invitational, the red-hot Matsuyama

looked to most to be closing in on an inevitable Major triumph despite the plucky attention of Kisner, who played wonderful golf and maintained a slim chance of forcing a tie right until the final hole.

Matsuyama, who finished tied for fifth at five-under with Rickie Fowler, will now have to wait another eight months to quench the thirst for Major

championship success that his homeland has been craving for many years. Surely, his fearless approach to the game will be rewarded with the ultimate accolade before too long!

The much talked about Quail Hollow renovation that was carried out in the 12 months prior to the Championship, certainly caught out players with memories of 'Tour events past at the venue.

Replacing the turf grass with Bermuda certainly had the desired effect of firming up and increasing the green speeds at this time of year and the rough and difficult pin positions did the rest, with scoring more akin to U.S. Open Championships than a PGA.

Only a dozen players out of the 75 who played the weekend broke par.

Very hard to argue, however, that

the course and its more austere setup did not identify a quality winner, this being Thomas' fourth win of the current season, breaking out of a three-way deadlock of victories with Spieth, Matsuyama and Dustin Johnson.

He now vaults into the 'Top-10 ranked players in the world and places himself well in the running for 'Player of the Year' honours with the season ending

FedExCup Playoffs still to come.

And of course, let's not forget the opportunity that awaits to win a third-successive CIMB Classic at TPC Kuala Lumpur from October 12-15, for which the champion has already confirmed his attendance.

Justin Thomas could almost hear that cheer at Quail Hollow as he hoisted the Wanamaker Trophy above his head. ●

**Final Leaderboard**

276	Justin Thomas	73-66-69-68
278	Francesco Molinari	73-64-74-67
278	Patrick Reed	69-73-69-67
278	Louis Oosthuizen	70-67-71-70
279	Rickie Fowler	69-70-73-67
279	Hideki Matsuyama	70-64-73-72



Hideki Matsuyama plays his shot from the 17th tee during the final round of the 2017 PGA Championship, where he finished in a tie for fifth.



Rickie Fowler carded a 67 in the final round to tie for fifth with Matsuyama.



Louis Oosthuizen receives treatment after an arm injury on the second hole during the third round. He went on to card a round of 71 and followed up in the final round with a 71, to tie for second.



Patrick Reed and caddy Kessler Karain on the 18th hole during the final round. He closed with a 67 to tie for second.

“ Justin Thomas  
 The experience (at Erin Hills) helped me though. Any time you can be in the final groups is great. This week felt different. I was comfortable with where my game was and with the prep I had put in. I felt like I was ready. It just was about going out and doing it.