

American Century Championship

Wednesday, July 7, 2021

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

John Smoltz

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have annual top player, Mr. John Smoltz, in the front of the room, going off in this tournament 8-to-1 odds. This will be the 12th time. You've finished in the top 10 10 times, all but once. You haven't quite got over the top, the final hurdle to win this thing. What do you think it's going to take?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Putting like I did today. I just haven't putt -- last year I set the par record. You don't want to be setting a par record in a tournament when they reward you for birdies a lot more than pars. It's going to take putting. I've never putt well here. I putt good enough to be in the top 5, top 10. I've changed my strategy a little bit. And sooner or later, you know, maybe I'll be the oldest winner to ever win this some day.

THE MODERATOR: That would be it. I think Jack Wagner has that current distinction. Are you still using the stand-up putter?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Not this time. I've had some issues with these greens, and being as light as the putter is, it gave me a little bit of speed issues. I still love it. It still gets me in the mindset of once I know it's lined up I know I can make it. But this weekend it will be a different putter.

THE MODERATOR: Nothing to do with your caddie Greg Olson?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Nothing to do with Greg.

THE MODERATOR: Cheap shot at your former catcher. Now that we've got that out of the way, beautiful. Upcoming All-Star Game, what's your thoughts on players, teams, who is the favorite?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Biggest thing is everybody will be watching Shohei Ohtani. Never seen anything like it. One of the greatest athletes to play our game. He could end up with 33, 34 home runs by the All-Star break, which if he ended that with with the year, that would be a slam dunk



MVP.

What he's doing is not -- it's so hard to describe that that we're going to see his talents on display both from power, speed and on the mound.

And the young players that are in our game are so dynamic, they're all former Big League sons that are dominating the game. So bloodline has been pretty good in those families. Guerrero Jr and Tatis Jr and even Bichette. And there's just so many young players ready to play the game. Biggio's son playing for the Blue Jays. The All-Star Game is going to showcase the youth and showcase the power for sure in Colorado.

Q. In recent years, baseball's trying to alter rules to either more runs, move quicker, whatever it is. Did all they need to do was get rid of the pitchers using a foreign substance to, like, up the runs?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Not necessarily. I think you're going to see -- it's a summer. It's hot, the ball's flying, the opportunity hitters having a little more confidence because pitchers aren't using certain substances.

I'm just of the mindset that the game has gotten statistically -- anytime you talk about statistics, it's not that you're hating the game -- you're stating facts. The game is longer. There are more strikeouts than ever. There are less balls put in play than ever. So the contributing factor to what you asked will help and significantly change maybe some action.

But when you have a shift and the ball on the ground is an automatic out, that's why you have the philosophy that we have where everyone's swinging for the fences, strikeouts, walks, hit batsmen. I'm a believer every sport has done it but baseball takes hits for some reason because it's the most, or the longest historic sport to not really make many changes.

I would lower the strike zone and ban the shift. That would easily fix some of the things that people are talking about. Because when you're playing on average a game that's three hours and 20 minutes or whatever it is, and 25 to 27

strikeouts per two teams, that's tough. And the pitchers have had the advantage because the velocity is the highest it's ever been.

I was of the mindset that the hitters will make the shift go away. Well, they never did because they're not able to hit that kind of velocity the other way the style they're trying to hit.

So if the shift went away and you played -- NBA has a defensive rule. NFL has had defensive rules. NHL changed their rules. So everyone's changed their rules when they feel their sport is going to a place they don't want it to go.

That's what I've always said, we'll help the game and it will get more action and the ball's that's hit on the ground 105 to 110 is not an out. We can't defend that but you can defend that if you've got three guys situated the way they are.

Time will tell with the pitching substance because of the comfortable ability to spin a baseball and backspin it. I still today don't know what that stuff is. I guess it's called Tiger something. But from the layers of what has gotten us to this point, it's a valid question. The ball changed significantly three years ago. It was slick. Pitchers are having a hard time holding their ball, making the pitches. I think the evolution with that, along with the style of baseball we have today, has led the pitchers to probably go too far with this stuff, technology and information.

So with that -- obviously everybody's watching. And I would feel bad for a pitcher if he had a bad stretch during this time and the instant thing is going to be what, they're going to blame it because of that. Pitchers go through bad stretches. This is the one thing you've got to fight psychologically when you're dominating and then this subject comes up and then you're not dominating and then people just start drawing conclusions that may or may not be true.

Q. Now they have to pitch. They can't just throw.

JOHN SMOLTZ: That's the thing. I understand our era is different. I'm not one of those guys that are thinking they should always play one way. But when you've been taught to throw your hardest pitches every single time and there's no emphasis on location, you're going to have more walks, strikeouts and hit batsmen. It's just natural.

So when we were pitching, we were taught you better hit your spot or you're in trouble and strikeouts weren't as prevalent. There was a different style of hitting and a different approach. So players are always going to adapt

to what the information dictates and the style that it calls for. And so that's kind of what I see from afar.

When I call a World Series the team that usually wins is the team that puts the ball in play the most. It's happened for the last 20 years.

Q. One question about the shift. Hot topic, it's interesting hearing a pitcher say ban the shift. You answered that one. Is there any middle ground, not letting it go as it is, or straight banning it?

JOHN SMOLTZ: You can tweak it. You can have as many guys as you want but they have to be on the infield. Getting in the grass gives you all that time and ability.

The reason that I say ban the shift because of what the information is saying is if you're now an elite pitcher, you don't care. If you're not making pitches, then that shift covers for your mistakes.

It's analytically driven. I get it; it makes sense. It's working. But from an action standpoint and imagine all the left-handers that's really impacting. It's really impacting left-handers. That to me is a subject that I think eventually will happen.

And see anytime you make a rule change, sometimes there could be unintended consequences. They can be good or bad. I believe this unintended consequences would be great, because now hitters who are okay with .200 batting average, 25, 30 home runs, strike out 200 times, they now have hope that they can hit the ball on the ground because they're being taught to get the ball off the ground. And that would change the game.

Q. I heard on a podcast they said maybe give them eight or 10 shifts per game, sort of an allotment, I thought that was interesting.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Like I said, doesn't have to be hard, you could make an alterations to any rule. This is what I would say about any rule. No one has an advantage when you make it. Everyone has the advantage/disadvantage. It's all the same. You could say pick three hitters out in a lineup. But I believe they have to do something because the shifts are going higher and higher and higher and that we thought would go lower and lower.

Q. Bringing it back here to the tournament, I overheard you saying you might be the oldest winner of the tournament with a smile on your face. You're embracing it?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Absolutely. When I turned 50 it was the

greatest time in my life. It allowed me to play in some Champions Tour events. And there's no doubt these guys bomb it way by me. But that's okay. I love this opportunity. It's a great event.

The course suits my eyes. I just have to make some putts.

Q. If you're not betting on yourself this week, where is the money going?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Always going to go to those big dogs. Mardy Fish, what he did last year, how could you not take him? That memory of what he did, although be it a changed environment, and all going to charity, anytime you shoot 10-under in a place I don't think you could ever not feel like you could do it again. Mardy Fish is definitely the favorite in my mind. And Romo, and the same suspects.

Q. In terms of on-course betting, do you have a favorite story, maybe not the most money won, but is there one that sticks in your memory bank maybe from the days playing --

JOHN SMOLTZ: It involved my caddie. A good buddy of mine -- we were playing at the AT&T. Long round. We're not in it. Pearl I was playing with at the time wasn't going to make the cut. I said give me something to play for. We did a \$25 bet, like what are my odds to shoot 1-under the rest of the way in four holes to go.

Well, then it got to the last hole. And what were my odds to make an eagle, which was a par-5. And I wasn't going to make the other bets. I'd get them all back if I make eagle. So imagine my caddie is on the bag. I just made, just over the green in two. A little chip downhill. It gets about five feet from the hole and he screams: No! And throws the bag down as it goes in. And the fans are looking at him like what are you doing. Cost him a little bit of money. So that's my favorite one.

Q. Was that at Pebble?

JOHN SMOLTZ: It was at Pebble. This one was not at the actual Pebble. Poppy Hills back then, the par-5 or whatever, 19 or 18.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports