

# American Century Championship

Thursday, July 13, 2023

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

## John Smoltz

## Mardy Fish

### Press Conference



**Q. Mardy, tell us how the game is and what the chances are.**

MARDY FISH: Game feels good. Hoping for a good start. I haven't really started off good at this tournament before. Last year, only had 15 points during the first day. So hopefully just trying to hit a lot of greens, and the greens are super tough always out here and a couple new greens out there, too. So tough to kind of make a lot of putts.

Hoping to hit the ball good and give yourself a lot of chances and stuff. Just kind of get started. Again, I usually start pretty slow. So hoping to get off to a good start.

**Q. John, you've been out here a few times. This is the one you've always wanted to win. We know you've won a couple times down in Florida. You've come close here, obviously. What's going to put you over the top, you think, this week?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: Birdies and bogeys. I'm tired of making pars. You can't win making pars. You've got to make birdies. That's the biggest reason I haven't won.

Like Mardy said, if you're in position and you're aggressive and you get some birdie looks, you've got to make some of them. You've got to roll some in. Before I was too cautious and not wanting to 3-putt a birdie put and therefore you never give it a chance.

So I'm always looking at the scoreboard, first round. I saw his 15 points last year, but there's three heavyweights. I have to play pretty good, and I do need to get off to a good start because it's usually not my forte in the first round.

**Q. Talk about putting, I know about Brad Wunderlich, course super here, has the greens rolling. I think he said yesterday like 12 and a half. How does that it feel,**

**especially when it's downhill?**

MARDY FISH: That's kind of the defense of the course. The altitude makes it, from where we play, fairly short. A lot of kind of wedges and short irons in your hands for second shots, if you can put it in the fairway. And that's their defense, really, is the greens. They have a really good defense. They're good, they're tough.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Depth perception on some shots are really difficult. You think you're hitting it close and you're above the hole five feet and you're in trouble. That's the biggest thing I've learned the last two days of grinding, it's so hard to be below the hole. If you are below the hole, you have a chance to get a string together.

It's definitely going to be humbling for a lot of people because if -- well, if -- it's going to get hot again, they said, this weekend. And if some wind kicks up, it will be grinding on the putting green, that's for sure.

**Q. Mardy, we keep flashing back to your second round back in 2020 when you shot 9-under with 10 birdies.**

MARDY FISH: Me too. Flashing back also.

JOHN SMOLTZ: He wakes up to that in his reel in the morning when he gets a video.

MARDY FISH: My alarm clock, just keeps going.

**Q. Besides hitting it long, hitting great irons short, you were making a lot of putts that day. You were doing everything right.**

MARDY FISH: Blind squirrel. It's that one round that it all came together. Certainly, obviously, I'll never forget that round and that tournament that year. It was a weird year, obviously, with being COVID, the initial COVID year. That one is a special round, for sure.

**Q. Steph was talking about how nervous he is when he steps up to the tee. You guys have both won these celebrity tournaments. Do you feel a sense of nervousness when you're up there, or are you pretty**



calm?

MARDY FISH: I do. I sort of hope we have driver on first hole because it's a bigger sweet spot than a driving iron that we have to hit off the tee on No. 1 there.

For me, it's the wrong way as well. I play a cut. I'm a lefty. I play a cut. I'm hitting it the other way. I've made a lot of big numbers on the first hole. Toughest hole for me by far, historically at least. I've been working on hitting, not draws, but snipe hooks just to get off the tee on No. 1. We'll see how it goes.

JOHN SMOLTZ: I've learned I've never been a really good "first tee let it go" type of guy, especially if it is a driver. And I've learned how to be a little bit better with that over the years playing in a bunch of tournaments. I think really the Champions Tour was where I was the most nervous I've ever been. For reasons that don't make sense, but it's just kind human nature --

MARDY FISH: Even baseball?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I was never nervous in baseball. Baseball --

MARDY FISH: World Series Game 7?

JOHN SMOLTZ: No, that always was the best feeling in the world.

MARDY FISH: No. 1 in Tahoe is harder than Game 7 in the World Series?

JOHN SMOLTZ: No.

MARDY FISH: More nerve-racking than Game 7 of the World Series?

JOHN SMOLTZ: No, if we were teeing off and trying to play Sahalee in the first tee shot, that would be more nerve-racking.

But I've learned to try to simplify and not hit as many -- I hit too many practice balls. And the next thing you know, you've hit so many shots and you're past warm-up and you're trying to figure out your swing.

So I literally, these last three weeks, went to Scotland, and in some of those courses they don't have a driving range. I learned that I don't need to hit a lot of golf balls to be effective.

So that's the one thing I will be -- this will be the least amount of practice swings that I take before a tournament.

**Q. Last year I ran up after the presentations on 18, I was a little out of breath, was trying to make the point that those athletes who are able to manage their game, like a pitcher, like an NFL quarterback, like a tennis player, and see ahead, not just see and focus on what they're doing but kind of make an overall view of what's happening in your competition, have been very successful. In 33 events here, the previous sponsor, now American Century extended to '29, of course, everyone knows, there have only been four times, two by Jack Wagner, one by a place kicker and one by an NFL safety, in their roles in professional sports did not have to manage a game as much as a pitcher, a quarterback, a tennis player. Ten wins by four different quarterbacks, 11 wins by pitchers. And I guess my question is, do you realize the ability and the talents you have, or is it just something that's second nature to you, it's in your subconscious, of how to manage a game?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: I know for me, being a visual guy and on the mound, everything is visual. So the catcher, strike zone, hitter. Some ball parks you like; some you don't. Some golf holes fit my eyes; some don't. So you kind of learn how to navigate that way.

Look, I think the biggest thing about golf is if you know where your golf ball is going all the time, it's one thing, but if you're fighting your swing and trying to steer it, that's when you get in trouble.

So managing that part of your game, those who have been able to win, even though they haven't been perfect, that's what you learn. I've learned there's been times on the mound I've not been very good. But I've got teammates to bail me out.

When you're on the golf course, there's nobody to bail you out. Like, for example, for me 18 is just -- 1 doesn't fit his eyes -- 18 definitely does not fit my eyes. That's the one hole that you know you've got to take advantage because most guys are hitting 9-irons, wedges, 8-irons.

**Q. Mardy, what do you think?**

MARDY FISH: I've played a sport where, when we leave the locker room we're all by ourselves. Golf for me is, it's nice to have competitors that you can chat with, a caddie you can sort of talk to as well.

So it's a little bit different. And mentally, it's an individual game and it's still on you, win or lose, play well or not. It's kind of on you.

In tennis, you're trying to beat one person across the net. In golf, you're sort of trying to play the course and play yourself and the competitors in the tournament as well. And it can be exhausting mentally at times. Obviously golf can.

I think guys that play a sport where everything goes through them, whether pitcher, quarterback, even a catcher probably in baseball, as well, they're always in the action, they're always alert, ready to go.

I think a lot of those sports tend to be better for golf or for tournament golf.

**Q. You had it all together the second day of your win in 2020 with a 37. Not too shabby. I think last year it was 62 for Romo to win. What do you think your scores are going to be this year? That was one of the lowest-winning scores, 62 by Tony.**

JOHN SMOLTZ: You never are shocked when someone shoots a great round. Usually it takes 75 to win it. So they say, in years past. 70 to 75. I think the greens are going to make it very tricky. So you may see in the 60s again just because you've got to be so defensive. If you're fearless and don't mind five-footers coming back, then more power to you because that's what's going to happen if you get aggressive out here.

MARDY FISH: It's kind of that low 20s on a daily basis will probably put you right there on Sunday.

**Q. Famous Barkley bet, coming in under 70. To me it's not Charles coming in under 70, it's Charles finding 23 to be worse than he is.**

MARDY FISH: Steph got it last year. I remember Steph was down on him big time because he was down on San Francisco or Oakland or something, when they were playing, that was why.

**Q. He was down on Oakland style.**

MARDY FISH: He was upset with Charles. He said no. He got that right. I said yes. I think he gets it. I'm a pro-Charles.

JOHN SMOLTZ: There's some newer players. Nerves might get to some of them, to your point, bring them in the fray.

But Charles is one of the most amazing, I guess you could say, persevering golfers I've ever been around in my life. And he somehow loves it. So I've got to give it to him. I'm going to say he's going to do it this year.

**Q. Supposedly he lost 60 pounds, is a little bit more fit. But my analogy to that, that's like anyone in the press room losing two pounds.**

MARDY FISH: I don't think that's a good thing for golf. I think you're supposed to be big, swing it.

**Q. You better eat well tonight.**

MARDY FISH: I've got a long way to go.

**Q. Charles started off, it was like \$100 and win 350. Last night it was \$100, you win 170. So there's a lot of money over at the joints on Charles. John, I know you talked about, during your baseball career, even if you missed a pitch, you could rely on your teammates. But a pitcher's mound is known as one of the most lonely places in all of sports, right, especially given certain moments within a game. And knowing the individualistic nature of golf, do you find any direct correlations between a high-leverage situation on the mound and being out on the course?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: Ironically, when I'm in the woods, trying to hit like a three-foot window, I'm really good at that.

When you're on the mound -- a lot of practice -- you see a tunnel to the home plate. You're on the mound by yourself. But anything you do is committed, you've got a great chance. If you're sub-committed or half committed, you've got no chance. Same thing with golf.

If you're not committed, you just say I'll hit this -- my big thing is, like I've told Greg, he caught for me early on -- Olson -- he's my caddie. And I told him a long time ago, don't ever say the word "don't." Don't tell me like "don't hit it left." "Don't hit it here." That's a negative command that usually follows -- the brain doesn't remember "don't." So everything we do is positively attacking this spot or hit it here. Same thing on the mound.

They say things that they don't realize are not smart. They'll say, "Hey, don't hang a slider to this guy." Well, again, the brain doesn't hear "don't"; it just hears "hang slider." And next thing you know, you're hanging a slider.

I heard on some of the pitch comms that they've got some explicitives that follow the command of "throw a fastball," "bury it" or "nasty."

MARDY FISH: I thought you meant cuss words. Like "bleeping throw the fast ball."

JOHN SMOLTZ: They're in there, too.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

