

American Century Championship

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Edgewood Tahoe

Taylor Twellman

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Taylor Twellman, soccer lead analyst and first-time golfer here at the American Century. We'll be talking about the U.S. men's national team head coach change. Can you give us your thoughts on the Berhalter change?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I think it's a sign in the United States of America that when you fail to perform at a tournament at home -- if I'm not mistaken, there's been 20 tournaments that the U.S. men have played in their backyard. This is the first time they've never got on their group. There's got to be accountability. You have to send the message to your fan base, to your sponsors and your players that the most important summer in American soccer history for the men is coming in less than two years, and you need to take it serious. Gregg Berhalter did a solid job of resurrecting the program, but his statement was as class and honest as it could be. Absolutely 100 percent, he needs to be responsible for the Copa América results. He raised his hand and now they move on.

In saying that, over the past 10 to 15 minutes we've found out that Jürgen Klopp has said no. He has rebuffed the approach from U.S. Soccer Federation. Now it becomes very interesting where they go from there.

I'm on the record and I'll stay on the record that the United States men, for the next 18 to 20 months, they need to really think bold and they really need to think big for this World Cup coming here in their backyard in '26.

Q. I wanted to ask ahead of this weekend, we have an MLS Cup rematch in Los Angeles. Who do you think has the edge as you've look at the season for LAFC and Columbus? And secondarily, Balongo/Cucho, what makes them so brilliant, and if you had to pick one, who would you go with?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: You know me well enough. I'm not going to sit on the fence. What's interesting right now is LA have seemed maybe the hottest team in Major League

Soccer, I think if you ask the neutral fan, the majority of the MLS soccer fan that watches week in, week out, Columbus is a difficult team to play against.

They're appealing to the eye, the way they go about their business. I'm very intrigued to see how they fill the void of Aidan Morris. So right now, in this moment, I think with the experience, with a little bit more of the revenge aspect, even though Steve Cherundolo and the LAFC players will deny that publicly.

I think right now in the moment I would take LAFC. I think Olivier Giroud, coming off the European championships where he didn't do a lot, I think he's going to be champing at the bit. And I think for the four months he's going to be there to finish the season, that's going to make it very interesting to play with Denis Bouanga.

Cucho Hernandez is arguably in my opinion the best 9 in this league. That's a position I played. But he plays it at a completely different level.

He's all-around relentless. He goes about his business the right way. I think he makes the players around him better.

But you're really going to ask me to not take Denis Buoanga in the moment right now, that's going to be very difficult, my man, not to do.

So to answer that question, I think I'm taking Denis Buoanga because I'm starting to see a next-level progression from him where, yet teams may sit in, he's now finding ways to break that down, but Major League Soccer is extremely lucky to have those two players in this league.

Q. I was talking with Bradley earlier this week and I said we've got a rematch for Cup, but could this be a preview for Cup as well later this year. Could you see this match-up filtering out? I know it's so far in the future.

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: It wouldn't surprise me, but I think we're downplaying how strong the Eastern Conference really is. As good as Columbus is, Cincinnati is going to be really looking at how the last season ended. They're going



to want to get after it.

I think Miami is going to have something to say when it's all said and done. So I do think LAFC is the frontrunner in the Western Conference. I think you'd have a difficult time convincing me otherwise.

I could go about four different ways in the Eastern Conference. Yeah, you may get a preview of MLS Cup, but Columbus going into Leagues Cup last summer was not the best team in the East. After the Leagues Cup, they were. You could tell there was something different.

I would ask that question maybe after Leagues Cup to see if maybe any tide changes or anything changes course because I think that's where some of these teams may grow into that next-level confidence going into the playoff run.

Q. Back in 2017, when the U.S. failed to make the World Cup, you had a very famous rant. You asked, "What are we doing?" What growth have you seen from U.S. soccer since then, and what are some things that still need to happen in order to find success within U.S. soccer?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: We don't have enough time for me to really dive into this. I'll say this, we've got American players -- I think the viewpoint, the point of view of the American players, exponentially, is different. It's difficult to quantify.

We've got players playing at AC Milan and Borussia Dortmund, Juventus in the English Premier League. That's something that my generation never got to experience. That 100 percent unequivocally has changed.

What hasn't really changed is the ability to compete against the greater nations, the better teams, and I think that's ultimately what this is all about.

In 2014, when Tim Howard stood on his head and set a World Cup record for saves, I said after that, it's got to be about beating Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain -- that's where the goal is. But now we're having conversations where you're down a man for 70 minutes, you can't beat Panama.

And so this group of players, unequivocally, may be more talented, but I'm not sure collectively they're better than anything we've seen before because under Gregg Berhalter, other than Mexico they haven't beaten a top 20 team. The other generations have.

So to answer your question, a lot has changed regarding

the viewpoint of the American player on the world scale, the fact that we're talking to me here in Tahoe in American Century Championship about the U.S. Men's National Team, about MLS. That means there's growth, yes.

But when they go up against the bigger nations, when the United States men play the bigger nations, has anything really changed? And the results will tell you no.

Q. I talked to you earlier this year about the New England Revolution. It's been an interesting season, that losing streak at the beginning, things are looking a little better now. The transfer window is about to open. They're voting on a stadium build potentially opening up that opportunity for a stadium. What are your thoughts about the New England Revolution and the future going forward?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: If that stadium gets built it's a top five market in Major League Soccer. You won't convince me any other way. And that's because it's in the backdrop of downtown Boston. It will move the needle anything like anything else in the REVOLUTION will do.

And their attendance records have been fantastic the last four, five years. The numbers don't lie, but that stadium needs to be downtown. Downtown Boston, metropolitan needs to recognize how important the younger inclusive, diverse crowd that would come to the Revolution games and make that a part of it.

I can promise you this, the Red Sox probably don't want that stadium because that means there's a real, real threat to the younger fan base that are dying to have that downtown.

Now in saying that, this has been a difficult time for a Revolution fan. It's been a difficult time because over the last 12 months there's been a lot of uncertainty with the program. There's been a lot of uncertainty. I think Caleb Porter has come in, and Caleb Porter is trying to win his third MLS Cup with his third different team, which would be the first manager ever. I do think time has to be on his side to build that roster and to dive into the Revolution project.

But in saying that, I have no beef whatsoever with the fans being a little unsettled with what the Revolution looked like right now. I think this summer's important. I think this winter coming up is massive because I think then you can see maybe a little bit more freedom to sign players.

But make no mistake about it, that stadium has to be at the front of the minds of ownership and everyone else to get that done.



Q. Jim Curtin said today that he thought it would be very hard for an MLS coach to get the job now given the stigma of the team under Greg. Do you agree that it has to be to have respect of the fan base or the player pool or whoever has to come from outside the U.S. system?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I think that's a great question. I think my perspective strictly comes from how do you maximize the group? And I think it's got to be an outside set of mind, set of eyes, set of ideals.

I think with the United States men going into a World Cup in your backyard with this, quote/unquote, golden generation of player, I think you need a bold, brash personality, someone that walks into that room and tells everyone that they're on a clean slate and they've got to figure out who they want to be going into that World Cup.

I completely agree with Jim Curtin. I don't think that says anything for the future, but I think the next 18 to 20 months or whatever it is -- yeah, Jürgen Klopp has said no. There's five or six other candidates out there that absolutely you have to pursue, you have to have a conversation with.

But you need a personality that walks right into that room and gains the respect of the players but also puts the players on their toes in trying to get them righted, the ship righted, and them getting in the right place because right now that program is not in the right set of mind going into hosting a World Cup at home.

Q. No matter who comes in, how does someone overcome having the weakest goalkeeper pool in 35 years and a youth system that's not really producing any central defenders under age 25 that can play with the national team?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Well, that coach coming in doesn't need to worry about that, to be quite honest. That's more of a conversation for the Federation and the technical staff that has to think five, 10, 15 years down the road. The manager coming in is worried about the 18, 20 months. That's all he's worried about.

Q. During these 18, 20 months, there's no top goalkeeper --

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: But my rebuttal to that -- that's a long time. Matt Turner could find a situation very quickly. He plays in week in, week out. Then all of a sudden you and I are talking about Matt Turner is in great form. Right?

What happens after the Olympics? Does Patrick Schulte,

does Slonina -- 18 months is a long time. I think it's a concern. I'm not saying your concern is wrong. I'm just saying 18 months is a long time for us to say right now they're going into a World Cup without a strong goalkeeper.

I think a lot can happen. And, quite frankly, it's the six months before the World Cup that you want to hit your stride and hit the ground running. I think a lot can happen.

My money is on Matt Turner and that group finding places to play. I think centerback may be a bigger concern because I think we're assessing that position differently than I would.

Q. You said big and bold. Is the big and boldness part the coming into the locker room and kind of putting everybody on notice? What else do you think needs to happen for this job to be filled?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: It's also the big-and-bold when that light's on and there's a press conference, he or she takes the attention away from the players, because I think right now this group of players has heard far too long that they're the golden generation of player, yet they haven't really had that significant win.

So I would -- if I'm running the organization -- say, hang on a minute I'm going to put the attention on the players. I'll put someone in front of the camera someone that takes all the eyeballs and all the attention from them and puts the pressure on themselves to manage that group.

Yes, behind the scenes, whoever comes in is going to have to motivate this group. But you know what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the PR part of this, really having the attention of the fan base, and, honestly, the nonsoccer fan that all of a sudden is intrigued by this big, bold personality that says "I took the project; we're up against it, we didn't get out of our group in Copa América, but I took this project because I think there's potential to really be successful," take the attention away from these players and really try to motivate this group.

Q. Any thoughts on the Copa final and what it means for Messi to be here in the twilight of his career playing in this country and what a win could mean for him and what it means for him to be here?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I'm here at the American Century Championship in Lake Tahoe. There's 90 of us that are going to play golf. And I've had 85 come up and talk to me about Messi.

That would have never happened 12 months ago or 24 months ago, the fact we're doing a press conference here,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

the fact we're talking about my sport, that's one thing. But Lionel Messi has come here and lit this country, lit this continent and lit this league on fire. It's been great.

Now, following the World Cup win for him, he now gets to play in another final at the tail end of his international career and he's going to play it in the United States in his home city of Miami. I don't think the script writers could have wrote anything better.

I think it's going to be a really good final. I do. I think Colombia will play a little bit more than Uruguay will and Argentina. I think it's going to be a really good Copa final, and I just it's the story of Lionel Messi in America.

Q. What do you think it does for the rest of the season for Miami? How much do you think the viewers are going to be a tailwind off the Coppa final and just continue to pour into watching these MLS games?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Absolutely, MLS Season Pass on Apple TV, it's through the roof when Lionel Messi and Inter Miami are playing.

If he wins Copa America in Miami, it's only just going to expedite that. Then you have Leagues Cup following immediately that. They are going to defend their title. They want to get into the playoffs -- Lionel Messi, Tata Martino, Sergio Busquets, Luis Suárez -- the whole organization has looked me in the eye and said, "We want to win MLS Cup."

I think if they win Copa America, it's only going to build the momentum in the Leagues Cup and then ultimately the MLS Cup playoffs and MLS Cup.

Q. I gotta ask you some Atlantic questions. Sitting on \$50 million roughly with the various sales. But put yourself in Lagerwey's shoes a moment, you've got no permanent coach and all this money to spend, what would you be doing?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Take time. Take my time. I know the fan base doesn't want to hear this. But, one, while you may not be in a great spot in the MLS Eastern Conference and you may not be the same juggernaut you were from '17, '18, '19 and all that, fine. All those arguments are valid.

Business is good in Atlanta. You just sold how many players? Three players. You also sold, I would throw in, Barco as well, and it turns into 50-plus million. That is real business on the world market.

That puts Major League Soccer at a different level now

when European teams and the world market is looking to find players.

But this is the first time in his professional career that Garth Lagerwey gets to hire his manager. In the previous situations, he's had those, but he's never hired his first coach.

I know Garth is going to want this and get after it, but I think what he really wants to do is take his time and try to do something that really puts Atlanta and I would say the fan base and the program on good footing. But hand me 50 million, I'll find you a goal scorer.

But just so everybody at home, that's not my phone, that's not Garth Lagerwey calling me, asking me what I just said.

Q. Caleb Wiley was one of those that is being transferred out. But just being who he is, as young as he is and making this big move as a former national team player and somebody who played plenty everywhere, what kind of advice would you give to him?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I think you've got to be very patient but also go in with a clean mind and go for it. But in saying that, I think sometimes when you make this transition, Tyler -- failure is going to come -- I think it's how the young player, quite honestly any player at any age, how do you deal with adversity? How do you go about trying to find your footing within that?

I love the project of him. I've said it right away when I saw him play. There's got to be the world scout that looks at it and says that is a profile that really can succeed at the highest level. I think he's going to be given the opportunity.

If I'm not mistaken the loan is going to be at Strausberg, and as of right now that is Patrick Vieira, who has got a real, real high mindset and ideology, I would say, regarding the MLS young players. So go in with your chest up, your head high, but also be open minded on really pushing yourself in how do you evolve when you hit a little bit of adversity early on.

Q. I know the spotlight is on the Men's National Team, but you have the Olympics coming up. What are your overall thoughts on the Olympics with the under-23s?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: It's great that the men are finally back into this tournament, first time since 2008. I still think -- and some people will disagree with me -- but I don't care. I really believe that the Olympic tournament is a valuable development tool for the United States men.



I get it it's under-23, but our under-23s aren't competing at the highest of levels at times the way the rest of the world is, and what if you're successful? Now all of a sudden you play in the Olympic tournament. This group of players now breeds the success of winning. They can then move on. I think it's a great opportunity and it's about time they're back in it after a long spell of not being there since 2008.

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