

American Century Championship

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Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Joe Pavelski

John Smoltz

Press Conference



are here that haven't won it yet, it's something you want to do and want to be there.

I've had the opportunities. It feels good coming down. So you look forward to trying to put yourself in that position playing in that last group, the last two groups, and being there with the crowds and the excitement.

It's such a sport when you get in that moment. For us not playing it all the time and to experience it, look forward to it. Hopefully we can get there. The season's over right now. It still feels normal, I think. For me, season ends, you pack up the house, head back to Madison and have an offseason.

We've been back there for three weeks trying to scramble, get as many rounds as I can, get the game tight. It feels like it's in a good spot. But we'll see when it really starts.

Q. Besides the two of you, who else are you guys looking at as your top competitors in this event?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Well, the usual suspects, Mardy Fish, is probably our target. He's a tremendous golfer, and obviously a great guy. So you can't get mad at him. Tony Romo has had tremendous success here. Mark Mulder. Annika. This, in the last five years, there's been so much more competition for the chance to win.

People have really taken their game to the next level and really looking forward to Tahoe, American Century Championship, because this is as good as it gets. You want to represent your game when you get here, but Mardy's the guy.

Q. Trying to get into his head in any way for this?

JOHN SMOLTZ: No, I tried that in Dallas. It didn't work. He beat me on the last hole to win. But my only goal is to get in the group with him. So I haven't really had many opportunities to have groups with him. Been always right around him. So that's my goal.

Q. Joe, how about you, what do you think as far as the top -- the list?

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Joe Pavelski and John Smoltz. John, we hear you're playing really well, at least that's what your catcher and caddie is telling us.

JOHN SMOLTZ: I am, I'm blessed to have the All-Star Game being next week. Typically I fly in after the All-Star Game and try to put everything together. So I've been here this week, and it's been enjoyable.

Honestly, I have been playing good ever since I got hit in the head three weeks ago with a golf ball.

Q. Tell us about that.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Scariest thing I've had in my life. I've never been hit, played a million rounds. I got hit right above the eye, hundred miles an hour. Had to go to the hospital.

I think what it did it knocked out my brain of doubt. So maybe I have no more doubt. But I am very fortunate to be here.

Q. Joe, first of all, congratulations. You just announced your retirement after an illustrious NHL Hall of Fame career. Congratulations and it's nice to have you back in Lake Tahoe.

JOE PAVELSKI: It's official unofficially, I guess. It's been a great run. Really enjoyed the game. Just feels like the right time. So definitely the plan now is not to play next year. And I don't see that changing.

Q. Joe has played in this tournament seven times. He's had five top 10s. He finished third last year and second in 2022. What are the chances of going up one?

JOE PAVELSKI: That's the plan. I think like all of us that



JOE PAVELSKI: I've got to back him up with Fish and Romo. I've seen Tony's game a little bit in Dallas. Last tournament they played in, Dallas, I got my eye right there and that tournament and watching how it's unfolding, and he's put together a few good years now and he seems to have this game going. He's not wrong.

It's like you mark Tahoe, American Century Championship, on your calendar trying to get your game ready. It's pretty cool wanting to see guys wanting to play, on your schedule. He's talking about the All-Star Game, it lines up well for him this year. That's exciting, I think when you get a little extra time you feel like you're prepared coming into this week.

Q. John, you've been retired a few years now. Do you have any suggestions for Mr. Pavelski here?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Once you officially realize you're retired and the doubt has been eliminated, it's freeing. I know he has a couple of young kids he'll get a chance to enjoy.

But for me, I know a lot of people thought I would never retire, and I probably, if I stayed healthy, wouldn't have.

But when you get beat up and you're tired of going into the workout room and doing all the things you've got to do, it's pretty freeing. It was for me. And your hope is that it's that way for every athlete because you put in a lot of work and you love what you do, and you get to the highest point and now he'll get a chance to be a plus six in golf.

Q. Few more hours to practice your game now, Joe, is that what's happening, or just been too busy from immediately ending the season?

JOE PAVELSKI: It's been pretty busy getting the house unpacked and stuff. But we've gotten some rounds in, made some time. Hit a few more hours, but that's going to be spent on the boat today and going out on the lake. Going to enjoy it. We played the round yesterday. Got out there. The course looks great as it always does.

The weather's been perfect and every once in a while you get a Thursday off here and go out, hit some balls this morning. Felt good. Roll some putts. Hopefully stay sharp that way and then go enjoy the day.

Q. Speaking of odds, John, you're 6-to-1, Joe, you're listed at 11-to-2. What do you think about Barkley's chances of being in the top 75 this year?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Well, he got close last year, didn't he? And I know Charles, that is his major goal is to prove

people, for all the things he's gone through in his game, left-handed, one-handed, you name it. He gets the greatest perseverance award, and he embodies this tournament. That's the thing about it. Like, Charles comes out here and has a great time, but I guarantee you, he's got 74, 75 written down because I think 75 and a half is the number, right?

He's going to be right around that number, and I'm telling you, I think this is the year he does it.

Q. What do you think, Joe?

JOE PAVELSKI: I think so too. Last year it was a buzz around him that he was going to beat it, I think. His swing was starting to come around a little bit last year, started to look real again. And so him having another year and having that eye on that number, I think he gets it done.

Q. You talked about a future surgery coming up. Did you have that surgery over the winter? And how is it working out?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I had my second hip replaced the day after last year's tournament. So I'm working on a brand new hip with one year. So it's two of them. I never thought I would have this many surgeries after I retired. I have one more to go after this year and hopefully that's it. And I don't talk about it ever again. Left shoulder, two new hips, ready to go.

Q. Bionic?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Almost.

Q. We enjoyed your broadcast from Philly this year, and you were extolling the virtues of the Phillie Phanatic and then they gave you a hat. We're wondering if you brought it here for good luck.

JOHN SMOLTZ: I didn't bring it here. My grandson saw the hat and he went nuts over it. He currently has the hat. In my playing days, there's no better mascot than the Phillie Phanatic. I used to find myself just absolutely watching everything he did.

When I broadcast, I can't wait for him to come out. And when they showed me that hat -- I actually got somebody in trouble for wearing it on the air because they don't allow you to wear anything on the air they can't sell that the fan can't have, and they got crushed, fans wanted that hat. So my grandson is sporting that hat now.

Q. Joe, we have a new NHL player here, Matthew Tkachuk is here. Obviously coming off a Stanley Cup

championship, a couple of other guys out there. Do you bust his chops? Do you bust everybody else's chops a bit about getting the Stanley Cup? You came close a couple times.

JOE PAVELSKI: No, definitely we were right in there. It was a fun playoff run for us and chatted with them a little bit last night just about it. It's something we always tried to go for, and it's what drove us, I think, as players.

Never got to fully experience it that way. But they were a good team. They deserved it probably. We would have liked to see them in the finals and have that. But him coming here first time, it's exciting. First time, tenth time, I don't think it really matters, that first tee happens and those trees are staring at you. There's a few nerves out there.

So you enjoy it. You get through it. You want to feel it as an athlete, go up, try to hit a shot and just really enjoy it. I haven't seen this game. I really don't know much about his game but I'll see it tomorrow. We'll be paired in the same group.

Q. We have a newcomer Austin Reaves from the Lakers, any advice for him? We noticed he's third on the odds leaderboard in front of you.

JOHN SMOLTZ: First of all, that's impressive in itself that he's got that low of a handicap and coming here for the first time. Like Joe said, there's nothing that replaces getting the experience of the first time doing something.

This is the problem with golf and handicaps. I'm sure he's great, and I'm not saying he's not. I'm just saying that generally every scratch thinks they can come here, and we all realize that, you know, there's something different than playing in your own golf tournaments or playing with your buddies. We all had to learn it. It's going to be fun to watch him play.

I was looking at the sheet going, wow, he's coming off his season. So I'm sure he got a chance to put in some time and do it, but there's something about the first time. It's not really even the first days, first, second days, it's about the third day.

So I'm imagining he's going to be in one of the last three groups based on his game and then that's when it hits. That's when you're, like, the tournament, you're trying to win.

Q. You heard last night in the player meeting about the donation that NBC is making to here South Lake Tahoe on behalf of Tim and Stacy Wakefield and the tribute going this week. John, I know you had a

special relationship with him being a teammate at the Red Sox and fellow pitcher. Talk about Tim and Stacy and how you guys have gotten to know them here at the tournament and just the void that that will be this year.

JOHN SMOLTZ: This whole year -- this is my third tournament -- and it's the third reminder of the unfortunate passing of both of them.

I got a chance to end my career, last year, with Tim. Played against him forever, of course, when he was with the Pirates. We played so much golf together, and we shared so much in common. He's a selfless man that gave so much to his community and gave to his family.

And it shocked us all. It didn't seem real. Everybody kind of knew the battle that his wife was going through, and she had really fought that fight. And then to have the scenario play out the way it did, and our heart and our prayers go out to his kids. But this is a great tribute and reminder of: We get to come here. This is a great event for us and it's so much fun, but in reality and perspective, these are the reminders of how fragile life is.

I'd say this about American Century Championship and American Century, in general, they give so much to the surrounding community and the fundraising that they do. We're part of that. We get to be part of that. That's a huge part of, you come here for the excitement but you know the reward that's being poured outside of this golf tournament.

It will be like it was in Orlando and in Dallas, there's going to be a 49-yard marker, and it's pretty touching when you get to that point and you see it and you realize they're not here but that cause is going to live forever.

JOE PAVELSKI: It was well said. And for me, I got to know them here. Right from the first time out here, I got to spend some time with them. The last few years, got to play a couple of rounds with him.

When you heard that news, it was shocking because he was so selfless. You never knew he was going through, really, anything. And he cared so much about everything else and wanted to hear how you were doing.

To see that, it was definitely -- it hit you hard. Definitely feel fortunate to get to meet him, spend some time with him. You get to know somebody a little bit better when you play 18 holes with them and going through and just the couple little conversations you have outside of golf, it was pretty cool. Just special people, I think, and wish the best for the family.

