

American Century Championship

Thursday, July 11, 2024

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Annika Sorenstam

Austin Reaves

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: With us we have Annika Sorenstam and for the first time Austin Reaves.

Annika, you're listed at the odds, once again, as one of the top players. I believe it's, let's see, 7 to 1. You've been in the hunt every year you've played here. You've come close every time. What's it going to take to get you over the top here, do you think.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: You're right. I've been close. But, first of all, it's just great to be back. Such a wonderful tournament and American Century does such a good job.

I keep trying. I don't give up. So I'm going to keep going. I would love to see a few more putts go in, obviously. I feel like from tee to green I played quite well here. It's just trying to figure out the greens.

But I've been out there a few times already this week. The course looks fabulous. Really happy to be playing. We'll see. A little luck as well wouldn't hurt. But like I said it's great to be back. Having players like Austin come here and add to the field, it just makes it really exciting. Seems like this tournament is getting bigger and bigger every year.

THE MODERATOR: Austin, you're listed at 5-to-1, one of the best odds a first-time player has seen out here. How tough's it going to be to live up to that.

AUSTIN REAVES: It's tough. It's probably the second time I've ever played in front of people. First time probably a couple of weeks ago I played in a YouTube event with Garrett Clark. I'm super excited. Like she said, the place is phenomenal. The scenery is beautiful, and the course is in perfect condition. So hopefully we can go out make a lot of birdies.

Q. I heard you had fun talking with Steph Curry about who is the best golfer best player in NBA?

AUSTIN REAVES: I haven't spoken to him about that personally but I'm sure he would pick himself as well. I saw him play golf here last year. He's a phenomenal player. I don't know what a competitor would be if you didn't take yourself.

Q. Annika, you've been here a few times, obviously. So you've seen first-time players come in here. And I know you don't want to give too much advice to competitors, but do you have any tips for Austin his first time through?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, I'm sure he's quite a competitor. I have no doubt about that. And it helps in other sports as well. I think the key here is being patient. The format is a little different than stroke play. It favors more of an aggressive player, as we all know, through the point system.

But you've also got to be careful because there's a little bit of a penalty of being too aggressive. So finding that balance I think is the key here. And just keep on going. We've seen the weather change a few times.

But if you can -- an eagle or so, or like Stephie had a hole-in-one, I believe, last year. So those extra points certainly helps in this format.

But, again, patience. As we know golf, you just have to be patient and have to do it for three days.

Q. Austin, you're playing against someone like Annika, obviously. And she's won her share of tournaments throughout her career. What do you think of when you're thinking this is my second tournament where I've been in a group like this, what are you thinking going into that?

AUSTIN REAVES: Honestly, I'm just going to admire the good golf. I'm a huge fan of golf. I woke up this morning like 6:30 and I turned on the tournament that's going on right now overseas and watched it basically until I came here. I'm just a fan of golf and I'm just going to admire the good golf that's being played around me and really enjoy it.



Q. Austin, the boys are in Paris getting ready for the Olympics. How do you think they're going to do this year in basketball?

AUSTIN REAVES: This is one of the most loaded teams, I think, that has ever been assembled in my opinion. You've got a lot of hall of famers on that team already, and then guys that are going to soon-to-be hall of famers as they get older.

But I think if they play together and kind of just build that chemistry quick, then I don't think anybody can beat them, to be honest, because the skill level that they have is unmatched.

It's just different now because you're going against guys that have played together since they were 13, 14 years old. I talked to Dennis Schröder last year about the team that he plays on in Germany. He was like, yeah, I've played with all these guys since around that age, so they have that chemistry. So if they can build that, then it's going to be trouble for a lot of those teams.

Q. Annika, so this is your fourth time playing here. The past few years, you travel around a lot with your foundation and different tournaments, but you have been playing several competitive rounds. So talk about going into prepping for this week, kind of going from being the ambassador for your foundation to putting on the competitive juices and preparing for this week.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Thanks for the question. You're right. I wear a lot of hats, different roles that I play, whether it's the foundation and then also being a mom and a wife and then trying to juggle my golf into all of this.

I haven't competed since Dallas. It's a few months. But I go out there, practice, I enjoy the practice part. I enjoy working on my game still but I don't really have so many reps on the course. Our son, Will, as you know he's a big golfer. He takes me out or I go out with him, and he pushes me, which is a good thing.

I'm looking forward to this week. And as far as preparation, I've been playing a little bit around in this area getting used to the elevation and I'm also playing in the U.S. Women's Senior Open coming up in a few weeks. So I've got to make sure my game is as good as it at this point with all the things.

Then I'm actually heading to Paris for the Olympics to watch the women play. So my schedule is packed, to say the least, but it's fun and I enjoy it. Sometimes I feel

getting on the golf course and practicing is kind of my quiet part. It's peaceful to be out there and just work on my game because I still enjoy it and still trying to figure out how I can be better.

Even though it's hard at this time when I don't put so much time in but trying to eliminate some of the mistakes I make sometimes.

Q. Austin talked about Team USA and the Olympics. Talk about your excitement about going to the Olympics with your role with IGF and your role what you're going to be doing as almost an ambassador for women's golf for the Olympics.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I've been an advocate of golf and Olympics for quite some time. I think it's good for the game, especially for the global game, because I think it's giving countries that really haven't had exposure to the sport to be able to get some funding and grow the game at a grassroots level.

So I think it's exciting. And again you look at the field, it's really good. The U.S. obviously has many of the top players. It will be exciting to see.

Some of my roles, there's going to be some meetings. I know I'm the "flower girl," which means I give out the awards on Saturday. But attending some, like I said, some meetings and some presentations and just really represent the sport over there.

Q. Austin, this is one of the sort of all-time gatherings of greats, athletes, celebrities, all this. Is there anybody here that you were really looking forward to meeting, somebody you haven't had a chance to come across their path yet?

AUSTIN REAVES: A lot of these guys are people that growing up I've watched in their respective sports, television, whatever it is. But the one I grew up a Yankees fan because I played a lot of baseball growing up.

I ran into Alex Rodriguez the first day I was here, the first five minutes I was here. We sat there and had a conversation for five or ten minutes.

But for me, as a kid, looking up to baseball players, he was one of those guys that I looked up to. So running into him so early and then him taking his time just to say what's up, talk about some of the other things, because he's a part of the Timberwolves now. We went back and forth about Anthony Edwards and how great he is. But a lot of these people are, like I said, people I've seen since I've been a young kid. So it's going to be cool running into all of them

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

and meeting them and introducing myself.

Q. How has this experience been so far, the fans, the crowds, the whole thing all together, tell us a little bit about how you're taking it all in?

AUSTIN REAVES: It's been great. Yesterday we started on 17. So probably the heat of everything that's going on out there. And it probably took us 45 minutes to play 17 and 18 because I was trying to take my time and sign everything I could for the kids or take pictures or whatever they needed.

It's been really cool for me to just come out here, see everybody show up and have a lot of fun. But it's just a beautiful thing.

Q. Annika, do you have a pick for us for the men's British Open, just around the corner, anyone looking good to you?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: They all look good, don't they? I don't know. It's one of those things. I'm so bad at picking. But I do watch it. I enjoy watching golf, just like Austin said, also a fan of sports, especially golf. And Evian I was watching the Evian this morning. As far as the pick for the British, what can I say? I would fancy to see Jordan win again, maybe. That would be a good one. He's playing pretty good.

AUSTIN REAVES: He's probably my favorite athlete of all time, by the way.

Q. Austin, you're kind of the X factor this year. Tell us how and when you started playing and how did the golf bug bite you?

AUSTIN REAVES: It started in high school. I played my freshman year but I wasn't really in love with the game. I just didn't really like school that much. So I could get out of school if I played golf. And that was really how I got into it.

Kind of towards my senior year I seen improvement in my game, started hitting better shots. When I went to college, my sophomore year at Wichita State, I needed an outlet and that was golf because all we think is basketball, 95 percent of the time. So golf was my outlet to kind of get away from basketball. That's when I fell in love with it.

But I've never taken a lesson. I don't really go hit the range. I kind of just love to go play in. I didn't play that much my rookie year because I was trying to find the way of the NBA. But after that, I started taking my clubs on the road and obviously playing when I'm in LA because I get good year-round weather. But 100 percent addicted to the

game now.

Q. Tell us how it felt for you to get the call to come and play in this event. I know it's a big deal.

AUSTIN REAVES: It was something that I've wanted to do for the last couple of years because I've obviously watched it being a golf fan. When I got the call to come join this event, it was 100 percent a yes from the get-go and something that, like I said, I've wanted to do for a while.

Q. When John Smoltz was in here, I don't know if you heard him, Austin, your name came up and your odds and chances, what not. He goes, I bet he's a great player. I haven't had a chance to play with him much. He said, but there's something different about coming out here, especially the first time. He goes, maybe not the first round or the second round, but that third round, you get a lot of people and it's a different kind of pressure. What do you feel about that?

AUSTIN REAVES: I mean, I'm sure he's not wrong. But kind of my whole life I've been behind the 8-ball to start with. If y'all know my basketball story. I didn't have many offers coming out of high school. Then went undrafted. I've been kind behind the 8-ball, had to fight the whole way.

So I don't think it's really going to be anything different this week. I'm just going to try to stay focused and play good golf.

Q. Any other tips for Austin, Annika?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I look forward to seeing you swing. Our son Will has talked a lot about you. So I know a little bit more than I knew coming in here. But I look forward to seeing you play.

Have fun. This is a really special tournament. As you know, American Century, their commitment 25, 26 years, and we've been here 35 years. This is one of a kind. So look at the view, enjoy the golf and have a lot of fun. I think that's what we should be doing this week.

Q. Austin, you talked about your excitement when you got the call. When the season ended, what's been your preparation like back home to prepare for this tournament this week?

AUSTIN REAVES: Like I said, I don't really -- I don't take lessons. I don't hit the range. I just go play. When I say "I play," I play a lot. Especially in the offseason. I probably haven't missed many days. There's not really anything different. I just go play a lot of golf. I play a lot of holes. Like I said, I don't hit the range. It's really no different.

