

American Century Championship

Wednesday, July 9, 2025

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Joe Theismann

Erik Schneberger

Press Conference



you've seen some of these pictures.

JOE THEISMANN: I have. I haven't seen anything that looks like my swing yet. I'm actually very excited to see. You're always curious. As an athlete you always want to know where you stand in different situations.

I see John Smoltz, of course, one of those guys that could win the tournament. John wants to be the oldest player to ever win this tournament. Certainly, he plays well enough to be able to do it.

It's interesting, when you look at the different statistics that come up, we always hear about how hard the ball is hit, how far it's going to go, what's the smash factor that they've used before. Now I get a chance to try it. And I'm excited to do it.

ERIK SCHNEBERGER: It's great. What's great about this it's not about how hard you swing; it's about the energy transfer from the club to the ball. You can actually have an 80 mile-an-hour swing and still register a 1.5 smash factor if you hit it exactly right on the sweet spot on the club.

This was a way to make it fun and enjoyable for everyone and everyone can compete. It's really about precision, much more about precision than speed and brute force.

JOE THEISMANN: And I think those things are so much fun. There's so many incredible athletes that are here and actors that love the game and musicians that love the game. It's one other element to be able to gauge yourself against other people.

Let's face it, we're competition junkies. Those of us here love to compete. We love to compete against the course. Everybody says you are not playing against someone; you're playing against the golf course. That's not true. You're actually playing against someone. This is a chance to be able to, once again, to draw a comparison of where you are to where you want to be.

ERIK SCHNEBERGER: No doubt. There was a lot of celebration out there and some almost got into first place.

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to talk about initiatives that American Century Investments is bringing into the tournament this year. We've got a pretty exciting one out on number 14. Erik, I'll turn it over to you to talk about the Smash for Cash.

ERIK SCHNEBERGER: Great. Thank you. Like every year, we're always looking for new and innovative ways to engage our celebrities, our guests. And so this year we have a new innovation that we put on the 14th hole. It's called Smash for Cash. It's a combination of modern technology, golf tracking as well as some AI.

Basically when you tee off at 14, Wednesday, Thursday, we'll be tracking swing statistics. We're actually calculating something called the smash factor, that is the club speed -- the ball speed divided by the club speed, max registered as 1.5.

Essentially the way it works is we're tracking that information. There's a technology that's taking a picture. It's pulling the background off that picture. It's actually using AI in the cloud to generate a custom, unique visual background, and then it displays it on a massive screen.

It's a competition, like everything at the American Century Championship. This is an opportunity to showcase the culture of American Century Investments of giving back, like 40 percent of our profits going to the Stowers Institute of Medical Research.

In this instance for Smash for Cash, the winning group with the highest average smash factor will be provided \$10,000 to direct to their charity of choice. We're really excited about this. We ran it out there today. I encourage you to go out there at 14 tomorrow. It will be out there for the morning round.

Joe is going to take a whack at it. I don't know, Joe, if



So, so far, after one day, we have Jerome Bettis and Jay Bilas at the top of the leaderboard tied. We'll see how tomorrow goes. So everyone gets another shot at it to see if they can beat a 1.48 combined average smash factor for their team.

JOE THEISMANN: That's pretty powerful.

ERIK SCHNEBERGER: So one other thing we're really excited about in 2025 is our relatively new investment capability of Avantis Investors. For those that don't know, Avantis Investors was launched in 2019. It is a new investment capability, relatively new investment capability for American Century Investments along that same vein of always innovating on behalf of our clients to help them have a better future.

So Avantis Investors within just over five years reached \$75 billion from zero, which is wonderful. We're unveiling the first-ever ad campaign sponsored and highlighting Avantis Investors. I'll show you the first one and explain a little bit about what we're doing on air throughout the weekend.

Run the first one.

[Video]

The general idea behind these is twofold. Number one, mirroring the fun and games we have here at the American Century Championship --

JOE THEISMANN: Don't hit it in the rough.

ERIK SCHNEBERGER: Don't hit it in the rough -- or in that case the rough fairway.

JOE THEISMANN: The real rough.

ERIK SCHNEBERGER: And really highlighting the stark contrast that Avantis Investors brings to the marketplace. Many investors invest in passive investments or index investments. And they're good; don't get me wrong.

But Avantis Investors is different in that indexes only rebalance or only look at the investments once a year. Avantis Investors is looking at investments every single day.

So you get the benefits of an ETF, which is a low-cost, tax-efficient investment vehicle, but also the benefits of active management, which is essentially evaluating portfolio holdings daily.

So throughout Saturday and Sunday we're going to be

running these. We created nine. The reason why we created nine is because we run a lot of commercials throughout this tournament. And we wanted to honor our viewers with something a little bit different every single time they see these. So we'll run the next one. You can see what I'm talking about.

[Video]

Like I said, we're going to run nine of these. They will only run once between Saturday and Sunday because they're all different. And then we have a special ending that I'm not going to spoil for you. You just need to tune in on Sunday and see the special ending.

Lastly, this is our fifth year -- I cannot believe it -- our fifth year for fantasy golf at American Century, the American Century Championship.

Joe, I know you've played several years in a row and really enjoy it. I'd love to hear your thoughts.

JOE THEISMANN: It's exciting. I think so many sports now have a fantasy aspect to it. What we've created with -- it's actually, go to accfantasygolf.com, it will tell you all about it.

But what we've been able to do is get everybody involved. Every player in the tournament winds up in five different groups. You're separated by your ability to play the game. You get to choose a team of your own from each of those five categories.

The thing about it is you don't have to lock into that particular group for the entire tournament. You get to go to a different group the next day if you like or someone else.

If you win the first day, you wind up with two tickets back to next year's tournament. Win the second day you wind up with two tickets back. And you win the third day and win it all win two tickets to next year's tournament and you get a \$10,000 check to the charity of your choice.

Not only are you able to go out and compete, as, like I say, we love to do, but it's involving the fantasy world, which everybody loves. Now all of a sudden it's a chance to win money to give back to charity.

You think about what American Century Investments has been able to do, the amount of give-back, over 40% of the net profits go to the Stower Institute for Medical Research. I think if all of us took a step back and said, how much money do I make, what's 40 percent of what I make. That's what goes to the research. That's how powerful American Century is with their investments.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

And I'm excited about the new aspect as well. But fantasy now is in its fifth year. Seems like it only started yesterday. I won't tell you what group I'm in. I'm going to make you go look online. So go look online and figure out where I am.

ERIK SCHNEBERGER: Today is the cutoff time for registering for fantasy golf. If you go to accfantasygolf.com register before midnight Pacific today, you have the opportunity to win the overall and not only win two tickets and expense paid to next year's tournament, you also have the ability, if you win, to get that \$10,000 directed to your charity of choice.

One of the things I'm most proud about this tournament and honestly about American Century Investments, is this tournament has generated over \$8 million to various, to over a dozen charities, I think it is, over the course of the tournament.

Then on top of that, that 40 percent you talk about, that represents \$2.2 billion to fund research for cures for cancer and other gene-based diseases.

It's just a wonderful organization. We pride ourselves on, number one, taking care of our clients and giving them the best chance for their financial future, but secondly our impact on humankind.

JOE THEISMANN: I'm thrilled to be here. The tournament's been around 36 years. American Century Investments has been a sponsor for 27. I've been lucky enough to play in 35 of them.

And, boy, has it changed out here. From the 50 people that were on the 17th hole 36 years ago to the 15,000 that are there now.

What's really great about the tournament, too, it tests your mettle because we're used to playing in front of crowds. Now all of a sudden, you're standing on a tee and everybody's standing there and they get real quiet. You go, oh, no, make some noise. I played in front of 100,000 people. I need some noise. The band is rocking, everything else is going on, that gives you a little more comfort level.

But this game is an entirely different game. And American Century Investments provides us, as athletes and as entertainers, the opportunity to be able to experience things that is out of our element. It makes you dig down deep to be able to come up with it.

We talk about what American Century Investments has

done with the Stower institute. Also the Lake Tahoe area benefits from the charities as well. So it's a community that's embraced us here. We love being here. But the American Century Championship is something that is so special.

ERIK SCHNEBERGER: I have you on my fantasy team I'll keep you all weekend long because I believe in you.

Q. Joe, couple of Notre Dame questions for you, if I may. Jerome Bettis and Larry Fitzgerald have a couple of sons or son each going to Notre Dame this year. Jerome obviously a legacy. Can you just talk about your excitement with them, and have you had a chance to talk to them about their sons going there?

JOE THEISMANN: I just found out a couple days ago that Jerome's son was going and Larry's was going. And there are a few more other sons going. They're wide receivers, basically.

I was kidding as I was walking off the putting green, I said to Jerome, your son is going to Notre Dame as a wide receiver. He said, yeah. I said, he has your niftiness.

And I won't express what he flashed me, but it was a oh, yeah, sure.

But he does. That's one thing about Jerome. People didn't realize. Great feet. And his son, I think, is going to be a terrific addition to our football team.

Marcus has done a terrific job at the University of Notre Dame. His leadership, what he managed to accomplish last year, getting so close.

This year the quarterbacks who are there actually have been there, which would be different with what goes on with the portal all the time. But I'm excited for these young men to be part of the University of Notre Dame.

Q. Last year was probably the best season since the Lou Holtz era. With the changes in the power structure with the SEC and the four power conferences, is it easier, harder, the same for Notre Dame to compete for a national title?

JOE THEISMANN: I think it's about the same to compete for a national title. We got so close last year with different type of conferences.

For years people have asked me questions: Is Notre Dame ever going to join a conference? Every year it's a different looking conference, and Notre Dame manages to stay where it is. Extremely competitive.



I don't care what conference you're in, I think we can compete against anybody at the University of Notre Dame. I think it will pretty much stay status quo as it is.

But the landscape of college athletics is changing tremendously. And we try and move along in step with it, but we do it the Notre Dame way, which I think is the right way.

Q. We're a few months away from 40 years since that famous incident on Monday Night Football. Other than me asking you about it now, do you still get asked about it a lot?

JOE THEISMANN: I always get asked about the "accident." People like to call it an accident. When Lawrence and I sort of ran into one another. I do play -- I should say he ran into me.

I do play golf with Lawrence Taylor, but I don't let him stand where I can't see him. Just so you know, he has to be in my vision to be able to feel comfortable hitting the golf ball.

It was a time that changed my life. I had wonderful success as a quarterback for Washington. Being a Redskin quarterback and winning championships and MVPs and all that stuff is great. Sometimes we get full of ourselves. And I had reached a point where I had pretty much gotten full of myself.

I believe it was through divine intervention that it was taken away from me, and giving me an opportunity to talk about it, to be able to tell people stay within yourself. Think about the things that are important to you -- your family, your beliefs in God.

And I believe that it was God's hand that came and said, okay, look, you had the ability to be able to play this game, and now it's time for you to go do something else because I feel like you might be taking a little bit too far.

He could have called. (Laughter).

I still have no problem with that.

But I think that day changed my life. It was a life that was going in a direction that I would not have been very proud of. I'm trying very hard to be the very best person I can be going forward. It's because of that night.

Q. I assume it's titanium you have in there. Does it still bother you at all?

JOE THEISMANN: Actually they never rodged my leg.

The rods hadn't come about back in 1985. It was sort of new. I had a good union and my surgeon decided that we'd let it go.

It worked well for 40-plus years. Now I've got a titanium hip. And that's titanium, I can tell you that.

First time -- first time I go through the airport with my new hip, I empty my pockets. All of a sudden the machine goes off. I step back out. I take my belt off, machine goes off. I said, what's going on here. They said, do you have any metal in your body.

Oh, okay, I got one of those. I got a hip. But it's been great. I feel great. Dr. Jimmy Guyton in Memphis, Tennessee put me back together. I'm absolutely thrilled with the ability to be able to walk. I'm excited about going out. I played in this tournament with the old hip. Now I get a shot with the new one.

Q. Joe, today The Athletic just published a pretty long piece about Notre Dame and Clemson's incoming 12-game series that's going to run through 2038, I believe it was. I wanted to ask you, what are your thoughts on just new rivalries in college football in general, the concept of that?

JOE THEISMANN: I think it's exciting to have new rivalries. As I said, the conferences continue to change. USC and UCLA in the Big Ten. Who would have thought that three, four, five years ago?

And having a home-and-home series with Clemson is exciting. It's a great program. Terrific school. They've done a terrific job there.

And for us to be able to continue to be an independent and play in different conferences, this is something that needs to happen. And we're certainly going to be up to the task, I can tell you that.

Q. Do you think that having a rivalry with a school like Clemson, given that Notre Dame is in the ACC besides football, do you think that moves the needle in the direction of Notre Dame joining the ACC, or do you see that independent status?

JOE THEISMANN: You know, I don't know what Pete's going to do out there. I'm not sure what decisions the university wants to make regarding joining the conference or not joining the conference.

Like I say, I think we're very comfortable where we are. Certainly you're always going to consider it. You consider the possibilities.



Economically, when you think about the economics that a university gets, it isn't like the program, the football program or basketball program gets it. Everybody benefits. The educational part of it is so vitally important. The different departments are given an opportunity to be able to expand with what they're able to do with the student body.

I think having that kind of rivalry, adding to it, can't do anything but good.

Q. Question that ties investment and quarterbacks together. The local pro quarterback here is Brock Purdy for the 49ers. Niners made a sizable investment in him this offseason. What's your take on Brock Purdy, and how can having all that new-found wealth impact a player's mindset when he's playing?

JOE THEISMANN: The first thing he needs to do is get a hold of Avantis investments and get hold of American Century Investments and say, hey, I'm Brock Purdy. I'd like to sit down and talk to you. I just happened to have fallen into a large pile of money, and I'd like to investment it and keep an eye on it every day, not once a year.

I was thrilled with Brock. This Mr. Irrelevant, all you want to do is get into the game. And he did. He's smart. He gets the ball out well. He fits into Kyle's system so well out in San Francisco. His ability to get rid of the ball, his ability to anticipate.

To be rewarded the way he is, I'm thrilled. I felt sorry for him last year at the number he was at, but now he managed to make it through the year. We see these numbers go out of the chart.

1984, I was the fourth highest paid player in the National Football League at \$1 million a year. I don't begrudge these guys one penny. I'm thrilled for them. Get as much as you can.

Now the pressure really gets on them to be able to say, okay, can you earn the dollars. You earned the opportunity to get it, now can you earn the dollars. That's really where it falls.

I'm thrilled for Brock. I think the 49ers will bounce back this year, not just because I'm close by and I flew out on the plane with George Kittle. Scares the living daylights out of you. He's old school. I love the guy, absolutely love the guy.

But San Francisco was beat up so bad last year. And 1s can't play against 2s and have a lot of success. That's what the 49ers were stuck playing with, a lot of guys that

were not the number ones.

So I'm thrilled for him. I think he's a smart kid. That's the first thing I noticed about Brock, is to process that offense as well as he did coming in and doing the things he did, he started as far away from being a starter as you possibly could, other than being a punt returner. That's about as far away as you can get.

He's done a terrific job. I'm thrilled for him. Excited for him.

Q. What's your first impressions of George Kittle then other than you're scared --

JOE THEISMANN: George is old school. I would have loved to have played with George Kittle. I'm not kidding. His approach to the game of football, we talked football and talked a lot of different things.

I'll tell you something. His approach to football is the way I've looked at it. He wants to be the best. He works his rear end to be the best. He tries to help the young guys understand what they need to do to be the best. I had absolutely one of the best trips I've ever had.

Q. Well, he wrote the forward for my book that came out last year.

JOE THEISMANN: We've got the same opinion.

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