

American Century Championship

Thursday, July 10, 2025

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Mardy Fish

John Smoltz

Vinny Del Negro

Annika Sorenstam

Press Conference



You've come close obviously every time. What do you think it's going to take for you to beat these taller guys on either side of you?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I'm looking at them, and I guess I could use my mighty game.

But I'm excited to be here. I want to thank American Century for the invite. A lot of players want to be here and compete. This is such a special week here in Tahoe.

I'm standing with these guys, first of all. They're incredible at golf, but they're just good people. I think that's what this tournament is about.

I think for me, personally, I've got to just -- things have got to go my way, start to finish. I've had some good rounds. But I've had some mediocre rounds. It doesn't do it here, especially when you have players like Mardy who have nine birdies and that's what it takes. Last year I had an eagle. That helped. Maybe a few more eagles. I welcome them.

But it's great to be here. I just enjoy playing with them. We have a good time. The whole family and friends are here. It's a celebration of golf and certainly a great summer week to be here.

THE MODERATOR: John Smoltz we keep hearing you talking, hey, I'm 55 years old, I'm going to win this tournament, I've got to win this tournament, time is pushing me. You've played great. We look at your record here in 15 years, 12 top-10s in 15 years. So I think you're due.

JOHN SMOLTZ: I'm due, and I'm 58 now. So I'm really due. I'm really due. I will challenge anybody to the most pars in the field and they have no chance. Until I figure out how to not make pars and make birdies, I'm going to keep answering that question.

It's the greatest week that we have. And it splits the season for what I do, and I race back to do the All-Star Game. I'm grateful the All-Star Game is after Tahoe. This is a great week.

THE MODERATOR: It's great to have our contender list up in front left to right, defending champion, Mardy Fish, Annika Sorenstam, John Smoltz and Vinny Del Negro.

Mardy, defending champion, we'll start it with you. Let's talk about what the chances are this year. Everybody's talking Mardy Fish, favorite at 2.4-to-1, along with Steph co-favorites. How does it feel to be back and what are you looking at?

MARDY FISH: I don't like that, and I walk around and people say, I put money on you, I put money on you. That's a lot of pressure. I'm not that good.

Obviously good memories from last year, excited to be back, and can't wait to start.

THE MODERATOR: Pretty good memories from 2020 as well. Besides COVID you won the tournament there with a great round of 63, I believe, on that Saturday with 10 birdies.

MARDY FISH: The two times I've won here I've had one round that's been pretty low. Last year it was 64, nine birdies.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Blah, blah, blah.

MARDY FISH: Hoping to make more birdies, not many double bogeys.

THE MODERATOR: Annika, greatest female player in history. You've been in the hunt for this thing many times. Yes, I know you don't want to hear that, but anyway, you've been in the top four in the five times you've played here.



THE MODERATOR: Vinny, 2021, when you won it, a great, very emotional win, obviously. I know you've had some back troubles since. How are you feeling now? What's it look like for the coming week?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Not playing much golf, doing a lot better. Doing a lot of therapy.

Like everyone up here, this is such a great week, American Century, NBC Sports, the greenskeeper, the fans, the volunteers, it's all first-class. We all love coming to compete. But all great people.

Obviously Mardy is a fantastic player. We have a legend in Annika. And obviously Smoltzy is as good a player as you're going to find. Just great to be in that company.

The atmosphere is spectacular. The course is in great shape. The wind is going to pick up, gonna change the course a little bit. But love the competition, love to compete.

You have you to make birdies. You're never out of it because in the Stableford, like Annika said, you can throw an eagle and a birdie. And you have to play smart golf and sometimes be aggressive and understand what it takes to win and make big putts when you have to.

Love the week. Everyone here is pulling in the same direction. They compete at the highest level. And we'll see how it ends up on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: Do the three of you look at Mardy, okay, perennial favorite now, or tough guy to beat? He's been playing great golf. What's it going to take to get him? Just more birdies, John?

JOHN SMOLTZ: The problem is I like Mardy a lot. I can't say anything bad about him. If I got an incentive for every time I've said "Mardy Fish," I would be very, very wealthy.

MARDY FISH: You are wealthy.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Even more wealthy. It takes a lot. It takes wind and it takes you making birdies. And that's definitely -- you know the one thing that we love, at least when your expiration of your sport is over, you love competition.

I don't know -- I'm always looking at the scoreboard. Maybe I should stop looking at the scoreboard and just concentrate on what I'm doing. I'm sure you never looked at the scoreboard, right?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I guess I'm expired, too. I do love

looking at the leaderboards and see what's got to be done and who is doing well.

But you're right, Mardy has done so well in this tournament several years. I hope he feels the pressure. I hope people are betting on him. I love playing with him. I love to get a chance to come down the 18th hole with any of the leaders and just see what they're made out of and see what I'm made of.

I think that's what makes this tournament so fun. The format on its own, it's not about pars, like John said. Unfortunately, I make a lot of those too. Here you have to be a little more aggressive. It changes the playing style a little bit. You've got to take a few risks.

But sometimes they pay off and sometimes they don't. But I think that's what we all want to see. I definitely think the fans and the people watching, they want to see that aggressive shot and see if it pans out when you need to.

We're going to keep pushing. None of us have given up. So hope you feel it, Mardy. But I'm just like John; he's such a nice guy. Nothing bad to say, other than just if you want to take a week off, this week would be okay.

Q. You had 83 points to win last year. That's the second highest in competition. Billy Joe Tolliver won in 2010 with 84. And Mark Mulder had 82. You're right in the middle there. That's up from 2020, when you won with 76 points. Since then -- I was starting to worry because the scores were all in the 70s -- that's the highest score since 2010. What can you do to duplicate that and get in the 80s?

MARDY FISH: I played really well last year after the first round. I played great on Sunday as well. Two years ago, Steph threw an eagle at me on No. 4, and I just couldn't get away from him, making birdies. He was making eagles and stuff.

Q. He still only finished with 75 points to your 83?

MARDY FISH: Four eagles from him. It takes -- I mean to get that many points -- I didn't look at Billy Joe's scorecard or anything; I assume there's eagles in there. I didn't make any eagles last year.

Again, seems like Saturday is my round here. 63 in 2020 on Saturday and then 64 last year.

I usually don't start very well. So I'm trying to figure out how to start better. That's my only critique of last year was I didn't start quite as well as I wanted to. We'll see.



Q. How are the greens looking for you so far?

MARDY FISH: They look good. I haven't made many putts like normal. The course is in great shape. The course is beautiful. We come here every year and it seems like it's beautiful. And we say this is the best we've ever seen it every year. This is the best we've ever seen it, so it's beautiful.

Q. John, you have a new training device for driving. Want to tell us about that?

MARDY FISH: Driving a car?

JOHN SMOLTZ: No, getting distance back, trying to stay within 30 of you. This right here, Shock Force. I've been training on it for two months now. I'm stronger than I've been. I've been training because my shoulders are terrible. I've been fighting that for a long time. I don't fight it anymore. It's one of the best things I've ever had and ever trained on. I've used a million things.

Basically golf is always about the older you get, the less distance. And you chase it with technology. And technology can only do so much if you don't train for it. You have no ability to kind of pick up that yardage loss.

So I've picked it up and hopefully it will be on display this week. But it still comes down to putting.

At least now I have the confidence to release the club without any reservations whatsoever. That's the best feeling I've had.

Q. In 2021, you had your highest score at 69 points and you were in second place. So how do you beat Mardy, with longer drives?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I've made one eagle in 15 years. I'm probably make three this week. That's the only way it's going to happen.

Q. Mardy, the first thing for you, if I may, you obviously won twice. Only five people have won three or more. Is that an important milestone to you?

MARDY FISH: No. I didn't know that. So, no. No, not that important. But I want to win.

Look, there's been a lot of players throughout the 36, 37 years that this has gone on. And there's been a lot of great entertainers and athletes who have been phenomenal golfers and sort of think about who is the best one of the lot.

You want to put your name up there when it's all said and done, too. I think about that sometimes. But not how many times can I win a tournament or something like that, no.

Q. Annika, your list of accomplishments is through the roof. Being the only woman winner here, what would that mean to you?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Obviously that would be super cool. I would be honored if that would happen. We've talked earlier, I've tried so many times. I would say it probably gets harder and harder every year. I'm close to John's age. I feel like maybe I should try the distance device.

MARDY FISH: What is it called?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Shockforcetrainer.com.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: There's not a lot of women playing in this event. I feel very honored to be one of the few to be here and appreciate it. I'm just going to do my best, see what happens. I've played in enough golf tournaments to know that you have to play one shot at a time and see what happens. Nothing changes. I still do that despite being retired for almost 18 years.

But once you're inside the ropes, you're still competitive. The juices are still flowing. I just have to channel everything I have and see what happens.

Q. For all of you, we all know who the main six or eight contenders are. Are there any other new talent out there in this tournament that you're keeping an eye on?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Not that I know. There's some new people playing this year. We'll see how they compete. Obviously, in this environment, I think, they have to get used to it a little bit. It's much different.

We have the advantage of obviously playing in this for a lot of years, playing at a pretty high level periodically here. But people step up and play well, but it's a three-day tournament. Like Mardy said, getting off to a good start is important, but staying consistent and making good golf shots and making putts, especially with Stableford, you're never really out of it.

There's obviously Tony and Mark Mulder. Joe Pavelski has played well. There's a lot of really good players that have an opportunity. Obviously, like we've all said, the competition is what we thrive for. We'll add them up at the end of Sunday.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Watch out for Austin Reaves.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Austin can play. Basketball.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Matt Ryan.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Matt Ryan. I'm happy the basketball guys, with Steph and Austin and things, Ray Allen is playing pretty well; played a round with him the other day. Nice to see some basketball guys out there.

Q. It struck me that you four come from different sports. Tony Romo sitting over there, a fifth different sport.

THE MODERATOR: Come on in, Tony. Let these guys take some shots at you.

Q. Not so much for Annika, but the other three, what about your sport do you think has helped you in golf? What most translates to the golf course?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I know for baseball and pitching, it's just about time. We've got the most time. I know we don't get credited as athletes because they think we're not, but we're actually the greatest athletes on the team because we chose the right position. So if you can choose the right position, like quarterback in football, it's up to everybody else to try to deal with it. But no, it's about time and reps.

We had 21 years of playing golf. We made 36 starts a year. And the rest of those opportunities, we played golf. It helped us stay in the game. We didn't try to get mechanical. We didn't try to make it another thing that we had to worry about; we just went out and had fun.

It grew on us, and all of us that played the game in our sport realized that golf has the longest expiration date. So that's really what drives everybody to that level.

Q. Vinny, how much did hand/eye translate? Steph and I talked about hand/eye translating from basketball to golf. How much do you think your basketball background helped you in this setting?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I think it's very important, but I also think with golf, like all the sports we play in and things, you have to put the time in. You have to practice and figure out what gets you in your comfort zone.

All of us obviously have different swings and different things we go about and how we do it, but obviously gotta get the ball in the hole at some point.

You have to make shots. In basketball, it's about making shots. Obviously in golf, hitting it in the right spots, making putts. I think the competitive nature of it gets you going in it. All of us obviously haven't all been successful in different sports and different things.

Annika is obviously a legend in women's golf and sports in general, just kind of what she brings to the tournament. But there's just a lot of great players here, a lot of great athletes, but at the end of the day, everyone's competitive. Tony's obviously had great success here. He's a fabulous golfer. Takes it very seriously.

So there's just a lot of really good players. That's what makes it fun to challenge yourself against the best players out there.

Q. Mardy, Steph said yesterday the banter between him and you is at an all-time high given you're both sort of defending champs. Can you sort of describe the interaction with him the last month or so?

MARDY FISH: All-time high for him is like, "Hey, good luck," kind of thing. That's like him like not wishing you luck.

No, it's pretty soft, to be honest. He's too nice. I've been trying to push the pressure onto him. He's the defending champion.

Q. Curious if you could each share what your current swing thought is, or if you have one and kind of what that means to you in your head?

TONY ROMO: I'll tell you Mardy's, it's a backhand, and he does it every time, just like in tennis.

MARDY FISH: I don't have one.

TONY ROMO: It's the only one. I've asked him, how do you do it? I feel like a backhand.

MARDY FISH: I just swing.

TONY ROMO: Which makes you good.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I just try to aim and fire. If I start thinking too much, nothing really good happens. Just aim at something and try to hit it at that spot and try to stay down through the shot, that's all I'm thinking about.

JOHN SMOLTZ: For me it's firing on my left side because I never could. Now I can. Fire on my left side. Two new hips and shockforcetrainer.com. That is the reason I can fire on my left side.



ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I'm always working on something. I have since the day I started playing this game. It's always something, fine tuning. I got some tips actually from our son, Will. He was telling me my hands were too far behind, so I better listen to him. Actually getting the ball a little higher in the air. I'm thankful for that. But this game, always something to work on, something to tinker around with. One of the reasons why I love it so much.

Q. Tony Romo, thanks for being here. Three-time winner. '18, '19 and '22, what is your game like? Last year was a little bit of a struggle, have you been playing?

TONY ROMO: Last year, I had a rough year the whole year. Just ball-striking. Wedge game, chipping got to where I -- I can remember playing in the Texas State Open where my first chip never actually hit the green for full rounds. That kind of persisted throughout the year.

This golf course, you need to hit wedges good. It's such an advantage. We worked really hard. Took a long time, probably until late spring this year, then it came on.

Sequence change for me. It's been pretty good here the last month or so. Just playing some of the tournaments I've had the scores I used to shoot. I'm actually a little bit better in the short game areas than I've ever been. So that gives me hope to go out here and challenge it, see how it plays out.

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