

American Century Championship

Friday, July 11, 2025
Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA
Edgewood Tahoe

Alex Caruso

Adam Thielen

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have a couple of our early leaders up on the stage for you. We have Adam Thielen, with 19 points. And we have Alex Caruso with 18 points. Nice opening round. Put a little bit of heat on guys. Tell us first of all about your round, Adam. What were the highlights?

ADAM THIELEN: Made a couple of birdies in a row. I forget what holes it was, but 1 and 2, maybe -- 1 and 2. So that definitely helped.

But a lot of scrambling, which you do out here, try to make some hard-earned bogeys and make a bunch of pars. It was good. Obviously you look back, man, I could have made a couple of putts coming in. I made a putt I shouldn't have made. So it all evens out.

ALEX CARUSO: It was a good day. Got off to a good start after 1. I missed a par putt and from there made a good putt on to get some momentum for par.

Just had a really clean round. Didn't do anything that special. I left a couple of birdies out there probably on the front nine for how well I was hitting it.

Then just kind of carried that momentum through the day, just kind of boring golf, really, greens and regulation, lag up there, tap it in, get to the next hole.

Q. Adam, this is your ninth year here. You've had three top-10s. In 2022, you finished tied for fourth with 58 total points, and last year's event you finished seventh with 58 total points. What do you think it might take you to win it this year?

ADAM THIELEN: I've got to start making some more putts and keeping it in play. But, yeah, for me it's, like, what I've learned out here, you take it one hole at a time. You don't try to put a number out there. You don't chase a number.



Just go hit a good tee shot, give yourself birdie ops.

The great part is as you play you get a better feel. A lot of us don't get to play every day. When you get out here, you get to play a couple days in a row, get some practice in, you start to get some feel.

Just give yourself looks and chances and I think the putter will come as the days go on here.

Q. Alex, second appearance. Your inaugural one was in 2022. We'll talk about how your game's improved back then. You tied for 61st and had minus-9 points. Today you've had 18. Tell us about that turnaround.

ALEX CARUSO: The goal for the tournament was to get positive points. So unless we have a catastrophic explosion we'll get there. I'm a golf aficionado. I got the bug like Adam and the other guys out here.

Just being competitive, you want to get better and you want to improve. You hit those couple shots around that keep you going. I've committed to really practicing, which is something, like he said, we don't get a lot of time to do. But in the summer and offseason I do that.

It's been a steady grind through the years. Luckily I'm in a high point in my game where things are kind of clicking.

Q. When you were both walking in, looking at the leaderboard, talking about Paveleski and the other guys. They've got a lot of holes left, are we going to be in the hunt. You're not on the favorite list -- you went off pretty good, but compared to those guys, the top three or four players, how do you feel your chances are? Do you feel realistic about winning this thing?

ADAM THIELEN: I mean, I think as competitors, we all think we're going to win, right? And you have to have that mentality.

But, for me, again, it's always good to just get some points on the board the first day, then settle in and go play your game. Kind of hit a lot of shots out there today that I wouldn't normally hit because of some nerves and just like



not trusting it.

But you know, as the weekend goes on, you get kind of more comfortable. And you play with good players as you go on and it just kind of motivates you.

Q. You've been in the top 10 a few times. You should be getting there. Alex, you're starting getting used to winning here. Congratulations obviously on the world championship in the NBA. You also won it in 2020 when you were with the Bulls.

ALEX CARUSO: Lakers.

Q. I think the thing you lost was the chip-off against the ladies?

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, but that was a loaded competition against Annika. We knew that was a long shot coming in.

Like you said, we're all competitive. That's why we're at the pinnacle of our sports respectfully. I think putting points on the board the first day kind of frees you up to go out there, swing a little free and not be grinding over the putts and kind of just freely rolling them.

Hopefully we can keep it rolling and make a few putts going on.

Q. The odds from Caesars Sportsbook, you both started out 22-1, and here you are. Nice playing.

Q. Alex, we've had Stanley Cup champions playing in this event. One won. Mario Lemieux won several years ago. And we have Matthew Tkachuk, Stanley Cup champion, playing this year and last year. But no one has won American Century Championship the same year as they won a championship of their sport. How are you feeling? You've got a great first day. Can you break that mold?

ALEX CARUSO: Maybe. We're going to need some help from, as we're looking at it, Joe just jumped to 20 -- I'm going to need some help probably from a couple other guys, but I'm going to give it my best. Like I said, make a few more putts and anything can happen.

Q. Adam, what is more excitement, playing here in ACC or being on the field with the Savannah Bananas?

ADAM THIELEN: More excitement? It's kind of two-sided question. The more excitement would be the Savannah Bananas. But what I have more fun doing is playing in the American Century Championship.

Q. I hope everybody in here knows what the Savannah Bananas what they do. They're the Harlem Globetrotters of baseball. My wife and I are watching their game, and there's Adam on the field. There's a great chance to embarrass him.

ADAM THIELEN: I tend to embarrass myself a lot when I try to dance. I had fun with it. So it is what it is.

Q. Given your given sports, how do your careers in your given sports help on you the golf course?

ALEX CARUSO: I think just, we mentioned before, you've got to be really competitive to get to the top of any sport, of any field.

So starting with that, you have to be really competitive to kind of be your best, and that's more or less what golf is. It's you against the course. It's you against yourself, how good can you be?

For me, that's what it really is, is the mental part of the game moving on to the next play, and, in golf, moving on to the next shot.

That's a big thing for me that I found success in basketball in getting to the NBA and staying there. That's something that I think has helped me translate into golf.

ADAM THIELEN: I don't think football helps me much with golf because when I have a bad play in football I can just go hit somebody. Unfortunately it doesn't work very well in golf.

ALEX CARUSO: Caddie wouldn't like that too much.

ADAM THIELEN: Yeah, caddie wouldn't like that too much.

But, honestly, I take a lot from competitive golf to what I do for my day job. It's one way that I can really work on my mental sport, sport mentality and just how to handle adversity.

In football, you're not out there by yourself. You have other teammates. You could have a bad play, no one would ever know. Where, in golf, it's all on you. You hit a bad shot, it's your fault. I think it really helps me translate to the football field how I can control my emotions and go and move on from play to play.

Q. Could you tell me about your foundations? Adam, the ones you started with your wife?

ADAM THIELEN: My wife and I started The Thielen



Foundation about seven years ago. Our mission statement is helping youth reach their full potential. Really, we kind of go for the youth that don't have the resources and opportunities that maybe my wife and I had growing up and really try to provide that -- provide opportunity, provide resources to know that they're cared for and loved.

We've seen just great results from that, that they want to be more active. They want to be in sports. They end up graduating high school and going to move on and do better and better things.

Just giving those resources. After that, it's up to them.

ALEX CARUSO: My foundation, Alex Caruso Foundation, is pretty new, within the last the year, year and a half getting started. It was something that as a young player professionally I always wanted to get to because I always saw the great players of the NBA and the NFL, and they always gave back to the community, and they had something they were doing for the fans that supported them.

So I think just being able to start that and support my local community back in Bryan/College Station, the Boys & Girls Club that I grew up playing basketball. I played in their summer league four, five years in a row.

And then moving on to Oklahoma City this year and making sure that the people who show up for me night in, night out and were screaming for me through the playoffs and into the finals for the championship are getting the same support that they show me.

Q. Doing something on active players competing for the title. When Steph won here in '23, he broke a 22-year drought of active players winning. You guys are close. You already answered question about whether or not you can win this year, but can you win even after your playing careers, do you have a better chance maybe after your playing careers?

ADAM THIELEN: Yeah, I mean, I know when I retire I'm going to spend a lot of time on the golf course and focusing on getting a lot better. Unfortunately, and fortunately, I don't have that time during the football season. So I take about a six-month hiatus from pretty much touching a golf club.

That really affects my game. Like he said, I've had a couple of top 10-finishes and I don't really get any better. So I'm right there.

Hopefully when I retired -- and God willing I'll get the invite back -- and I'll be much more polished.

ALEX CARUSO: For me, it's the same thing we kind of talked about. Just trying to get better. Part of that is the time to be able to put into the game because it is such a difficult sport to master and skill to master.

It's the same thing, once I'm done many years from now playing basketball, I'm probably going to be fighting with my wife about getting to the golf course too much because I really do just love the game of golf because it is something that's impossible to perfect, but that chase and the pursuit of it is kind of what keeps you coming back.

Q. What do you think might be different? 20, 30 years ago, active players didn't compete and they said -- or maybe the line of thinking was they just didn't have time. But now, you two, Steph Curry, Joe Pavelski, who just retired last year, you've all been in the hunt. What's different now than maybe 20, 30 years ago?

ALEX CARUSO: Just playing good golf. I don't know. It might just be a good group of guys that are coming through that are playing now. I don't really have the answer for that.

ADAM THIELEN: I think maybe more guys are playing. Like, you probably have a lot more guys in the NBA that are playing golf than ever before. Same thing in the NFL. We have 20, 30 guys in the locker room that love the game of golf. Doesn't mean they're great, but just more access.

You have guys that want to go play. You go play with your teammates, spend time together on the course. That might have something to do with it.

Q. And people like Rick Rhoden, Dan Quinn, the guys who won this a lot, they didn't have a celebrity tournament as a child to look at. When you guys were in high school, did you watch this and think, this is cool, if I get to that level, this is something I'd like to do?

ADAM THIELEN: I definitely kept an eye on it. But I didn't have any idea how amazing of an event it is and how amazing it is out here, just being out here.

American Century and NBC Sports do such a great job putting this event on. You literally feel like a professional golfer out here. I had no idea how amazing it was until I got here.

ALEX CARUSO: Same thing. I think, I didn't really get into golf until later in college, and then post-college, where I really started grinding on it.



But, yeah, I would always see it on the Golf Channel and catch the highlights, watch, there's a hole-in-one like every other year or something like that.

But just echoing what he said, it's such a great event to come back for my second time. I was just so thankful and excited to be back because it is such a special event.

Q. The crowds on 17, talk about the crowds out there, especially on 17 today.

ADAM THIELEN: I didn't really have it. I was early. I started on the back. It was obviously still early, but it was fantastic.

I think sometimes it's nice starting on the back nine because you don't have the craziness and the long waits on 16 and 17. But, yeah, there's nothing better.

Even yesterday, we were out on the boat, you could see in, there were a ton of boats yesterday, like, wow, that's pretty cool on a pro-am day.

I imagine that tomorrow is going to be even crazier.

ALEX CARUSO: I was the opposite. I started on 1. It was pretty rowdy by the time I got there. It's, honestly, fun.

For me, when I play golf back home or on the road, wherever I am, I'm usually listening to music. I'm playing with friends. We talk a lot. It's not as professional as a tournament setting. So getting into that arena at 17 creates -- it's fun for me because it feels more like my style of golf, my safe spot, rather than "quiet on the tee" and everyone's just staring, waiting for you to hit it.

Q. Speaking of the fans, Alex, you had a special interaction with a fan who you signed an autograph for today. Share about Charlie.

ALEX CARUSO: Charlie Melanoti [phonetic] -- you know, this whole week we sign autographs and take pictures. He gave me his. It's Charlie Melanoti, 2025, point guard, No. 13. Remember the name, up and coming. I'm going to.

That's what we were talking about it being such a special event, just the interaction with the fans, a chance for them to get one-on-one and personal connection when maybe they couldn't watching him from the seats or the sideline and watching me from the second deck.

It's things like that that, obviously the golf is great here, but the connection with the fans and the people that attend is what makes it a great event.

Q. Is that a good luck card?

ALEX CARUSO: I'm going to keep it in there. Maybe a hole-in-one on 17. If so, I'm going to bring Charlie on the bag for Sunday.

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