

American Century Championship

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Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Taylor Twellman

Press Conference

Test test test test

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Taylor Twellman

THE MODERATOR:

Q. Since we're here in lovely Tahoe, if you had to compare your golf game right now to a current player who is still alive in the World Cup, who would it be, Messi or Haaland?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Who hasn't played soccer for three weeks because of the World Cup? Good question. That's a really good one. I would say, no matter what I give you right now, there's so many good jokes to be had.

I'm going to say Harry Kane. Because Harry's not leading the Golden Boot race. He has really done a lot of little things well for England. He's been there in big moments, and I kind of feel like that's where my golf game is.

I'm never going to put myself in the position of Messi, Mbappé and Erling Haaland, and the fact that I just put myself in the conversation with Harry Kane, I should be punched in the face. I'll say Harry Kane.

Q. You've spent a lot of time around the MLS. I'd say one of the more controversial selections leading up to the World Cup was Sebastian Berhalter with the Vancouver Whitecaps. But now that's all said and done, he's probably one of the three that raises the values the most now, all these rumors about going to Europe. So my question for you is, what did you see out of him in this performance? I know he was on the bench mostly. Then the percentage you think that he's going to stay in the MLS through the summer?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I'll start with the MLS teams right now are probably sniffing around on whether or not they can keep him and make a trade with Vancouver, and how to navigate that. But the teams that are sniffing around



Sebastian Berhalter in England, that's going to be difficult for him to turn down. It says a lot when Mauricio Pochettino, he's the first guy off the bench. And it's a great reminder that social media at times can be a real cesspool. And when you think of the Sebastian Berhalter and the Berhalter family three and a half years ago in the '22 World Cup, after that the Berhalter family with their best friends growing up, and the Reyna family, I give Sebastian a lot of credit. I'm a huge fan of his. You give me ten Sebastian Berhaltes on any team, I'm going to win something, and if not, we're sure as going to kick some people and make sure they know about it.

I think he did a fantastic job, and I think it's going to be very interesting to see his next step. But I do think over the last 48 hours, MLS teams have sniffed around to see whether or not they can find a financial package that Vancouver would be interested but more so Sebastian to stay. But I'll be shocked if the lure of England and Europe doesn't keep him away.

Q. What would you say the program, both U.S. soccer, and the team, has to do to take the next step to get past where they've been stuck in the round of 16 for a quarter century? And do you think Mauricio should be brought back for a second term, or are you against World Cup coaches doing multiple terms?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: You know me well enough. I've always been one that says, I stand on the side of the fence that managers shouldn't get a second term. They should change the message.

Didier Deschamps has changed my mind a little bit, right? Naturally so. He could be coaching in his third straight World Cup final. I would also say Mauricio Pochettino didn't even get a really first term. So if U.S. Soccer believes that Pochettino and Mauricio believes that he can really put his fingerprint and blueprint on changing that team for the better, then I would consider this being the real term of his tenure.

United States Soccer Federation hired him too late. And the biggest issue for the way preparation went for the World Cup -- and anyone that turns a blind eye on this isn't



being honest. Three and a half years, they didn't take advantage of Copa América in their backyard. They were the first Copa América host to get grouped. They didn't have World Cup qualifying.

The quality of friendlies is very different nowadays with FIFA because of the Nations Leagues around the world. So the three and a half years preparation for '26, it wasn't at its best.

Now 2030 is coming around. You've got World Cup qualifying. That's going to help. You've got the Gold Cups and all of that. So it's going to be a little bit more like real preparation for that.

I don't have an hour to give you, but I will say this, on a macro level, if you're not asking the question, how do I have three Christian Pulisics, three Weston McKennies, three Tyler Adams, and three Chris Richards, then we might not be asking the right question, because the rest of the world that we're chasing to be in the final eight, final four, they're two or three deep at every spot, and they have world-class players like a Haaland and Mbappé and a Messi.

But if you're not going to create that superstar, you have to, in this ecosystem, ask the question, how do we get a bigger pool of players? And I've always been of the mindset, this sport has to be more inclusive.

And I've had more conversations at the American Century Championship this week about it because it shows you the growth of soccer and the World Cup and the attention to it, but youth sports in the United States of America is now a business. There's a massive issue with that.

Whether it's baseball, basketball, football, gymnastics, everything's expensive. That's not how it works. But basketball, baseball, basketball, and I would say hockey, they're not really asking that question because the United States is in the top four of every single of those sports.

In the United States, if you're chasing the rest of the world that is doing something that is very inclusive, then you can't be exclusive.

On a macro level, that has to be the question, and I'm a firm believer, if you address that, and we figure out the ages of 17 to 21 at the male level, then we will bridge that gap very quickly.

We're not far off, but we're also stuck because the round of 16 exit and the manner by which we lost to Belgium, everyone in the United States of America that's a general sports fan is asking the same question: Has anything

changed?

Even for those of us in the soccer world, absolutely. We could roll up our sleeves and we could spend an hour showing you how different this league is in MLS and how the young American players are viewed around the world. Absolutely. But we've got to get more players playing at a high level so the internal competition of the United States Soccer Federation raises the bar, and when the lowest tide raises all boats, now you're cooking with gas.

Q. Taking it down a notch or two from the intensity of your other answers.

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: My apologies. Feels fresh in my mind.

Q. Yes. You've played for the New England Revolution in the MLS. And your brother and father uncles played in the NASL?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: My brother played in MLS and my dad and uncles played in NASL.

Q. Can you compare and contrast the two leagues?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Yeah, absolutely. I'm better than my dad and my uncles. (Laughter)

Q. That's the answer I was hoping for.

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I know it was. First off, I was raised in a family that I had a grandfather that played 11 years in Major League Baseball, that played with Joe DiMaggio and the Yankees. I had a uncle that played on the PGA TOUR. Yet growing up, they all taught me you're no different than anyone else in their profession; it's a job. If you ever think you're bigger than the sport, it will bite you in the ass. I'm forever grateful for that.

And those uncles and my dad would slide tackle my brother and I in the backyard if they had a chance to. They wanted to remind us of who we were.

Listen, the NASL doesn't get enough credit in that generation, because when that league folded, a lot of them stayed within the youth climate of our country and coached and gave back to their communities, and I'm forever grateful for that.

Oftentimes, we forget our country, we think the World Cup in '94, that's where soccer started. That's extremely ignorant because that generation that played in the NASL, especially the American player, when there was only three Americans that were allowed to play, that was extremely

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difficult.

But if you think MLS is anything like the NASL, then we haven't paid attention, because the MLS has four teams right now worth a billion dollars, and we are on the verge of changing our league to fit with the top seven or eight richest leagues in the world and that schedule, and we are on the precipice of really doing something special.

The owners have done all the hardware that they needed, with stadiums, we got Chicago and New York City -- Boston eventually coming. Now when we do the software part, the players, the quality of competition, I can't wait to see what the 2034 and the 2038 World Cup looks like because MLS is going to have a big blueprint and a big fingerprint on those teams.

And yes, I'm better than my dad and uncles.

Q. In ability, maybe not statistics, who is better, Messi or Pelé?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I just said I was better than my dad, and my dad now is going to hear me say that Messi's better than Pelé.

I've not seen anything like it in my life. I get choked up talking about it because in life you don't really fully understand. Like, it's a job to call games, but it is an honor and a privilege to be seeing greatness. He's 39 years old.

Fathertime has knocked on the door. They've called his cell phone. They've sent an email. He's not answering. It's truly remarkable. We've all watched this in the World Cup. And everybody told him his career would die and end in MLS. He's the oldest player to have a hat trick in the World Cup, after MLS. He's got how many goals? In the World Cup right now, he's got eight, nine, whatever the number is. It's nine. It's ridiculous.

He's honestly the greatest thing I've ever seen. And Pelé, I had the pleasure of meeting him twice and having dinner with him once. I know you're looking down on me right now, wishing you could punch me in the face, but Messi is the greatest player I've ever seen and I think the greatest player ever.

Q. Your own accolades, you were the youngest --

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Do not put me in the same conversation of Messi and Pelé. I can hit a golf ball better than those two.

Q. I don't know if everybody recognizes, you were the youngest player in MLS.

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Yes.

Q. A, B, C, D, E, youngest player in the MLS to score 100 goals?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Yes, but that was on a good team. For everyone listening, I did not compare myself to Messi and Pelé. (Chuckles)

Q. Obviously I'm curious your thought on his impact on MLS but curious how you and him and Hugo Kuipers can work together? It's a really unique thing when you're bringing in that type of striker next to the current MLS Gold Boot winner.

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Yeah, Hugo Kuipers has been a home run signing. That's been unbelievable. And, listen, great players like to play with great players. So my money's on Greg Berhalter finding a way. Absolutely. I'm not really concerned about that. And good luck trying to stop Chicago because that just becomes really difficult task.

I want to say something, I've said this for years, listen, Chicago Fire fans and I have a great love-hate relationship. I love Chicago. My father played for the Chicago Sting. My brother was born there. We've had family there for years. It's unequivocally one of the top five sports markets in our country. And for Joe Mansueto to come into MLS, take over Chicago Fire, build the training facility, now build this fantastic stadium going downtown, to then add the Lewandowskis of the world and potentially Goretzka, they're all chasing him as well, we are very lucky that the Mansueto family really believed in the Chicago Fire and the projection that it needed to go. That stadium goes up. That thing is going to be a home run.

Lewandowski is one of the top five best strikers of my lifetime. I was done when he started to come up, but even now, if I was playing, I would have 100 percent watched his game and tried to steal little things that he does. He's going to bring immediate class to the Chicago Fire.

But what Greg Berhalter's system doesn't get enough credit -- listen, Greg was a former teammate of mine -- I've been very critical of Greg Berhalter as the national team coach, but his system is just suited for a 9 that scores goals.

Now, he's going to have to find a way to figure out with two 9s, but what a great problem to have. And I think the Chicago Fire fans will have a lot of fun. I cannot wait to call a game in that stadium because that thing's going to blow the doors off this league very quickly.



Q. Your grandfather played with Joe DiMaggio and Yankees. What was his name?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Jim Delsing. It was my mom's dad.

Q. Obviously many American soccer fans are still hurting after the loss to Belgium. Just to talk about the next World Cup in 2030, what does U.S. Soccer need to do to try to improve themselves so that we can break out of the round of 16 and move on to the quarters, maybe the semis? What does U.S. Soccer need to do internally to fix themselves for the future as well?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I think I tried to answer this with Ron. I would say this. The 2030 World Cup preparation will be better for the team because they'll play more meaningful games. They'll play away World Cup qualifiers. That helps you create bonds and experiences.

You're also going to have a generation of Tyler Adams, Wes McKennie, Chris Richards, and Christian Bulisic that are going to want to rectify what happened in Seattle. That's hard to quantify. I don't know how to quantify that.

So listen, the Cavan Sullivans of the world and the younger generation that are coming up, we've got to integrate them. They've got to play a ton of minutes. We've got to get the 17- to 21-year-old player that is an American player. We've got to get them more meaningful minutes around the world.

MLS has done a pretty good job, but everyone's got to evolve and improve. That's life in any profession. But the similar answers to Ron, we need, the United States Soccer Federation, needs three players at each position to push each other, otherwise you have complacency at times, and that doesn't get you anywhere.

When you look at France, is there a better development system around the world, France, Senegal, Morocco, Algeria, Ivory Coast? Look at the rosters of those five World Cup teams and how many of them were developed at some level in France. Now they're fishing. That didn't bring them for the Allez les Bleu. But the point is, they develop players. We've just got to develop more players.

Q. Talking about the pipeline. What do you think the SEC, the Big Ten, the ACC and other collegiate conferences could do to improve the situation for America, likely for 2034, as opposed to 20 --

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Interesting question. First off, Title IX, the men's side, we don't have teams in the SEC. We

don't have teams in the Big 12.

So the college landscape -- I don't care what anyone says because I know this to be a real belief. There's still a real value to having that. Now, first off, the NCAA's treated soccer barbarically for -- you play 20-some-odd games in three months. Meanwhile, they changed the basketball schedule, the baseball schedule, football, we all know is its own entity and everything. Every other sports has been treated with respect of evolution and how it's played.

My father played the same schedule I did 20 years before me in college. It makes no sense. Now college has addressed it. They're going to change it. There's split seasons. We just need games. To answer your question in a different way but it will answer it this way, every scout around the world, when they text me and call me, and everyone that's watching the United States youth landscape, they don't bring up anything up to the age of 16 because we're kind of doing things at a pretty good rate. I still think we can be more inclusive, less expensive, not spending four hours in the car, all that. But you know what I'm saying. That's a kind of different conversation.

But they all say, 17 to 21, we're still behind the 8-ball. Around the world, those players are getting meaningful minutes. We need a huge pool of players that are getting meaningful minutes.

You might not know it's 17, 18, 19. Jamie Vardy would have been kicked out of the United States soccer landscape in the blink of an eye. And we found him later on in his career with Leicester City and all of that. So that's where college can help. But they've got to change the landscape. They should be allowed to play more games. It should be more cost-effective so they don't need to hide behind the Title IX cost in football and all that, and allow them to play as many games as possible. Get your education. All of that.

There's huge value to college. It's just the NCAA has got to treat it with the right respect, the way they treat all the other sports that they've changed the rules for.

Q. We want to keep Sebastian Berhalter here. So don't go getting him going anywhere else.

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I know you do. They should have signed him a lot sooner, instead of letting him get to this point, but I digress.

Q. Touching on the strength of competition and opposition. We've had this debate in Canada. I think it's fair for the U.S. and Mexico as well. CONCACAF isn't the most testing environment. Do you see a point

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down the line for CONCACAF and CONMEBOL could merge and you're just looking at a combined qualification path that way, just to get tested more?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I've said this numerous amount of times, I think personally -- it's not saying anything about Europe -- but I think the United States would be so prepared for the World Cup and that kind of battle if they played more South American teams. I do.

Now, I also say that because UEFA is such a money-making machine right now with the Nations League, that my generation, and even the generation after me, you could find friendlies against Germany and Italy and all these other teams, and you just, quite frankly, don't have the time to do that now.

But if you can find on this hemisphere some kind of way, as travel is a huge impediment to this, but if you can find a way to test yourself, I think you're really preparing yourself at a better clip for the World Cup.

Now in saying that, I think everyone on this Zoom will appreciate this comment. I've been very impressed with Africa, this World Cup as a whole. I think Africa has done a real good job with their tactical evolution, their ability to understand in different situations, oftentimes it would be a real Helter Skelter kind of game. Africa and their continent has really impressed me this tournament.

Now, travel makes that almost more difficult, obviously. But the evolution of the game in Africa has impressed me. But to answer your question very directly, if the United States men play the South American teams more, it's only going to improve.

Q. Want to ask you about the New England Revolution, fourth in the eastern conference under Marko Mitrovic. Thoughts on the team. But I'm also really curious about this upcoming transfer window. Chris Tierney, a guy you know well, is now the general manager. He said they're going to bring a designated player. Tom Bogert has announced that Matt Turner is coming back, but he probably won't be a DP. What do you think they do with that slot and do you think anyone maybe goes out during this window?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: First off, Marko's been really good with the Revolution and changing the culture and believing in the young players. It looks like the Revolution players are enjoying their work and enjoying their vocation and getting after it.

So, first and foremost, Marko's really had his finger on the pulse. That in turn leads to the promotion of Chris Tierney,

because Chris Tierney was massive behind Marko and his hiring.

He believed that this was the time for the Revolution to have that kind of hire. They've got to get the designated player spot right. They've hit a home run, as you've heard me about Carlos Gil. He's arguably, if not the best player in Revolution history, he's 1-A, 1-B. It's interesting. You've heard rumors of Jack Harrison potentially coming back to MLS. I know the Revs were sniffing around that. I think Matt Turner coming back is massive. He can't be a DP, though.

In the current climate of MLS, in the way the roster rules, even though they will change with the schedule change and all that coming up, I just don't think it's the smartest idea to have a goalkeeper as a designated player. So Matt Turner coming back is massive.

It's interesting, I don't know what they do with it. Because if you ask Chris Tierney directly, he could probably give you two positions that they desperately need to complete the team. That's where it becomes interesting. If it's a guy like a Jack Harrison that's been reported out there, well, that's interesting, that tells you they believe they need production in wide areas and all of that after spending money at the 9 position.

Q. What two positions would you say, from your perspective, not Chris Tierney, that the Revs need?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: You're asking the wrong guy because I'll always say, if you get a guy that can score you 25, 30 goals, you sign that guy. But those guys cost. They cost real money now. So I don't know. When I watch the Revs play, there's still something for me that says, if you have a top 5, 6, a top 5, 6, I've always been a believer that is the most important position on the field, does that change the Revs. I also believe a wide player makes them better. So for me, to answer your question, it's a wide player or somebody in the middle of the park that can run the show. Not a Colecio (phonetic), but run the show and running all over the field and controlling the tempo of the game.

Q. I know you love talking about the World Cup, but kind of a golf question. You are at 12-to-1 odds, so still not quite the favorite, but you were leading 51 holes into this tournament last year.

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: My dog died, too, do you want to talk about that too, cool? (Laughter).

Q. My question for you is how is your game, and do you not feel slightly disrespected about these still

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pretty high odds considering how good of a golfer you are?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: First off, they're allowing a soccer guy to play in the American Century Championship. So first off, Jonathan Thomas, Jon Miller and Mike Milthorpe and Company, thank you because I may be the only celebrity in the tournament that has to work for a living.

We all laugh, but it's kind of true. The odds are what they are. Until I showed the ability in the final five to six holes of the tournament to go 2-, 3-under, then I expect to be where I am on the odds.

But the thing about golf is I'm not playing against anyone. I'm playing against the golf course. So it is so much fun for me, because I've played with John Smoltz, who chips in three out of seven holes. I'm like, what is this? Or Mardy Fish or Joe Pavelski. I haven't played with Steph yet. But, yeah, it's me against Edgewood. And Edgewood got the better of me last year -- and if Edgewood behaves this year, which, by the way, this course has never been in this good of shape. Unbelievable shape. Probably because it was a harsh winter. Not a ton of snow. But the course has been absolutely gorgeous. We'll see. I believe I should be where the odds are because I believe people like you should enjoy those odds.

Q. I know that you have a great relationship with Tim ream. I want to know how difficult it was for you to see your fellow St. Louisian have some rough moments there down the stretch?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: I mean, it doesn't matter where Tim Ream or Matt Freese are. Any athlete will tell you, it's difficult. Your heart goes out to them. You get a pit in your stomach.

As quickly as you feel like you're on top of the world, sports can humble you quicker than anything. And I'm playing a sport that probably does it better than any of them. But I feel this. Tim's had a hell of a career. He'll show up at Charlotte and he'll be a consummate professional, but I'm not going to sit here and lie to people and say that that's going to be an easy one to swallow, and he and Matt Freese, those moments. They didn't lose that game because of that. Everyone on the field had arguably their worst game they've had in a long time at the worst moment.

But that play, down 2-1. I thought the momentum had changed a little bit in the second half. I thought Giovanni Reyna coming in was good, right move, getting dust off the field, all of that. That's a tough one. I feel for him.

But when you retire and you move on, you think about the good moments and you hold your head high, and I'm not sure there's been a better professional than Tim Ream. And my money is on Matt Freese rectifying that mistake and he'll be better for it.

Q. The World Cup this year has been a massive success popularity-wise, especially in the country. You also previously mentioned the league changing the calendar next year. How big of a miss was it to not have that calendar switch lineup with the World Cup this year and have the new season starting once the World Cup is over?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: It's a great question. And honestly, we need to make this abundantly clear. The fact that we're actually changing the schedule is massive. And I've talked about this for maybe five, six years, along with everyone else.

But I'm not sitting at the power broker table, and I don't own an MLS team to offer my perspective, but when I speak to them individually, I just tell them, you're going to spend 20 to 30 percent less on players, and you're going to make 20 to 30 percent more, but also the most important part is your most important games are going to be away from the NFL. That's massive.

The weather in the United States is brilliant in April and May. And you align yourself up with the international calendar. It's huge. It's massive.

Should it be happening now? Sure, we could probably have that argument and say, yeah, absolutely, it would be awesome if we had it now. It would be great. But the moment it does happen, I don't know if all of us are going to sit back and think about, well, I can't believe we missed the first six months of 2027. I'm just so happy that they're doing it because it's going to lead to more systematic changes that it's going to further grow MLS. It's going to further grow the game and the American player is going to benefit from it.

So I'm not dodging the question. I'm so thankful that we're actually talking about it coming to fruition, that if the byproduct is we're not doing it right now -- I mean, I would have done it right now, sure, absolutely. But it is what it is. The other last thing I'll say to this, I think everybody in the room should think about this, I don't remember, since COVID, the last time people came together in this manner, collaboratively, collectively and enjoyed life again.

And America took a real negative, negative hit with the World Cup and hosting and ticket prices and all this. Show me a picture where they haven't delivered. And so it just



feels like life is back and the World Cup should take a lot of credit for that.

I'm very thankful that this country that I love and I played for, it has shown itself in a real positive light, because as that German fan said in Boston, if you read the news, you'll never go to America. But when you get here, you feel like you're in heaven. Hard to argue with that one. And the ranch dressing.

Q. What role do you see MLS playing in helping that 17 to 21 group that you're talking about? And also MLS has got different models. You know how the Seattle Sounders built up within Miami. Does that need to be unified, or are you okay with that model, different models?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: Let's start with the model first. I think the league is on real strong foundation where you can allow a little bit more diversity of thought on how to build the team.

If you want to build the team based on academy and not go out and sign three or four designated players, you absolutely can do that.

But if you are a team that wants to put in 50, 60, 70 million and go out and have five, six, seven of those guys, I think it would be good for the league. I would like to see it.

When I talk to Liga MX's teams, when they come League's Cup, which is coming up here in August, or even CONCACAF Champions Cup, they're a little worried that when Major League Soccer owners turn up the notch, change the gauge a little bit, and bring in a little bit more heat, it's going to put a dent into them.

So I'm excited for that. I think it needs to happen now, and I want it to happen now. But I think what sport is great, in this sport in particular, there's a million ways to skin a cat. You can do it a million ways. You can win games a million different ways, and I think MLS is at a time where they could probably do that a little bit more.

Q. And the 17 to 21?

TAYLOR TWELLMAN: The more highly competitive games the 17-, 18-, 19-, 20-, 21-year-old kid is getting, the more minutes they're going to get in MLS. But you cannot force an MLS team or owner to have to do that.

But in my opinion, if I'm an owner in MLS in the United States, that is a huge -- the league 30 years ago was founded on the basis of the American player giving them a platform to play.

We can't lose sight of that. But you can't force it. Because a team like Inter Miami that wants to do it a different way while still growing the league, you should allow them to do it that way.

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