

American Century Championship

Thursday, July 9, 2026

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Jake Owen

Tony Romo

Annika Sorenstam

Press Conference



But I just enjoy myself. I think the best part of being here is with my family and watching them have as much fun as I'm having. And I think, honestly, because with all respect to these incredible athletes and stuff that are here, one of the reasons I got out of being an athlete as a kid is I don't think I was that great of a competitor. I don't think I really put that much emphasis on winning or losing. I just kind of liked being there.

And I will say that I think now, at my age, that actually comes into play for me as a benefit, because I come here with just the idea, hey, I'm going to play as good as I can play. We'll see what happens. And I think after three years of playing, I've been able to figure the course out a little bit. I got the green speeds down better than the first couple of years, and I just kind of used that whole carefree attitude to my benefit.

Q. If you're fortunate enough to win, you'll be the only second player who's not a professional athlete to win the tournament. Jack Wagner won twice, and that's it, embarrassing every athlete in the field.

JAKE OWEN: Like I said, I'm just happy to be here. I'm going to do the best I can and we'll see what comes along with it. Like you said, it's gotten better each year. We'll see what happens.

Q. Tony, 8-to-1 this year. I think you're probably used to being more like a 3-to-1 guy here. Do you know why that might be? I know you battled injuries a little bit the last few years.

TONY ROMO: I think it's because I stunk at golf for a few years. That's probably why you slowly move back.

I had a little bit of success here for a long run. And then little injuries, one year was the wrist. I had broke it, didn't realize before I got here.

But you love the tournament so much you try to play through it and everything. That took a good year of time off almost with the wrist.

I just don't think I came back with the same ability that I

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Annika Sorenstam. Over her career, 94 worldwide victories, including 72 LPGA titles and 10 major championships.

And how about this stat? After 18 years of being off the LPGA tour active playing, she's still the all-time money leader, 18 years. She's done a great job in this tournament, third-place tournament in 2024. She's one of the tournament's top contenders year after year. And the odds in the sportsbook have her at 9-to-1 this week.

Tony Romo is here. 13 years in the NFL. Playing with the Dallas Cowboys, finished as the franchise's all-time leader in passing yards and touchdowns. Four Pro Bowl selections. He's done pretty good here at the American Century Championship as well, with three titles.

And Jake Owen is here. Jake, thank you for being in the room. You finished third last year, and I'll tell you what, we've got a great athlete here.

Q. Jake, your first year here in 2020 -- I think it was your first year in 2023. 2023, you had 43 points for a tie for 14th place. Then you increased it in 2025 by eight points for 51 points overall, and ninth place. Last year you came in third, 62 points. You added 11 points. You're averaging about a 10-point push per year. How do you think you'll do this year? Do you think you can get to 70? And what will that do for your score?

JAKE OWEN: I've been lucky enough to play with Annika the last two years. I just kind of follow her lead, see how to do this golf course. But I've been fortunate just to be immersed into this.

I'm not an athlete, per se. I played a little bit in college.



had previous to that.

And then kind of got off in the chipping, and for sure on the chipping. Driving a little bit, too. It's been a long road since then.

But I feel like this winter I kind of turned the corner where I feel comfortable enough where I can step up and hit and don't have to take 20 practice swings and slow the group down forever. It feels more comfortable than it has in a long time.

Q. Annika, you play from the same tees here as the men. Is that not right?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: They moved me up on a few holes.

Q. But with that in mind, I'm curious how many yards normally you're behind your playing partners in this tournament?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, of course, it depends on who I'm playing with. But I've been over 100 yards sometimes behind some. But I try to just focus on my own game, try to hit fairways and greens. That's what I've always done.

But with age coming up here, I feel like I'm getting shorter. Feels like everybody is getting longer.

But I've just got to play with what I have and excited to be here. I'm just thankful to be here and play with these guys and some of the others. It's the highlight of the week.

Q. You say you focus on your own game. But is it still a little difficult mentally to every time realize that you're hitting 5-irons when some guys are hitting pitching wedges?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: It would be nice, but the reality is what it is. I remember on tour, I was longer than some players. You've just got to play your own game.

But certainly the last 10, 15 years, there's a big distance gap. But I'm used to it now. So I've just got to focus on my strength. And we know it's about getting the ball in the hole. Not really, you know, how; it's how many. I don't try to let it bother me. I'm just excited to be here.

TONY ROMO: Her 5-irons are still inside of a lot of the pitching wedges.

Q. Jake, I think seven of the last eight winners here have been first-time winners. I think you might think

you could be the next one. But how hard is it once you get that close to actually finish the job here?

JAKE OWEN: I found that out last year. I think I had, like, four or five holes left. I was in the last group. And my caddie said, "Dude, you're leading this thing. You could win." And I said, "Why would you tell me that right now?" There's a reason I got out of competitive sports.

But I will say, my dad was mad at me this morning because I placed money on myself to win. But my odds are, like, 1800-to-1. I'm in on that. I'm not even a big gambler.

But I played pretty well yesterday. And I've been playing pretty well the last year or so. So I'm not like an arrogant person when it comes to thinking that -- but I believe in myself, and I think that's the major key to anything.

And I've learned, playing with so many great players, that the ones that I play with, I look at them sometimes and think, it's not like they're swinging it any better than other guys on tour, but their mind is right. I just come out with a happy mind and go to the arcade with my kids and see what I can do.

Q. Annika, every year you have to put up with all of these guys. I look at it and I think the question always comes up, oh, yeah, they're a lot longer than you off the tee and whatnot. You've won 72 titles and 10 majors. I've got to think there's a little intimidation factor on your behalf, would you agree?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I don't know. You should ask them. Certainly I'm very proud of what I've achieved in my career. It's a lot more than I ever thought I could. Again, just to come here and hang out with these guys and some of the other celebrities and amazing athletes, it's so much about this sport that we come here.

And, of course, I look at my resumé, it's great, but when you're here, it's more, like Jake said, it's more about family and friends and having a good time and playing the sport together.

Today is the pro-am, and we're playing with sponsors. I don't really stand there on the first tee and kind of go through my resumé by any means.

You stand there and you have to focus on this particular shot right at this moment. It's that drive. It's that putt. So I like to rely a little bit on my experience.

Like Jake said, it's a lot in the head. My mind is still there. Physically it's just harder. I just don't have the club-head speed anymore and the strength. Just gotta be positive



and enjoy to be out here, which is really what it's all about.

Q. Tony, are you intimidated when she gets up to the tee?

TONY ROMO: Always. Everyone's always intimidated by Annika. She's very strong. She's the best. She can lessen the tension, create an environment that makes everyone feel warm. She loves to compete. She's just really good.

I mean, if she makes putts, she's going to be in the mix to win each year. And I feel like you're going to see 14 different looks at it. Whether she makes six of them or two of them is going to be the score of the day.

It's just fun, because being around people like that, you get to learn, and you're always seeing something you want to go practice and do.

Q. Jake?

JAKE OWEN: I'm going to say something that I think is the most beautiful thing that I've heard in a while. My mom and I were talking about this at breakfast. My mom was chatting with Mike, who I've been lucky enough to get to know playing with Annika. The nicest guy in the world.

But my mom was asking him about their marriage and how long they've been. And what you guys keep mentioning about Annika, her stats and things like that. What I found, which was the most beautiful thing was Mike said, "You know what? She's a great golfer but she's a way better human being than she is a golfer."

And I can tell you and attest to that, that I only knew Annika as a golfer my whole life watching her play. And it wasn't until I got to play with you -- you're a pretty awesome golfer, Annika, but you're an amazing person and it's been a pleasure to play with you.

Q. Tony, you had a couple of PGA TOUR, maybe a couple of Korn Ferry starts a couple years back. I wanted to ask you what you took from those starts that you can bring to Lake Tahoe, maybe from a competitive advantage or what you took from the other pros, how they warm up and play?

TONY ROMO: I played with all those guys in Dallas, Scottie, Jordan, Will -- guys, you learn so much just being around them. From those starts, it's funny how, I think, the last PGA one I was in was -- what's the one in California? Napa. I actually shot, like, 70 in the first round. Was 20th or something. Then I came back with, like, a 77.

The two differences was putting. Like, literally, the ball was in pretty similar spots, and I just -- I think I was, like, second in strokes gained in putting on day one, and last or second-to-last on day two.

What you take away is you probably need to practice that more than you think. And I think that's one of the things that I feel like I've put a lot of time into coming here.

Q. Annika, for about a year and a half now, you've been golfing with Caitlin Clark. How has that affected your competitive mindset being around one of the greatest women athletes of all time?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: It's great to have her at the tournament, The Annika, driven by Gainbridge in Tampa. As you know, she's so popular. She brings a lot of people to our tournament, to the pro-am. She creates a lot of extra buzz.

And it's fun to see female athletes. I mean, I've been around some other great athletes, mostly men, when it comes to other sports. So therefore to get a female athlete of her caliber at our event, just I guess it brings back memories when I was younger, a little more hungry and energetic and motivated. And when you're in your peak, you just kind of -- that's all you live for.

But she's a great person. She loves the sport as everybody knows. She's quite the athlete. So fun to have her. And you see people, they go crazy around her. It brings more people to the sport.

But super proud of her and what she's trying to do. And it's been a little tough season for her. I think we all cheer for her in so many ways. And I wish they would give her a little more space and give her a chance to compete a little better. But that's sports, right?

Q. Quick question about 17, the most, probably, popular hole out here. Tony, in football stadiums, Jake, concert venues, Annika, major championships. When you guys get on 17 tee and you have those crowds around you, how do you prepare yourself for those tee shots, especially on Saturday, with all the crowds around you, to focus on that one tee shot?

TONY ROMO: Well, I think you get more used to it the more years you play in it. On top of it, you get it a little bit on the pro-am day. So it's like get to almost rehearse the shot so you understand it. I actually think they should have a hole like that in every tournament. Obviously they do in Arizona.

I think it's really fun for the game. I think it's a great thing.



Obviously, you've got to watch some of the fans going too far.

But I think it does, I don't want to say separate sometimes, but you've got to block that out and hit a golf shot. Sometimes it's tougher than you think for some people. But if you play golf and you hit the ball and you know your fundamentals, it's like you can just step up and hit it.

But it makes it more fun. I like it. I think it's an enjoyable experience. I think the fans like it and the people interacting. It can be a really enjoyable thing.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I love it, too. I think that's part of this tournament. I think that's what makes this tournament the way it is. And it's not just maybe 17. You come down there on 16 and then 18 and the whole thing, it's like you are waiting for it, the anticipation of coming down those last three.

I welcome it. But it's easy to say. Now I'm not at my peak, so it's different. You had crowds when you were -- loud -- in your peak. And yesterday, you want people to be noisy, right, you want them to sing along.

When we played, we had quiet signs. We come from a different perspective. But I think it's fun here, and I love it. It makes you want to hit a good shot because you know they get more loud if you do.

JAKE OWEN: I agree with that. My whole career of playing music, I've really enjoyed the bigger the party, the more fun it is.

Surprisingly enough on that hole throughout this tournament, I've made a lot of birdies. It makes me laugh because I think I've always been the guy that's like, a hey, watch this guy kind of dude. Sometimes, like, I ride in the line of failure is actually fun for me because the idea of pulling it off is just so fulfilling that I think in that moment it's the one hole where you go out there and in your mind you're kind of like, all right, y'all watch this. And there's music blaring, which I'm used to that anyway. So I find comfort in that hole. Like Tony said, it's such a great thing for golf.

Q. I'm sure that before you played in this event, you've watched it. This is year 37 of the event. Can you guys comment just on the growth of this event over the years, from even from 15 years ago, to kind of where it is today?

TONY ROMO: I think what Jon Miller and Jonathan Thomas have created, it's just unbelievable. It's like the standard model, and it's come from a vision, like you said

at the very beginning, from a few people and then to what it's created.

You just see what it's done for the area. I remember when I first got here, none of this was here. It was like I was staying in a little house right over here that next year it was gone. It's like, what's going on.

So this thing has just helped the entire city and area so much. I think it all started from this golf tournament.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I would echo that. What American Century has done, I mean, how they're activating this tournament, bringing customers and friends. It's not just the players having a good time. It's family members.

I mean, you came earlier in the week. You've been here. We do so much before the event. So I think partners are happy. Spectators love it. There's not a single person -- I believe you guys, media love it, too. They just created something I think people look forward to. That's just a wonderful concept. Obviously echo what you said about the community.

Everybody just says go to Edgewood, American Century Championship, here it is, we're coming. I want to congratulate them. And of course what American Century does giving back to charity. We pitch it every year but when you look into it, they do amazing things for the medical community.

JAKE OWEN: I echo what Annika was just saying, and as well as Tony. Jon Miller and Jonathan Thomas, and last night Jonathan was talking about how they give American Century gives 40 percent of everything that they make back to healthcare and research.

I think we all doing what we do for a living, that's a big part of what we all do, is that importance of giving back.

You can see it, as Tony said, I've only been here for a few years, but in the few years I've been here, I've seen an incredible increase in not only the crowds, but the golf course is incredible, the community has grown.

Again, I'm just happy to be here and be a part of it and proud of what American Century and NBC Sports is doing for this.

Q. Annika, you just brought up the charity component. Obviously you have a foundation that's very active and getting a lot of women involved. Tell us a little bit about that, if you would.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Thank you. We try to give back



to not just junior golfers now. Some of the college players and first-year players on the LPGA. But we have nine global tournaments around the world.

We have over 1200 girls that play in our initiative. We're giving back almost \$10 million to the sport. So players you see on the LPGA or players you see on the Epson Tour, or the ANNIKA Women's All Pro Tour, they've gone through one of our tournaments. So it's really cool. We're very, very proud of that. And obviously tuning into Evian, we had 57 players teeing up in one of our events. So I feel very lucky. And we've done some of the initiatives here in the Tahoe area and just really proud to be able to empower and advance young women through the game of golf. So I love when we see young girls out here coming out with little golf hats and autographs and obviously that touches my heart. So it's good to be -- they look at all athletes, they're great role models. So we've got to be good out there.

Q. Jake, do you have some buddies in the recording industry to talk to you about this event or how you do? Are they teasing you a little bit, are they cheering you on, or what's the reaction you get from your billion dollars?

JAKE OWEN: I have a lot of guys really jealous that I'm out here and I tell them the same thing just how incredible of a week this is. And hopefully as the tournament continues to grow, too, maybe they can incorporate some more entertainment artists and things because there's a lot of great golfers as well that play. They're definitely jealous, for sure.

Q. Annika, everybody out here is competitive. Most of you guys are athletes, professionals that have excelled. What would it mean to you to be the first woman to win this tournament?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I mean, it would be amazing. I keep trying every year, I keep trying, and I'm thankful to get the invite. Obviously I'm running out of time. Every year I come in with a positive mindset and hoping maybe this is the year. We'll see. I feel pretty good. I always do when I come into the tournaments. I feel ready, and it's just gotta click. But as you know, in golf you never know what the other players are doing.

I feel like the field is getting tougher. The players are getting better. Just listening to Tony here, he's competing a lot more than I am on a regular basis. I know John Smoltz does and Joe does.

They're out there regularly competing, and I think that's really what I'm missing. But there's not much for women at

my age to go out there. Not just to say that's really what I want to do every week, but a little more competitive round would certainly be helpful.

Q. For you to win this, it's usually about the putting, isn't it?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, I would say so. I hit fairs and greens. So I'm going to try to hit it closer, isn't that what Ben Hogan said? Just hit it closer. So that's a good thing.

Q. Who's reading your putts, is it your caddie reading your putts?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Yeah, it's a little mixed. I try to go with feel. So we'll see what happens this week; but yeah, no, it's good to have another set of eyes. I try to get Will on the bag. He's got young, fresh eyes. We gave him the option, right, Mike?

I think he wants to hang out with his buddies. There's so much to do here in Lake Tahoe that's distracting him, so it's too bad, it's too pretty and too nice around here.

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