

American Century Championship

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Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Larry Fitzgerald

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have Hall of Fame-bound Larry Fitzgerald with us this afternoon.

Q. Tell us your feelings right now going into Canton?

LARRY FITZGERALD: I'm really excited about it in a few weeks, but right now I just want to come out here this week and hold my own. I got a couple of games with some guys out here that I need to beat -- Ray Allen, Dwight Freeney, Jerome Bettis, Nate Bargatze, a few others. This could be a very lucrative trip or a very expensive trip. That's what I'm really worried about.

After I leave on Sunday, we'll start to refocus my attention back onto what's going on in Canton in a few weeks.

Q. Have you already prepared your speech?

LARRY FITZGERALD: Yes, sir. I have it. It's now just about making sure I perfect it.

Q. Do you think any of it might change between now and then?

LARRY FITZGERALD: Oh, yeah, I think there will be different things I might add. And when you're there on stage, a lot of guys have told me, they'll see somebody or something will happen throughout the course of that week while you're there that will make you think about something you want to add.

So I don't think it's a final product until it comes out of your mouth when you're reading it.

Q. You have a number of guys here that are already in the Hall of Fame. Have you been talking to them or have they been talking to you?

LARRY FITZGERALD: Absolutely. Just to mention the guys I've talked to here -- Ray Allen, I've talked to Brian Urlacher, Jerome Bettis, Vince Carter, Tim Brown, Jerry --

I've asked them a lot of questions. Speech length to party venues, party coordinators, transportation, lodging -- all the things in terms of logistics that I may not have thought about. I wanted to make sure that I had some guidance on that.

Q. You've had a long background with travel.

LARRY FITZGERALD: Yes, sir.

Q. So I would imagine you're pretty familiar with all those logistics.

LARRY FITZGERALD: I am to a certain extent, more on the international scale. But when you do this Hall of Fame thing, you're encompassing a lot of different areas and times of your life.

You're trying to incorporate people that were with you from little league football, then high school and then college and professional, and then relationships that you developed after the game over the last five years.

Trying to make sure you don't miss anybody. You recognize the people who have been influential in your development, and I think being able to talk to all those guys about making sure you hit the right cord. Because there's no next thing. Like, this is the summit. This is the mountaintop.

You want to make sure that you do it right. And the people that have poured so much in to you, you want them to feel like they're being recognized for their sacrifice in you.

Q. You're going in with Drew Brees. You went head-to-head like eight times in your career. Any of those games stand out, and what made Drew special?

LARRY FITZGERALD: Drew, he's just a football savant, the way he sees the game, the way he prepares. His relationship with his teammates, his dedication to his community, his military service -- and I really got to know Drew in 2009. We did a USO tour to Iraq, and we visited probably, I don't know, four or five different bases.



And to be able to spend 14 hours a day with somebody, even maybe more than that, you really get to see who people really are. And he is a high, high-quality man. And to be able to have my name even associated with him, it's a great honor.

To have built the relationship with him, to see things that are meaningful to him and to see what he's working on now in life, he's still aspiring to be a hall of famer in everything that he does. And that mindset is something that really resonates with me and something that I try to do myself.

Q. First, what are your thoughts on Carson Beck potentially having a start this season amid the Jacoby Brissett contract dispute? Do you think he showed enough at Georgia and Miami to succeed in his rookie year?

LARRY FITZGERALD: He's got a wealth of experience. He's older. He's seasoned. And he's played in big-time games from Georgia to Miami. He played in 15, 16 games last year. And he's performed at the highest level. He's made big-time plays and won everywhere he's gone. You can never take that for granted.

In terms of how he did in the spring, I wasn't there. I didn't watch any of the practice. I didn't see how that progressed. I just hope whoever the best option is takes the field and helps us win as many games as we can. If that's Carson, God bless him, and I hope he goes out and has a dynamite year.

Q. Mason Heintschel came on strong during his freshman year last year. What do you think he needs to do to avoid a sophomore slump and kind of continue that upward trajectory?

LARRY FITZGERALD: Just watching the games, what I really love about him, he's not shying away from making the tough throws. He's tough as a boot, took some licks last year.

It's really reassuring when you know you can have a young man who has got some leadership qualities to him. You could tell by the way guys responded to him that they really admire and respect him.

Talking to people in the building, he's a guy who is a come early, stay late kind of guy. He's ready to get it out of the mud. As a former Pitt Panther, it's great to see us have a quarterback that is proven, wants to be there and can take us to an ACC championship this year.

Q. Drew Brees is here this weekend. Any side bets between you guys for Canton, who pays for dinner

maybe?

LARRY FITZGERALD: No, Drew avoids that with me. Our head-to-head match-ups have always been detrimental to his bank account.

I don't think he's going to challenge me. I would have to bring it to him. Then he's going to ask for some points. How about you give me, you know, four or five points a day. I'm not doing that. I say, hey, we've got to play it on our mettle. But if Drew hears that, tell him to stop running from the smoke.

Q. The American Century Championship has become a bucket list event for athletes and for fans. Forget golf, what is the best part of this weekend for you in interaction with fans, all of that?

LARRY FITZGERALD: I would say for me, just in the place that I'm in in life is to be able to spend time with Andy Jassy and Brian Hull and Jonathan Thomas and some of these amazing businessmen who created this super successful empire, and how down to earth and easy going they are and how willing they are to share their wisdom and knowledge with us.

We get to do it Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday. And then the latter part of the week you get to be with your brethren, guys who are currently in it and guys who were in it and have done it at the highest levels.

No other time do I think you get that intersection of intellectual stimulation based on what you're doing now. And also getting to go and play with guys that you've respected and admired over the years.

I think the combination of both of those is really, really unique.

Q. Would you say there's no other celebrity event that you're part of that allows you these kind of opportunities?

LARRY FITZGERALD: I mean, there are other events, but I don't know if they're like this. I mean, just the time of the year it is, the weather -- every year is pretty consistent and it's 80 degrees, not a cloud in the sky, not too windy. You have a massive gallery that's here to support you and come out and watch you. So I think that that combination is pretty cool.

Q. The craziest question a fan has ever asked you here or screamed at you?

LARRY FITZGERALD: I signed a baby yesterday. That's

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a first. That was the first. When I heard -- sign the baby. It was a onesie, the baby was sleeping. I didn't want to wake the baby, so I was very gentle with the signature on the back. So that was the first. I'd never been asked to sign a baby before.

I've been asked to hold a baby, take a picture with a baby, but never sign a baby. So that was a first.

Q. When you think of the Arizona Cardinals and your career and you see now they're in the toughest division in football right now. What's it going to take for them to turn it around, do you think?

LARRY FITZGERALD: They could have a miraculous turnaround and still, you know, finish third or fourth in the division. Seattle's coming off a Super Bowl. The Rams just traded for Myles Garrett. They've got arguably the most firepower in the league on offense -- Davante coming back, Puka coming back and Kyren Williams and Matt Stafford, a hall of famer.

And the 49ers are healthy. You talk about Christian McCaffrey and George Kittle, and I mean Fred Warner's back.

It's not the division you want to be in. That's six games a year that are very difficult.

But I like our chances. I like our chances. We're going to compete. The one thing you can say about the Cardinals, last year every game they were competitive in, they fought and they're not going to lay down. And it's going to be a difficult road. But you've got to be clicking on all cylinders.

Q. Besides being one of the greatest receivers of all time, you have also been considered a very thoughtful person over the years, obviously. And you mentioned intellectual interaction with some of the folks that are here. You have a very interesting travel background as far as what you've done in traveling internationally. How has that impacted who you are?

LARRY FITZGERALD: I think what it does, I think travel in general, it just gives you a different perspective. If I stayed in Minneapolis and I went to my same church and I shopped at my same grocery store and I kind of did the things that I do every single day, like, my depth of perspective would probably be pretty much the same.

Now, if I go to Rwanda, if I'm going to China, if I'm going to Australia, I'm going to Scotland, I'm learning about Buddhism in Thailand and I'm learning about Muslim culture going to visit Mecca -- you see the world from a very different perspective. I think that it makes you much

more compassionate, it makes you more thoughtful. And I think you just see humanity for what it is.

I think as human beings, we all just want to love and be loved. I don't care what God you worship or food you eat, what region of the world you grew up in, what's your socioeconomic background is. I think it's a very simple principle. And I think you see that much more when you kind of get outside of your comfort zone and venture out and see the world.

Q. Going back to the NFC West, the 49ers added Mike Evans. What do you like about Mike's game?

LARRY FITZGERALD: Mike has been a very consistent player through his entire career. You think, to go that many years with a thousand yards -- and I think he's the most underrated receiver of this generation.

You hear people talk. You hear a lot of names, but not often do you hear Mike Evans at the top of that list. You'd be hard pressed to find anybody who has been more consistently productive than he has. He's a Super Bowl champion. Now you get him out here to the Bay Area, a team with Kyle Shanahan, one of the greatest offensive minds we have in our game, that's pretty scary.

The one addition that the 49ers have made that I'm really excited about is Christian Kirk. He came in, had a productive playoffs last year in Houston, and I think he's going to be a really magnificent addition for the 49ers as well.

Q. You have strong ties to the Minnesota area, obviously a Minneapolis native. Your thoughts on Kyler Murray on the Vikings. Do you think he has a chance to win the starting job?

LARRY FITZGERALD: I'll be honest, I haven't followed it that closely. I don't know how the spring went and all of that stuff. But I hope he does well. Obviously I grew up a long-time Vikings fan. I always want to see the organization do well. They've done a great job of really uplifting that community. I mean, some of my earliest childhood memories are Boys & Girls Club, Big Brothers Big Sisters were organized by the Vikings in their Community Tuesday. There's always a place for me for the Vikings and I want to see them do well.

Q. You've played in a couple different golf tournaments around the country, different courses. When you go to a place like Waste Management and play on hole 16 or some of these other pro-am events, how does hole 17 and the back half of this course compare to that type of environment?

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LARRY FITZGERALD: Well, I'd say it's pretty similar atmosphere. It's not nearly as rowdy and not as many beers being drank.

But you definitely feel the energy. You feel the pressure. Obviously you want to be somebody who is hitting the green and maybe possibly making a birdie.

When you play at the Waste Management event, it's not the same because you're in a group and it's a scramble. It just doesn't have the same implications, but both of them are nerve-racking, and both of them, I think, are iconic hole designs.

You've got all the fans on the left and you've got feels like hundreds of boats out in the lake, and the atmosphere is just really smooth.

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