

American Century Championship

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Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA
Edgewood Tahoe

Joe Pavelski

Press Conference



Q. Our defending champion -- and played like a champion once again. 29 points, Joe, in the first round. That's a big number. Take us through your round.

JOE PAVELSKI: Thrilled with that number. Didn't know it was exactly going to come today. I guess, the round early on, there was just a couple of questions early. Had to kind of grind, try to make a par, stay in it.

Had a number where I hit my hybrid into 4. And kind of hit it on the green, and it just rolled it over. And made a nice up-and-down for a birdie. It kind of got me going. Then got up-and-down on 5. And then made birdies, made a great putt on 6. Hit one close on 7.

Didn't hit the greatest wedge shot on 8, but it ended up really good and made that putt. So all of a sudden you're staring four birdies in the last number of holes. And it was really good.

Then kind of just flattened out for a bit. Had to get up-and-down a couple times, but kept it together, and had a strong finish. Hit one of my best 3-woods. Kind of hit a ball through the tree on 16. It got down there pretty far, but hit a great 3-wood that got to the back of the pin. Liked my putt there, didn't fall.

And then end up hitting another really great shot on 18 and that one fell. That was nice to see.

Q. Not to jinx that, but that's two 3s in a row on 18 in this tournament?

JOE PAVELSKI: We would take a third if -- I'll not be greedy, but I'll take them all. Eagles are good. I've never made a ton of eagles out here. I think that was probably my third one out of the nine -- this is my tenth year. So probably the third one that I've made since I've been out here. So hopefully keep them going.

Q. When Steph won in 2023, I think he had four eagles in three rounds. It was crazy. You've had how many in 10 years?

JOE PAVELSKI: That was my third.

Q. You've had a few birdies out here too.

JOE PAVELSKI: We'll take the birdies.

Q. Were you expecting to play this well today? You've got the confidence.

JOE PAVELSKI: I think you always expect to play well. There's times, depending on how your putts are looking and if they fall. You could be staring over a 6-footer that you feel real confident over out here, or you can have a feel like, I might 3-putt this thing at times.

It was good. I liked the pace. My speed on the greens was really good today. The commitment was there for most of the round, and hit the ball really good.

Got myself out of position a couple times. But nothing ever hurt me big time. And I was always able to bounce back after it.

Q. What do you think? Top five, Pavelski, Fish, Curry, Romo, Sorenstam, surprise, surprise.

JOE PAVELSKI: Some good golfers. Everyone's been there. Everyone knows how to win. I made an eagle, which probably helped separate me there at the end, with the extra points.

You understand you're going to have to make a few birdies out there. So there's a little bit of an aggressive mindset. But at the end of the day it's still golf, and you've got to be patient and take what's given.

Got on that run early, which felt really good. And you never knew where it was going to go from there.

Q. Four of your last six rounds here you've had 29 points. Is there growing comfortability with the



course? What would you say has kind of led to --

JOE PAVELSKI: I would not have known that. I would have said maybe last year. But I didn't remember the other ones.

I think for me out here, it starts with my driver. If I'm hitting it good, which I tend to out here very well, you give yourself a lot of looks with wedges.

Then I think the biggest thing with that is I'm starting to figure out these greens a little bit more and the pace of them and feeling comfortable.

There's times where you have two, three good looks and you miss them all. And not getting frustrated and understanding the patience that's required in these types of tournaments.

It was great. Seeing them go in today was good. The putter has been good for the last couple of weeks. It was great to see it continue.

Q. That eagle on 18 that gives you a couple-stroke lead or couple-point lead going into the next round, is there a different feeling when you are up a couple points as opposed to down a couple points and have to chase?

JOE PAVELSKI: At times, yes. At times, no. That's probably the biggest challenge that you face is when you are leading to understand that the lineup behind you is coming and they're good players.

I heard Steph say it earlier, there's big rounds out there. You can't play guarded golf. I think you still have to commit to your numbers, still be aggressive when you get your looks, and then try to roll in a few birdies.

So that's what you'll always be fighting is just, par's not going to get it done, because those guys are becoming great players. And obviously those numbers are on the board there because those four are really good.

And Annika left a number of putts out there. I don't think she made a birdie today. She holed out an eagle. You know, if that putter gets going, she's going to be right there. She's hitting it good.

And Smoltz hit it great, especially the first half. The first nine, he hit it as good as I've seen him hit it at times. It sounded awesome. Made a few putts.

There's rounds out there. You've just got to stay aggressive and keep trying to build.

Q. The last question alluded to the 29 score. Do you realize or do you remember you scored 29 on the last day last year when you won. You have back-to-back 29s. And you had back-to-back 29s in 2004, one on Saturday and one on Sunday. That's your magic number.

JOE PAVELSKI: 2004 --

Q. It's in the history book right here. I didn't make it up.

JOE PAVELSKI: 2024? I didn't win that year.

Q. Came in second.

JOE PAVELSKI: That goes back to the last question as far as it's going to take a couple good rounds because guys are coming and there's good scores out there. Love that number. Would love to go throw up another 29 points tomorrow and be in position on Sunday.

Q. Best tournament finish ever is 84 points by Billy Joe Tolliver back in 2010. Do you think with the level of play that's out there right now and the scores in the first round that that's in serious danger?

JOE PAVELSKI: I don't know. Fish had that great round. What did he end up with that one year? 83. He had it going. What did I have, 79, there that year? I was kind of right up around that -- 78. Doesn't matter, it was second place. No one's talking about that.

Q. Mulder had an 82 and Fish --

JOE PAVELSKI: So it's out there. You understand that's the leader. Like 29's a great day, and you have to go try to match that and kind of take what your game giving it that day and find ways to stay committed on certain shots.

It's way too far to look ahead. Great day. I'm not getting ahead of myself. I know it's going to be hard.

It was a little bit different challenge as far as winning last year and then coming into this and understanding that they don't just hand you that trophy. You've got to go do a lot of good things and get a few bounces, which I think I did today.

Q. Mentioned a couple times in our conversations, you just seem a lot more confident. Last year you seemed confident. This year you seem very confident. Are you?



JOE PAVELSKI: Yeah, you get to play a little more golf, have a little more trust in yourself. But it's tough. I stepped up on that first tee today and was trying to commit to a shot, and really didn't know where it was going to go quite yet on the day.

I was really happy with my second shot because we were coming out of that rough. It's a number where you have to commit to it and make a good swing on the ball because that rough can grab it. Then you're staring, looking over the water, and that pin's -- you know, it's in the middle, but it makes you think a little bit about not going too long. But you've got to take a club and hit a great shot there and hit a good putt. It didn't go in. And we're kind of on to number 2.

Q. Heard a couple of players say the rough seems to be a little rougher this year and a little bit tougher, and the greens seem to be faster. Is that your feel?

JOE PAVELSKI: Yeah, I would say. In the past, there are always a number of certain holes where the rough was thicker. Then there were certain holes where it wasn't really any kind of punishment. This year, it definitely feels, with the course condition, that the club will grab a little bit more if you're not careful.

Q. You already mentioned that you'll probably be playing with Mardy and Steph tomorrow and all three of you are winners. You are the most recent winner. Does that give you a little extra confidence, or do you feel them bearing down on you? Do you feel that target on your back?

JOE PAVELSKI: I think you go into Saturday -- that would be an awesome group. Love playing with Steph, love playing with Mardy. We'd have a lot of fun together. I like their games. They're good players.

Confidence -- I think the confidence just comes right now from how I feel about my game. And I like it. Hit it good today and the putter felt good and the short game.

Mardy, he had a number of holes where he hit the ball great. And when he did miss, he got up-and-down from everywhere. He had some all-world up-and-downs today, which kept his round going.

To be honest, the confidence is, like, put yourself in position to have a chance on Sunday.

Q. You've got some hockey players here with you this year. They had a little bit of fun on 16. I don't know if you saw that or not?

JOE PAVELSKI: I've seen the clip once. Kind of awesome.

Q. Those guys were having a good run. You've got to feel pretty good. You've got gold medal winners, and then guys hitting shots like that out of bleachers?

JOE PAVELSKI: Yeah, they've had a great little start to this tournament. Karaoke winners. The gold medals are getting passed around, which is awesome.

I was in Dallas for that gold medal game. I was coaching my son's team. And literally when our puck dropped for our game, 3-on-3 was starting.

So, we had the iPad down on the floor watching the game, the puck's going, we're watching it. And you had the parents in the stands, the crowd. All of a sudden there's a big cheer. And we must have been on like a five second delay, kids are turning around, we're all watching it.

It was an awesome moment seeing that goal go in. And just awesome for USA Hockey to finally get over the hump again. Those guys have been such a huge part of it, and they've carried that flag just so well.

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