

American Century Championship

Wednesday, July 7, 2021

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Jon Miller

Jonathan Thomas

Carol Chaplin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: I'd like to introduce the people who make it happen every year. In the center is Mr. Jon Miller, President NBC Sports Group. To his left is Jonathan Thomas, President and CEO of American Century Investments. On the left side is Carol Chaplin, President and CEO of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

Jon, if we think back 12 months to what we were doing last year, and we look to this day and the future, give us a couple of thoughts.

JON MILLER: Last year we were able to put this event on and largely because of the great support from Jonathan Thomas and American Century and the folks in Carol's organization. But I would be remiss -- you talk about the people who make this happen.

The person who really makes this happen is right back there in the corner, who is walking out, Gary Quinn. This event does not happen without all the constant attention and love and care and sleepless nights that Gary Quinn puts into this event, working with Carol and Jonathan and our teams and whatnot.

I will tell you, it gave me a great deal of confidence, after last year's event that we did with no fans, no families, we were able to run an effective event. We had no positive cases that came out of the event afterwards.

We kept very close tabs on all of our players, all of our production people, all the people who worked on it. We knew this community rises to the occasion like no other group we deal with.

Great evidence of that is that six months after this event, we ran an outdoor hockey game here. The Zamboni is still here. They haven't come to take it.

CAROL CHAPLIN: We like to drive it around. (Laughter).

JON MILLER: We ran the outdoor hockey game here on NBC. And that really resulted from a call from the NHL who was going to go to Minnesota for the game. I said, "You guys are crazy. If you don't look at Lake Tahoe, you're nuts."

They said, "They don't have an ice skating rink." I said, "These guys can build anything and execute anything you want. And I guarantee you they'll do a great job."

To answer your question in a roundabout way, we had every confidence this community would step up. They do every year. This is our 32nd year in Lake Tahoe with the American Century Championship.

We have the best field we've ever had. And we have the best partnership we could ever hope for at NBC Sports with American Century and the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority.

THE MODERATOR: Jonathan, last year you really spearheaded the support from American Century Investments to maintain the continuity of this event. How does that make you feel when you look around this year, you see the fans back, players back, and people aren't wearing masks?

JONATHAN THOMAS: Quite candidly, it's exhilarating. Last year, we lost a little energy; but as Jon said, everybody stepped up. The celebs showed up. And I think we were the second golf tournament on TV last year, thanks to the partners at NBC.

But everyone's so excited to be back. And the energy that the fans are bringing this year is just powerful. And I got out today and played a few holes. And the number one thing -- the volunteers here are so consistent.

It's the same people on the same hole every year. And they were just so overjoyed at the progress we've made from this year to last year. And the celebs are also extremely grateful. They're thankful that we've kept it



going and they're thankful we have their families here. And they draw off the energy of the crowd. I think they're excited to see the fans back as well.

THE MODERATOR: Carol, what does it mean to Lake Tahoe to have all the fans back and this even going almost in full swing again.

CAROL CHAPLIN: What's it mean? When you asked Jon about last year and where we were, I remember every Friday afternoon we were in lockdown and we were all in our houses. And you guys remember that, right? It wasn't that long ago. I would get that afternoon call from Mr. Quinn giving me an update.

We had more conversations last year about where we were and how American Century felt and how NBC felt and how to make this happen last year.

And I just have to say that it really took a big village to pull that off. And kudos to both of our partners here for actually doing that and gritting their teeth and saying, you know, we really want this show to go on; if nothing else happens here, we want this to go on and to make sure that it was safe, because that was foremost in our minds, with our visitors, with our staffs, everybody. We couldn't take that chance.

When they finally said it's a go, we went. And we did it. And we love our partners here. And it was more important to make this happen for the tradition of this tournament. It was a sign of hope. And so to answer your question, you know, it was hope, because this is the biggest event that we do and the most important and the most fun.

And NHL, I don't know where he got the idea of putting an ice rink on a golf course, but that's when NHL called me up and said what do you think of an ice rink on a golf course? I guess we said "go" to that, too.

With all of us involved, with all the athletes, with all the partners, American Century, NBC, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, all the media here today, that's what makes this tick.

THE MODERATOR: Jon Miller, take us back, 32 years ago.

JON MILLER: I was like four inches taller than I am now. So...

It's a fun story. And it's one of those things I still scratch my head at. I had been with NBC for a long time, back when we were still in black and white, I guess is what people like to say.

We had lost Major League Baseball. I had a new boss, a man named Dick Ebersol, came on, did somewhat of a housecleaning. Basically came to me and said I'm not getting rid of everybody. You're doing programming. You have to figure out a way to fill 26 weeks of programming to replace Major League Baseball. But you have no money to spend and good luck. I went home to my wife, said I've got a job for another year, but we better start looking.

So we came out here. There was a gentleman by the name of Rich Rose, with Caesar's at the time, and Mike Trager out here this weekend, who was a great friend and partner of NBC's and some other stuff, we had done the Breeders' Cup together.

We came up with this idea, along with a guy named Jim Corvallis, to bring a bunch of celebrities to play golf in a regular Tour event and treat it like a PGA TOUR event with PGA officials and counting everything, having prize money, whatnot.

We did it that first year in 1990. It was really going to be one-and-done, basically to be a Band-Aid while we looked for other programming to replace Major League Baseball.

Now, 32 years later, we went from having 3,000 people in attendance to well over 62,000 people in attendance in 2019.

It's become a must-stop for anybody in the entertainment or athletic world who plays golf. We have 90 players this year. Mike Milthorpe, who is our great tournament director, has been with us since day one, is always ready to kill Gary and I whenever we go past that 78 number because it's a lot harder to manage.

We don't have a cut. We have to be done by 3:00 on Saturdays and Sundays to get off on time. It's quite a jigsaw puzzle. But I will tell you in 32 years nothing has given me more satisfaction and pride than what we've been able to build here. And it's not me. I happened to be there at the beginning. But there's so many people whose fingerprints are all over this event to make it the success it is.

THE MODERATOR: American Century has been the tournament sponsor since 1999. And you have an agreement through 2022. Tell us the history, tell us why it's such an integral part of American Century's philosophy.

JONATHAN THOMAS: It's a big part. It's our biggest event of the year by far. I have to thank Gary and Jon for each year making it better than the last year.



Every year the fans and clients leave here and say, my God, that was the best year ever. They say the same thing each and every year.

We use this as a platform to tell our story. American Century is kind of a universe of one. We're an asset manager, which means we manage mutual funds, ETF and retirement products to help people reach their financial goals.

But the thing that's so unique about American Century Investments is that we actually drive over 40 percent of our profits each year to a 501(c)(3) medical research organization to find cures for cancer and other gene-based diseases. Since the year 2007 we directed \$1.7 billion. And we use this platform as a branding event and as a springboard to tell that story.

So, so many of the messages that you'll see about who's American Century, what we're doing, it's all about giving back.

We're also giving back to the local charities here. We're supporting Equal Justice Initiative, Wounded Warriors, but it's an important part of our culture not just to do well but to do good for the communities that we live in and serve.

THE MODERATOR: Carol, as far as Tahoe is concerned and the visitation and whatnot, we know a lot of people have been coming up here since the pandemic started. Now that it's clearly up, people can't wait to get outside. What's the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority doing in that regard to keep people safe, to let people know the best way to enjoy their visitation here?

CAROL CHAPLIN: Well, let's just step back again to last year where the Visitors Authority actually was telling people not to come, which was counterintuitive for our organization to put out messaging that says we love you but could you just stay home for a while.

It was very important for us to keep all of our residents safe and our local hospital was really key in helping us understand what that meant during our first and hopefully only real pandemic to really all pull together in the same direction.

And that was one of the great things that came out of COVID was even this partnership is deeper and better than ever before. So that's what happened, which was great. So that's the only opportunity that I think I can see.

But we were very popular. Outdoor destinations across the globe, really, are what people are really thirsty for, reconnecting with their family and friends in just a really

basic way.

And so we have had some great success. We've got some -- we're thriving where some of our urban partners may not be thriving. And now we're able to offer everything about the destination. And we're doing it with even more pride than we did before.

And the golf tournament is just indicative of how we see -- how we see our role in international destinations and our competitive set of what's important to people now even more than before.

And I would just also mention that golf was one of those things that came back faster than anything. People were able to play golf, even I was tempted to get out in one of those carts because it was safe.

So we did a lot of messaging. We worked with a lot of different organizations to make sure that the messages got out past our community, per se. Our regional planning agency, an organization called The Tahoe Fund, Eldorado County, City of South Lake Tahoe, Douglas County, sister organizations around to make sure that people understood how they could come here safely and how they could come and have fun in a way that maybe wasn't exactly what they remembered from the last time that they came.

And so now we're getting back to normal starting with our great tournament here.

THE MODERATOR: Jon Miller, you mentioned early on that this is probably the best field in the 32-year history of this event. When we first started, remember there was two or three players who could actually win this thing. Now there's probably 10 or 12.

JON MILLER: We have a very deep field, very talented players. We have a great diverse group of athletes and celebrities and entertainers who are here.

I think one of the things I'm most proud of is that people don't refer to this as a celebrity golf tournament anymore. They refer to it as The American Century. It gets that kind of designation out there in the general public and the sporting public and that shows you that you've kind of arrived.

I hear stories from Al Michaels, one of our football announcers, dean of football announcers, hosts Sunday night football.

Whenever he's at a game, it's amazing to him, when he runs into a player who has played in this event, all they want to do is talk about Tahoe. When two players from



opposite teams, when the game ends, they immediately find each other midfield, talk about I'll see you in Tahoe; I'm going to kick your butt in Tahoe or whatever.

But this event has created so many friendships and relationships, stuff like that, and it endures and it gives a lot back, too. We're happy with all of that.

THE MODERATOR: Jonathan, any new wrinkles with American Century this year as far as the tournament is concerned?

JONATHAN THOMAS: Yes, back to Jon's comments first. The one thing that athletes tell me all over, they come to be with one another. It's like coming to summer camp. They go away. They return. It's like summer camp all over again.

The big wrinkle this year, ties into Jon's comments about the quality of the field this year, we've launched a fantasy golf contest. Accfantasygolf.com. We've divided the field into five flights based on their handicaps.

And the fans, both here and online and around the country, can build their own fantasy golf team. They have to choose one player from each of the five flights. There will be a winner each day. The winner for each day will win a trip for two out here next year. Hotel, airfare, the whole thing.

And then we'll give that away on Friday, Saturday, Sunday. On Sunday, the overall winner, will also get a trip for two paid for out here, as well as \$10,000 given to the charity of their choice on behalf of American Century.

THE MODERATOR: Are media people eligible for this prize? (Laughter)

JONATHAN THOMAS: They are. Employees are not. I think even NBC folks can participate, yes.

Q. This is a celebrity event but it's also a charity. Carol, you've already addressed all the things. But most memorable for locals was when fan favorite Charles Barkley, I think in 2007, after the Angora Fire, donated in two separate occasions almost \$200,000. That endeared you to the Northern Nevada community like no one else, or Sir Charles like no one else did that. But any special charities this year that are going to be the recipients?

CAROL CHAPLIN: That was something that -- thank you for asking that question, because one of the things that I don't think is apparent because the tournament happens now, but after the tournament leaves, they leave behind

funds for our local charities. And, yeah, Mr. Barkley, that was incredible.

He said that year that he didn't think it was fair for everybody to have a good time playing golf when people had lost their homes and all their belongings were trying to recreate their lives. That was pretty special.

He and the tournament are -- American Century, they know what American Century is in this community. And they love it. And they look forward to it. But every year there is money left behind. It's a gift always. We don't expect it. But it's a wonderful gift.

And a lot of our organizations have benefited over the years to make their organizations more sustainable or just to keep providing the services they did.

And last year was really an incredible time for us to receive the entire pool really to give away. It's amazing to read some of these stories of these organizations and what they're doing for the local people and how impactful that money is.

As far as your specific question, I think Korbel has got a local charity, Lake Tahoe Wildlife. So the hole in one that's coming on Friday.

And of course Jonathan referred to their research, their organization. And then after that, we'll see how it goes. But we have usually 30 or 40 local 501(c)(3)s, nonprofits. It goes from environmental groups to helping youth and kids, to all kinds of just basic food.

And it's really very meaningful and everybody looks forward to it. And it's a fun time because I get to put the committee together. It's a local committee and they're just going oh, my gosh, I can't believe we're going to be able to help this organization and even the schools.

So it's really special. It's a big part of this tournament that you don't necessarily see. But we feel it all year long.

Q. Carol, last year, before the event, obviously in the planning, I'm sure you had phone calls, text messages, e-mails, some Zoom calls. What from your perspective led to the final decision to have this tournament here last year?

CAROL CHAPLIN: Well, some Zoom calls. So we found out that we can take eight or nine Zoom calls in a day and you just have to try to figure that bio break in, but you can keep going that hard. It wasn't really our decision.

We were there to support American Century and NBC in



their decision. We knew there were a lot of factors. Health and safety, the number one. Or how do you -- after you think you've got the health and safety thing down, how do you keep volunteers safe? How do you keep media safe? How do you come during a time of shutdown and put on a tournament that looks like it's just for fun, which it isn't.

So there was a lot of conversation. And like I said, Gary and I were on the phone almost weekly towards the end. Here it was again, ah, it's Gary; is it on or is it off?

And so I don't know what went on to determine this tournament, but we were ready to go. But there was so much conversation at so many different levels within these two organizations and so much consideration about we don't want to step away from it but is it the best thing to do.

And how do we execute something like that in a world that -- from day to day we didn't know what was going on. We were shut down. We weren't shut down. We're 25 percent open, we're not 25 percent. That was really confusing for us anyway because you step over the state line and everything was different. And everything was different on the other side of the country, where people were working and trying to make these decisions.

But our role is supporting the tournament in a way that helps them execute. And there's so many layers of this. It's like an onion. There's so many layers to this tournament and so many people that make it happen. Our thanks to our partners for pulling it off in the most amazing situation that they could possibly imagine, or not imagine.

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