

American Century Championship

Saturday, July 10, 2021

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

John Smoltz

Jack Wagner

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have John Smoltz and Jack Wagner right in the hunt. Nice round. Way to play.

John, let's start with you, start with the finish, eagle on 18; 51 total points; 26 today; 25 yesterday. Nice consistent round. Tell us about 18. 18's been fun the last couple of days.

JOHN SMOLTZ: 18 is my worst hole. I've been in the fairway maybe a couple times. It just didn't fit my eye. I decided for the first time to hit a 3-wood, and I got it in the fairway, could hit a nice 8-iron pin high, and I don't get many eagles out here. I feel like I should. But that's a great feeling to know when you can see the scoreboard, knowing that the putt puts you in the lead. That was a good feeling to make that putt.

Q. Driver, 8-iron to about 10 feet?

JOHN SMOLTZ: 3-wood.

Q. Muldy on TV said he's hitting a 3-wood, smart move.

JOHN SMOLTZ: I'm a slow learner, but I'm learning.

Q. Jack, back-to-back great rounds. 24 points yesterday. 23 today. Way to be solid. You're right there. How was it out there?

JACK WAGNER: It was a good group today. I enjoy playing with John. Mike Modano struggled a bit. I made one bad swing today on 10. It cost me it. I hit it in the water. Just made a double.

I finished, I think, 2- or 3-under from there. So I didn't lose it. And that's been my tendency as I've gotten a little older, not to be able to keep my grind. I made a big putt, long putt on 18. John looked at me said, you know, you only

make them from 40 feet. So I made a couple bombs today. We had fun out there and had some good golf.

Q. I guess the theme here is experience, not age. Because, John, you mentioned I want to win this and be the oldest of all time.

JOHN SMOLTZ: And if he wins it he's the oldest.

Q. You've got Annika right there, too.

JOHN SMOLTZ: There's so much firepower behind us. It's not -- this format, as Mike Modano showed yesterday, so much can change down the stretch. So it's going to be fun for me. I only have two other experiences going in with the lead and that's the two Diamond Resorts tournaments. I'm just going to kind of pull off of that and see if I can continue to stay aggressive when you're supposed to and stay away from the big number.

Q. You've won this twice, Jack. You've got to have some confidence going into it. You've got to know what the expectation is. So what it's been 10 years but you still have a memory, right?

JACK WAGNER: I'm so excited to be in the hunt and be in the final group or second to last group, whatever, it's been a while. But John hit the ball beautifully today. And that's what it takes out here. He had maybe one bad iron or two bad irons.

Otherwise, he knows you've got to keep yourself in play. You've got to hit some greens and just hope you can make a few putts. Because not everybody's going to make eagles. They've separated -- I think there's about four of us in the high 40s. John's at 50 something. It's going to be tough for somebody around 40 or 41 to win this golf tournament. It's going to come from the last group or two.

That's what it takes. Keep your nerve out there and to really -- I really think for me is to really stay in the shorter putts. That's where I struggle on the greens is just keeping my head down and knocking those things in the hole. Because it builds confidence. I think John will attest, when you make a four- or five-footer hits as good as hitting a



good iron.

JOHN SMOLTZ: I missed short putts on 8 and 9, messes with you. The two bogeys coming into the back nine. You've got to do what Jack said, you've got to be confident in your stroke; you feel the read and make the putts. But these greens, they'll get in your head. I'm living proof of that for the last 11 years.

Q. Going into tomorrow, John, you've mentioned, hey, you really want to win this one; it's really important to you. What's going to be the thought process tonight?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I'm not going to lie. I'm going to look at the leaderboard as many times as I can. I'm one of those guys I will look at it because I want the information. So I think it helps.

I know a lot of people don't do it. They just play their game and try to make as many putts. To me, the biggest key I found, like even from the last couple of experiences, if you get a couple birdies early, it helps relax you. And really that's the key, because you know the point value and you know how to do the math.

Coming into 16, no lead is safe. You've got to have a significant lead going into 16. So I'll be paying attention to everything that's going on. But more importantly for me, I've learned a lot of patience through some of the other tournaments that I played in. And that's what it takes. Because today was -- I think today was a pretty long round. And in the past I don't know that I could have stayed in the moment like this time.

Q. Jack, going into tomorrow, what are your thoughts? How are you going to calm yourself, get yourself ready and give it your shot?

JACK WAGNER: Not to sound corny, but I really work on my breathing to stay in the present moment. And if I can just, for me, like I said earlier, just try to make a few good swings and give myself some chances. John's not won. Annika's not won here. Vinny's not won here. So if I'm not going to win, I hope they have a great round because it's such a special event to win. And I would really love to win it again, but I've got to shoot in the 60s for sure tomorrow, probably, to have a chance being behind four or five points.

Q. Are you thinking, you've got an Annika Sorenstam out here, who is probably the greatest woman golfer in history.

JACK WAGNER: Ever.

Q. How many times she's won eight-time player of the

year; does that get in your head this was her game, we're playing her game?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Fortunately I've played a few times with her. So I've had a blast playing when she was ranked No. 1 in the world and Tiger was No. 1 in the world, we were in the same group. Believe me, she's not going to hit many balls in the rough. We are. She's not. The par-5s might be a little of a challenge from reaching it, but she's not going to put herself in any position but birdie putts.

And that's what Jack said is you've got to do. There's holes to be aggressive and there's holes to lay back. It's a beautifully designed course with some trees that I know a lot of people are cursing at when you hit them.

But it really comes down to keeping the ball below the hole. The first time she played in it, her husband, of course, is caddying, and the pro came out and said, Hey, this greens are the best they've ever been. But watch out for the rough because it's the highest and most thick it's ever been.

He goes, We're never going to be in the rough. We don't care about the rough.

And that's her game. She just carves up a golf course.

JACK WAGNER: I'm not going blow the hole, just playing for 40 feet. Need to be 40 feet.

JOHN SMOLTZ: If you watch the tapes, that's what you do.

JACK WAGNER: We have a game plan.

Q. How many did you make from 40 feet today?

JOHN SMOLTZ: He made three really long putts. Two bombs.

JACK WAGNER: Two from 40 and maybe one from 30 or something, which is, I don't know, those very rarely happen to have two or three in a day is very unusual. But I'll take it.

Q. The crowd seemed to be in it big time today. They were loud on the meter. What did it feel like out there?

JOHN SMOLTZ: It's been awesome. I know it's not, I guess, total full capacity, but it sure feels like it. There's nothing -- I've got a couple people who have come here for the first time. When you turn to the right on 17, you just can't, there's nothing like it.

And this course, with the fans, is everything, because last

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

year was just weird. And we know why. So there's no doubt you have to play in it a few times to come down the stretch to catch your breath, as Jack said, to breathe right, because there's so much energy on 17 and 18, you've got to be able to hit a calm shot.

Q. Jack, is the breathing part, is that from the Tiger Woods school or is that from the Jack Wagner school?

JACK WAGNER: You know, I taught Tiger a lot of things. (Laughter). No, no, that's from the Jack Wagner school of keep your mind calm and don't try to make a fool of yourself.

Q. Jack, you're the only non-athlete to win. But you did say in past years you work out on the elliptical. Are you still on the elliptical?

JACK WAGNER: Yes, hard. Crazy. I'm a madman. Push-ups, elliptical. And they don't call me a non-athlete.

(To Smoltz) What are you laughing at?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Nothing. I know he works out more than I do. That puts me to shame.

Q. John, after you left here, when you were here in the interview room the other day, Phil walked by and I said, did it seem to you like John was the most relaxed as he's ever been here in a pre-event, in a pre-competition press conference? And I thought if there's somebody that's turned a switch, it was you, just from your attitude and your responses the first day or first press conference. So has there been any changes? What flipped the switch for you?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I had to make a change, because I make no bones about it. I want to win this tournament probably more than anybody. That's probably why I haven't won it. But I had to learn to just accept whatever happens. I'm pretty hard on myself when it comes to playing games, playing golf and hitting shots. And I've done a really good job of not getting overheated with your brain.

So that is a lot to do with my caddie, Greg Olson, because back in the day when he would catch me, I'd shake him off and tell him I want to throw this pitch. But he knows how to keep me moving in the right direction. But, yes, that's a fair assessment, because I had to change something, because golf's not a game of aggression. You can't hit it farther by swinging harder. So that's what I've done.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

