

American Century Championship

Thursday, July 7, 2022

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

Vinny Del Negro

Mardy Fish

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the last two championship winners.

Vinny, we know last year was extremely emotional for you. Great to have you back and defending your title. What do you think it's going to take for you to repeat?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Well, there's so many tremendous players, like the guys have said. Obviously Mardy and Mark Mulder and Tony and Steph and obviously Annika. She's always going to be in the mix somewhere, just how great she is. There's a bunch of players.

The course is playing hard. It's a little windier, the greens are tough. It's the Stableford so you're never really in control of the tournament, never really out of the tournament. But you've got to play solid golf, play smart and be a really good putter around here, hit the ball in good areas where you can be aggressive, trying to make some birdies.

But you have to be patient as well as times. And I think if you can do that, you give yourself a chance. But tremendous players. Great guys. We love the competition. It's very competitive.

But it's also just an incredible week with NBC and American Century and Edgewood and the fans and just the environment and the energy overall.

But the greenskeeper and their staff have done a fantastic job. I think over the last few years anyway I think the course has gotten more difficult. Not as much run-out in the fairways. Greens are a lot quicker. And the wind I think is going to have an impact on some of the shots you hit.

Q. Mardy, back in 2020, you won when there was no fans and about five media people. So this year looks a



little bit different. Back then you broke the course record shooting 63 during your second round -- 10 birdies, if I remember right. You can play in front of a crowd. We saw it down in Dallas, couple months ago when you and Tony got into a playoff on 18. How is your game and are you ready for this one this week?

MARDY FISH: I prefer the crowds. I just happened to win it that year, the COVID year. It was a weird year.

I'll never forget that round, still the best round I've ever had in my life anywhere. So I've never made 10 birdies in one round.

So certainly great memories, great memories coming back here. And just kind of seeing everyone -- Vinny and I see each other once a year and it's here.

And you just make great friendships and relationships over the years, and with guys or folks you wouldn't necessarily cross paths with.

I played tennis, so I would never have crossed paths with Canelo Álvarez in my entire life. Turns out we're really good friends now. He lives in California and we play a lot of golf together.

It's those types of relationships you make out here are really special. And the memories that you can make here with family and friends, it's pretty special.

Q. Vinny, last year I think you went off at about 40 or 45 to 1. Look at where we are this year now.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Don't read all that stuff. We don't want to look at that too much. Just play good golf, play solid, have fun. There's so many good players. The environment is spectacular.

And when you have just guys like Steph Curry who I have so much respect for. I played with his father Dell in Milwaukee years ago. Great guy, great teammate. And seeing Steph, how great of a player he is, and it's hard to say this, but he's a better guy.



I mean, I've seen his work ethic. I've seen what he's about. He's as good as there is. He's an incredible basketball player. But the way he handles the media, the charity work he does, the impact in the community, I have so much respect for guys that have that platform and use it. And I'm not sure anybody does it any better than Steph. Happy he's here and competing. He loves golf. And he's an excellent player.

Q. Mardy, right now you're a co-favorite with Romo at 11-to-4.

MARDY FISH: What is that? Carry the two -- (laughter).

VINNY DEL NEGRO: It means play well.

Q. That's about two and a half to one. How is that? 3 to 1.

MARDY FISH: I didn't finish my junior year of high school.

Q. The year you won 100,000 was the year we gave all the money to charity, too.

MARDY FISH: That's OK. I'm fine with that. It's all good.

Q. Do either of you have a you shekels on yourself at the book?

MARDY FISH: Not yet. I have a few buddies that have some shekels on there.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Same as me.

MARDY FISH: We'll see the matchups. I like to bet the matchups. There's usually a couple in there we know some inside input on. Guys that will go out and party or not or injured or not.

Q. Mardy, your thoughts on Charles finishing in the top 70 this year?

MARDY FISH: I love Chuck. So I hope he does. I'm rooting for him. What's the number on that?

Q. It opened at 5-to-1 and the betting has it down to 3-to-1. He's got his fans betting.

MARDY FISH: I'll throw 100 bucks on that. Yeah, why not?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I think he's playing better. I hope he does it. He loves golf, and it's great for the tournament.

MARDY FISH: If he doesn't we'll make him buy us dinner.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: By the way, he's buying dinner anyway. But Charles is very generous, great for the tournament, great with the fans. He's been working on his golf game. And his swing looks better. But the range is one thing, and then getting out there and posting a score and putting the ball in the hole was a little bit different.

MARDY FISH: I'm going to go with yes.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I am too. Absolutely.

Q. Is there a Fish/Romo rivalry going on right now?

MARDY FISH: Sure. I can't stand that guy. (Laughter).

No, we were just texting last night. It would be fun to do the same thing we did in Dallas. We had a blast there. Kind of a home game for him, so it felt good to win that one. But he's a phenomenal golfer. And he puts himself up against a lot of competition that most guys wouldn't do, wouldn't put themselves out there like that.

And he's not shy about telling you how much golf he plays and how hard he tries to get better. And I respect the hell out of that.

I love Tony. He's a phenomenal dude. And a hell of a golfer. I love playing with him.

Q. Vinny, obviously last year, as we talked a little bit earlier, was really emotional for you to be able to go through those three rounds. Do you still have your dad with you this year?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Always. Oh, yeah, always. I was close with my dad. It's just -- a year ago today is when he passed away. So kind of a lot of people and family and talking to my mom and things and a lot of people reaching out. It's a special day. And my dad's always going to be with me. I was very close to him. And he pushed me all those years.

I probably wouldn't be standing here, obviously, if it wasn't for him just making me practice and believe in myself and compete and no matter what you're doing. You have ups and downs and adversity throughout professional career, whatever it is in sports.

And he was always kind of there for me pushing me, supporting me in anything I was doing -- basketball, coaching, golf. Whatever it was. Of course, he's always with me.

The emotion of it, winning and then coming back here, it

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just feels right. And I'm looking forward to playing and see what happens this weekend.

Q. Mardy, Wimbledon, eight Americans into the fourth round I think, something like that. And Taylor and Amanda making the quarters. Is American tennis back? Is it on the up? Has it plateaued? Where is American tennis on the world stage now?

MARDY FISH: You have to separate the two because women's tennis never left. American women's tennis has been as dominant as ever. Serena, and I can just keep going. There's a new finalist at every major it seems like from the States.

Obviously being Davis Cup captain, I'm very familiar with the men's side. And, look, we've got five or six guys inside the top 40 in the world. They're under 25 years old. It goes in waves. It comes in waves.

If you look at, like, a Switzerland for instance, with a Wawrinka and Federer, I don't think they have anyone inside the top 300 in the world outside of those guys. So it comes in waves.

We'd love a Federer from America. I would, for sure. But, look, Taylor's playing some fantastic tennis.

Reilly Opelka is our No. 2. John Isner has obviously been around a long time. There's a bunch of names, I could keep going, that have a lot of talent. I'm happy to be the Davis Cup captain for at least a few more years.

Q. Is there one American male who you think's going to take that next step and find themselves in semifinal after semifinal here in the near future?

MARDY FISH: It's hard to do that, first of all. But I mean, these three guys showed -- that's not normal, these guys, they're like 22, 20, 20, majors.

I think Novak is going to win Wimbledon, and so it puts him at 21. One behind Rafa. And look, it's going to be incredible to watch that unfold. And then as far as Americans go, the only one that has shown that type of ability in big tournaments is Taylor Fritz so far. He's the won that won Indian Wells. Played Rafa really tight the day before yesterday.

So you can say him. And then we're at a golf tournament, so it would be remiss not to talk about Sebastian Korda and how good he is and obviously his sporting family and his sisters.

He's a guy that's got some serious talent. He's a lot

younger than the other guys I mentioned. He's got some time. But they're coming. And they're coming in bulk, which is good for me.

Q. Vinny, we were talking last night we thought this was the one year ago today that your dad passed away. And you were channelling him, as you said. Overheard, "Lock it in, lock it in," as you were approaching the ball. Are you going to hear that again on the course?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Oh, probably. I always said it in my head. I was so emotional, I was saying it out loud really loud.

Q. Was that involuntary?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: Yeah, it just kind of happened. Just down the stretch, as Mardy knows, you've got to hit some good shots to close this tournament out. And I was fortunate enough to do that. Make some putts.

But there's so many variables that go into it. Where are you at point-wise, how aggressive you need to be, where the pins are at. But coming down the stretch, to hit the shots in the right spots, give yourself an opportunity and try to make some birdies, close it out is not easy. But it worked out that way. And I was fortunate at the end.

Q. And especially in the playoff round. Looking at the scores from last year, the top five finishers, only one, Tony Romo, increased his points on day three. Everyone fell back. Mardy, you were down --

MARDY FISH: What are you trying to say? (Laughter.)

We can't close?

Q. Is there something about Sunday? Is there something about the atmosphere here in Tahoe that everybody gets too relaxed after three or four days and Sunday comes?

MARDY FISH: It's a lot of golf. They're long rounds out there. And I can speak personally when I'm not necessarily -- when I can sort of feel it slipping away or guys are just so far ahead and they've got more holes to play and stuff like that, we come out here and you want to win.

So maybe subconsciously you're sort of like, oh, shoot, I didn't win it this year so your game kind of falters a little bit, maybe.

I've certainly felt that from time to time. But it's not easy to

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win. It's not the best golfers win every time. And it's just hard to win out here because there's like Vinny says a lot of really good players.

Q. One of the things we notice is that all you guys get along. It seems that way anyway, except for Mardy and Tony. (Laughter)?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I think it's just mutual respect. We played in a bunch of tournaments over the years together. Everyone's, different sports, tennis, basketball, football, baseball, whatever. Everyone is a competitive junkie. We all want to play well and beat each other. But I want Mardy to play well and I want to beat him. I want to play a little better. That's part of it. That's the competitive nature, how we were professional athletes for so many years.

It's ingrained in us, no matter what you do, whatever sport it is. Whether you're an actor, entertainer you want to do the best you possibly can. This is not our comfort level. It's much easier for me to hit a 20-foot jump shot than it is to make a 10-foot putt or him hit a backhand or whatever it is to hit a great shot.

Golf is not our comfort level. We play a lot. Compete a lot. Try to play at a high level. But I can correct a lot of things easier on the basketball court than I can at times on the golf course. But I think that's what kind of makes us enjoy it. I was in a team sport, not an individual sport. And golf, I have to figure it out. I can't rely on my teammates. It's me and my caddie, Dirk. And we've got to figure it out. I think that's what makes it exciting and fun for all of us.

MARDY FISH: It's also a really humbling place, that driving range. And like everyone next to you did something just as good or better than you did.

So the respect level is really high. And so it reminds me of the Olympic Village, when I was in the Olympics. Kind of go in there and maybe you wouldn't recognize anyone or there's a lot of athletes who do interesting sports and events there. But everyone did something just as good or better than you did. It was a really humbling place. So it's a cool thing to be a part of.

Q. Last night at the players meeting, Jon Miller from NBC mentioned that this event has become really like family. A lot of guys every year. We have American Century as the title sponsor now in their 24th year. I look at the support you got last year, Vinny. And I looked around that room last night, when we were talking about Jack Wagner. And hoping --

VINNY DEL NEGRO: There's a lot of personal stories. And we've played a ton of golf with Jack over the years.

And he's a good friend and we all reached out to him. There's no right words other than you give him a hug and you tell him you love him and try to help people as much as you can.

Every day, there's so many things going on in the world. But I think just kind of respecting people, listening to people, being kind to people, and just getting back to quality of life and the realization that life is difficult at times, but having good friends and family and support is very important and to come out here and have us be able to enjoy and compete is just a blessing.

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