

# American Century Championship

Thursday, July 13, 2023

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

**Vinny Del Negro**

**Annika Sorenstam**

**Tony Romo**

**Joe Pavelski**

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Annika, the number of times you've been at this tournament, again always in the top three or four, what's it going to take to break through this year?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Great question. Good to be back. I keep coming back because I haven't given up hope yet. I'll try to give the guys a run for their money.

It's a treat to be welcomed back every year. As you know, Tahoe is a special place for our family, and this tournament is just the highlight of the summer. It's really special, not only to hang out for these guys but be part of the community.

We have a home down the street, but Mike is on the bag and the kids are around and Mike's mom is around, and we have a lot of family and friends here.

It's been a competition for me, but for me it's a party week, and we get together and we have a good time. It's wonderful what ACC does, and I really appreciate it.

**Q. Vinny, 2021 winner, what do you think in coming back this year, how do you feel about your chances?**

VINNY DEL NEGRO: It's the best, obviously NBC and American Century and everything they do, the whole staff. It's a first-class event.

Like Annika said, it's really a big family when you've done it as long as I have here and seeing old faces, old friends, meeting new people, building some more relationships and then, obviously, the competition.

We're all competitive junkies; we want to compete and play



well. We want to have a good time, but it comes down to the competition really for us. So golf is difficult. I played with Annika before -- and obviously Joe -- they're fantastic. Annika, we know how great of a player she is with her career.

So to watch great players play, try to pick their brains, play good golf, enjoy the atmosphere. The fans are amazing. Enjoy the week with my wife, Lynn, family and friends and it's first class all the way around.

**Q. Joe, you've been one of the top finishers the last few years. Almost pulled it off last year in the playoff and before then. What are you thinking right now?**

JOE PAVELSKI: Just excited to be back. Like they said, such a special place, great week for us, the way the season's lined up. July comes around, get to play more golf; game starts coming around. Hopefully I'm in a good enough spot to contend again, but just such a fun time being out here in Tahoe and going through last year in the playoff and needing to make, feeling you have to make birdie on 18 to have a chance. Hit one in the woods and punch out and make birdie from there.

It was fun to experience a playoff in this setting, and you're a shot behind there and try to get it done.

TONY ROMO: It was fun. It was fun.

**Q. Tony, welcome back, our defending champion and three-time champion here at the American Century Championship. I was just talking to your competitors about what it might take to win. You've been there before, obviously. So you are one down in Dallas this year, back in April, been playing really well, what do you think coming into this one?**

TONY ROMO: Obviously it's very enjoyable and rewarding to go out and win at anything you do. But I do think it gets tougher every time because the depth of the field is now -- it's much deeper than it's ever been.

For so long it used to be three, four people you felt like. We got easily 12, I feel like. Could be 20. Every year



someone's improved. It's a golf course that gives you opportunities someone gets hot. They'll be in the mix. These definitely will be in the mix right here.

**Q. You've all been out on the course so far. Big winter here in Tahoe obviously. Course looks like it's in fantastic shape. What's the field?**

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I think the whole staff here at Edgewood should be applauded. Considering the amount of snow that was dropped here and the conditions of the course, they changed a couple of greens. But I think all in all, with the weather, the wind it's going to be hot this weekend, the greens will dry out, the staff has done a considerable job considering the weather they had to deal with. Just a couple months ago they were still working on it.

I played a couple of rounds. I think they've done an amazing job.

**Q. Tony, as you won this thing a couple of times, is there a memory in particular that kind of stands out about being here in Tahoe?**

TONY ROMO: I think last year stands out quite a bit just because I mentioned it after I was fortunate enough to win. But I got three boys who are 11, nine and five, and just their faces as you're coming down the stretch and watching them, and then their excitement, and then not being able to watch and I'm watching them not being able to watch before I make a putt or have to make a putt and the emotion of it, them coming out, that's like second to none. It's always hard to beat the first win, it feels like, but I think that one did.

**Q. Annika, this is obviously a different golf tournament than you're used to playing in. What's your favorite thing about playing in this particular tournament, this style?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well, I love the fact that people from all different walks of life are playing and enjoying this game together on such a high level. I mean, these three guys and a few more out there. They're very serious contenders. It's so impressive to see they're so good inside the ropes, when they leave this place, they're either behind a camera or throwing a football or throwing a basketball, and just I think that is so impressive.

And I love being a part of this, and Vinny said it, we pick the players' brain. I'm not going to let you pick my brain or you because you've not been -- I'm done sharing my experiences and my knowledge. That's my tip for the week. But it's just fun.

Once we get inside the ropes, I think it was said here already, we are competitive, and you want to play well. But once you leave, in between the shots and so forth, it's more giggle, having fun, sharing stories.

Yesterday I had a great chat with Kyle and Zach, both basketball players, and just to listen to how they approach the game and what they're thinking. Listening from their perspective, not so much about golf, but just what they go through. To me, I enjoy listening to their stories.

TONY ROMO: We're definitely all trying to pick her brain, how do you do this?

VINNY DEL NEGRO: She's sick of me asking her so many questions couple years ago. She's like stop asking so many questions.

TONY ROMO: How do I chip this, I never get up-and-down.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I should get a commission on what you're getting out here.

TONY ROMO: Thanks, Annika. She's like you're welcome, I think.

**Q. Tony, one for you, I think there are 12 quarterbacks in the field. Why so many, and why are quarterbacks good at golf, do you think?**

TONY ROMO: I think it's similar to Joe, I think it's a functional movement. The motor pattern works very similar. It's something in your right arm, right hand that you try and make go that way, a stick, a ball. Everyone's pushing off the same sequence, and I think that allows people to at least give themselves an opportunity to be on plane and to sequence in the right fashion.

I think that's why guys can pick it up and they get pretty good fast.

**Q. Is there a friendly rivalry between sports? Is there any sense of hockey players or basketball players, you're a golfer, so maybe that's different, but are better at golf than football players, how does that dynamic play out?**

JOE PAVELSKI: I don't know if there's a battle going on. But it's nice, I think, when you win for your sport. There hasn't been a hockey player that's won it in a while. So that would be nice. I don't think there's anything crazy, except you definitely want to represent your sport.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I was just happy to be the first basketball player. I think there's other guys in the field. Steph Curry is tremendous. Dell Curry. Ray Allen is in the field.

So the quarterbacks, the baseball, the pitchers and things. But everyone's competitive. Everyone here is used to being successful in the arena. When you're in this arena, it's very difficult. You want to be as comfortable as possible, and you want to try to compete at a high level.

We know how difficult golf can be. We're trying to be consistent as possible.

**Q. With Steph, Warriors were out, coaches talk about his hand/eye coordination, how that translates. I'm curious you, as a former guard, how much those skill sets translate to golf?**

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I think Steph is just an amazing basketball player. His work ethic is -- I've seen it firsthand. I played with Dell in Milwaukee years ago. I knew Steph came to practice shoot all the time. Amazing career, work ethic mindset. Loves golf. He played a lot growing up. He works on it takes it serious. He obviously doesn't have the time doesn't need to spend the time so much on golf as on basketball right now with the way his career is going. But he's one of those guys that is used to being under the spotlight and he's a tremendous player.

TONY ROMO: He'll have more time than this year, he's always coming in the week after.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: He'll have more.

TONY ROMO: He'll be in the mix this year, that's the guess.

**Q. Tony, first of all tell the guy to your right that he looks much better in a San Jose Sharks sweater.**

TONY ROMO: I disagree. We love him in Dallas. Not allowed to go anywhere for a while.

**Q. I'm curious, Tony, for anybody, is there a make-or-break hole on this course, a hole that you've just got to have if you're going to be successful?**

TONY ROMO: You know what's crazy, I used to think 18 was a hole where you could finish each day, you could be playing poorly make up a ton of ground. There's a real chance of hitting 9-iron or wedge into that or 8-iron, whatever itself, and you could have a legit --

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: First shot or second shot, 9-iron?

TONY ROMO: Just through that in.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Just checking.

(Laughter)

TONY ROMO: I, though, have always struggled on 18 because, for whatever reason, the start lines make you have to start -- it's a very tight shoot. And it's easier for me to fade the golf ball there's huge pines up on the left. So if you end up pushing it at all, because you can't accidentally hit them, same on the right, drawing it. I worked all last year drawing the ball. I'm going to be ready like you're 13 at Augusta or something.

So I get here, and I swear I had one birdie in the last 20 rounds going into the 18th hole, and I hit driver, hits a tree, finally get in the last round I have to make a birdie to possibly get in the playoff. I'm like, I'm just going to go just to my one-yard bleeder. I did it three times in a row. Got lucky enough to handle it. So hopefully that carries over. About you that would probably be the hole, I would say.

**Q. Tony, I don't know if you've even thought about this, we're 56 days away from the Lions and Chiefs opening up the season, is that wild?**

TONY ROMO: Yes and no. (Laughter) I'm trying to think of the wildness of it. I do think it comes on fast as a football player, this is like your last chance when these guys are here. It's like, okay, you're done. You gotta get your mind right because you're going to work here quickly, and then it's just one of those seasons -- not the essence -- but I just said it last week, there's so many teams similar to this that can win it now. It used to be you knew the two to four. Last year there were six teams, maybe seven, that were legitimate Super Bowl winning teams.

And they all had to go against each other. I'm like the parity of that is a great thing. The National Football League has it and so does Edgewood Lake Tahoe.

**Q. Joe, obviously I know, but down in Dallas, Tony, you guys probably have some epic matches down there off the cameras. Had one last year on the camera. How much different is the ACC from the off-the-camera battles?**

TONY ROMO: I think it's great. It's like bragging rights but none of us do it. But Joe just knows when I wink at him that I got him, stuff like that. It's like you got lucky.

JOE PAVELSKI: Reminding you a little bit.



TONY ROMO: I'm telling everybody how good Joe is. Honestly, you have to be good to beat him. I'm not joking, back home I tell him Joe should have beat me. It's like the truth. He's always going to be in this.

**Q. Joe, a thousand one points this year, congratulations. Great milestone for an American-born player, most goals for an American-born player in the NHL?**

JOE PAVELSKI: Playoffs, maybe.

**Q. You had a four-play, four goals in one game this past playoffs?**

JOE PAVELSKI: Yes.

**Q. The last NHL winner of the tournament was Dan Quinn in 2004. And I have the sheet here. I don't have all the stuff memorized.**

JOE PAVELSKI: He was good there.

TONY ROMO: He won it after --

THE MODERATOR: He's won it four times.

**Q. And Mario Lemieux won it once. 10 NFL quarterbacks have won. There's 33 --**

TONY ROMO: Not that special.

**Q. I'm sorry, 10 wins by NFL quarterbacks. 11 wins by MLB pitchers. So they've won one-third of the competition. This is the 33 events that have taken place. So quarterbacks almost one-third, MLB pitchers, mostly Rick Rhoden.**

TONY ROMO: And Mulder.

**Q. My question to all of you -- this is called let me tell you a question. Tony, you won last year with a 62. Vinny, you won with a 69. The scores seem to be getting lower. In the 70s-plus area 2014 to 2020, the wins were more than 70 points. The last time it was below 70, was in 2013, with 69 points. Why do you think the scores are going down?**

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I just think the conditions are harder. I think they set the course up. You can put the pins -- the greens have been fantastic the last, I'd say, the last four or five years for sure, they've gotten faster. I think the superintendent, his staff, have done a phenomenal job.

TONY ROMO: Totally agree.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: They also changed 8 and 9 several years ago. But at the end of the day it comes down to the green speeds, the weather, the wind, and where they put the pins and how aggressive you can be in certain spots. The greens, if you get above the hole, below it, you have to have a really good touch to kind of get the speeds right, especially if it gets windy. I think the conditions overall have been fantastic, and putting the ball in the right spot is obviously a big key.

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: Well said; I agree. If you look at the field it gets better and better, but the course on its own is really, I think, what some of the holes are set up for birdies. To piggyback on what Tony said what holes are important. I think the par-5s are important, to really capitalize them. I think most of the guys reach it in two now. But I think that's the key of playing well. But overall, the field is great, but the course is even better. It sets it up for some good scoring.

JOE PAVELSKI: I just know from my experience, every time you come, that the greens are rolling really good. And you get above the hole and you're playing a little defensive at times. I guess I don't have a question -- I guess I was surprised last year after day one, I didn't have a good day, you're looking, oh, nobody really had a good day. And nobody ran away with it.

It gave me a little encouragement to stay close and try to battle back. But every year is a little different. 69 is not far off from in the 70s. It's a shot here or there. For me, it's just trying not to make the double bogeys, which I think every year there's been a couple that I've made, and it's kind of pulls you just away enough at the end.

TONY ROMO: I agree with all of it. I think one area is just firmness of greens. So the firmer greens get -- because years ago, really maybe even before Annika might have played it once or twice, but I think they could be soft. They were spongy.

I remember making jokes sometimes Barkley's foot here because the poa annua is rising back up from the last 30 minutes ago. You don't see any of that anymore. These are so pure and it's not like all of a sudden they get really terrible later in the day.

It's like a little to it, but it makes it challenging for chips, for little wedge shots you used to just fly it to the hole. Now you have to control your spin. You have to control the trajectory. And I think it makes it a little bit harder to get the ball as close to the hole consistently.

**Q. Annika, how much did you ski this past winter with**



## all the snow?

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: As much as possible. I saw the photos of the golf course and obviously feel for the superintendent, but then when you drove up the mountain, then you were excited for the mountain people, right, and for all the tourists. I've never seen so much snow in my life. As you can see there's still snow out there and all the rivers are just fast as ever. So I think we needed the snow.

But just to echo what Vinny said here, the superintendent does an amazing job. I think it even snowed in May and June or something. It's been a different year.

**Q. This is a gambling state, and every year the media room, we have a pool, a bet on who is going to win. Do we have a confident proclamation of score? Anybody? Anybody want to claim their score in the winning?**

TONY ROMO: I don't know what you're asking.

**Q. Basically we bet every year and their score, wondering if anyone is brave to make a proclamation.**

TONY ROMO: Annika 67.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: I'll go Annika at 68.

TONY ROMO: I'll go Annika 69.

JOE PAVELSKI: I think 70 is going to win it this year. I don't know who, though.

**Q. We always see you and you're used to playing with the guys, here you are three guys around you, you're always in the hunt. You're playing the same tees they are. They hit it farther, obviously. And that's an advantage to them. But you're always there to the end. I look at it, I think, okay, greatest female player in history. 72 wins. I've got to think these guys are standing here thinking, oh, she knows how to play this game, this is our secondary game. So when you look at these guys, do you think you have an advantage when it comes to that, when you're in the hunt?**

ANNIKA SORENSTAM: I would say yes and no. These are just not ordinary golfers here. These are exceptional athletes, and they're the best in their field. So I think Vinny touched on it earlier. They're very competitive. They want to do things right. The first time I played in one of the celebrity events, I didn't know what to expect. I was like, wow, these guys have great swings, good feel around the greens. They're acting professionally. Everything about it. I'm still super impressed all these years later.

Yes, they do hit a long ways. Just to listen to Tony said that he wanted to hit a drive just one yard a little bit more to the right rather than left, I'm like, wow, I remember doing that, but that was a while back.

So, of course, we have to even it out somehow. I have experience in this. I'm a grinder. But the distance is a big difference here. But that's just -- I know those terms coming in, I'm just thankful to be here. But don't underestimate any of these. Hitting balls next to Joe yesterday, I could hear it just take off, a special sound you would see in a normal driving range.

I have a lot of respect for these and the others, and I need to play my best to even have a chance. No more tips. I'm done. Zipping it.

**Q. You all are at the top of what you do. So how does it feel to play with other celebrities and athletes also at the top of what they do, how's the sportsmanship on the course?**

JOE PAVELSKI: I think it's great. It's fun you look forward to your pairing. You're trying to figure out who you're going to play with and talk about their sport along the way. But enjoy the game.

One great experience for me, Annika, when we played, some of my friends asked how it was. It was like, I feel I'm a fairly good player, but we got around the greens, got around the short game, it was like be -- I'm like, all right, I completely understand how good these golfers are.

There's just a different level of professionalism, and that's probably the best word, just different level of pro to her short game.

TONY ROMO: She takes one second, and I'm trying to find the ground for 25 --

JOE PAVELSKI: She has it all figured out, knows what she's doing. I'm trying to trust what I think I should be doing. But there was one round I think we were talking Mardy Fish and Wakefield and I and Mardy was asking Wakes how to throw a knuckle ball, pulling out a golf ball, showing it. Talking about different experiences if he knew he had it that night or didn't. It's just fun to hear those kind of interactions thrown around.

VINNY DEL NEGRO: But I think probably for me, as many years as I've played in this, I think just the relationships you build, the friendships, and every year you seem to meet some -- there's new players that haven't played in the event, and getting to talk to different guys or different

women, or whoever is in the tournament.

And traveling and playing different golf courses and being competitive and learning and picking their brain, and obviously playing with Annika is an honor, with her career.

But she's been so helpful and so nice, and to watch her hit a golf ball is amazing. But I think for me it's the relationships and the bonding, and I want everyone to play well. I just want to play a little bit better. But if I come to Dallas I'm going to call Tony, say let's go play, whatever.

It's just to me you build those relationships, and to me that's one of the most special part of American Century Championship and the tournament is those relationships.

TONY ROMO: I couldn't agree more. But I honestly feel, when I come off of 18, I'm really happy that you win, but you see Joe or Annika, and after Vinny, I'm like you root for them now. You genuinely want them -- because I know them better than other people, it's like -- if I don't win, I want someone here to win.

But it's like you don't sit there and you're like haha, Joe was the same way with me, kick my butt in Dallas, just get out of here.

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