

# American Century Championship

Friday, July 9, 2021

Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA

Edgewood Tahoe

## John Smoltz

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by John Smoltz, current leader. Nice round today. In all the years you've been here, best opening round with 25 points. Take us through it.

JOHN SMOLTZ: It is. I have a goal every time I play here to have 25 points. I think 75, take my chances, but I've never been able to get off to a good start. For whatever reason I'm way too conservative. I tried to change some approaches today.

This golf course has the lip-outs for me. So I'm trying to get over seeing the ball lip-out. And I had three unbelievable lip-outs for birdie. But it's the most birdies I've made in the first round. So I turned a round -- I could have had a couple of double bogeys, a couple breaks. I'm not going to focus on 18 like I normally would. I put it 15, 20-foot for eagle and 3-putted. But all in all ecstatic with my round.

#### Q. How many birdies?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Five. I put myself in the position, that's the key here, get the roll and start to get the feel of it and you can get on a nice roll. I did struggle with my holes the past five holes. I've been battling a rib issue. Once it goes, I'm kind of hanging on.

So each day I get that adjusted. I feel great. I just hope it holds through the 18 holes.

#### Q. Romo is behind you at second and Joe Pavelski nearby. I don't know where Mardy is right now. I think he's been struggling a little bit.

JOHN SMOLTZ: The goal for me every tournament is to get as close to the last group as I can, to play golf with the guys that I know, or gals -- Annika Sorenstam. And I just like that position.

I'd rather be in that position than trying to be too aggressive



and go for 6-, 7-under, which would be nice.

But the biggest thing today was the most I've been committed with shots. I've been really struggling, staying locked in with as long as the round takes. So today I accomplished goal one.

#### Q. You mentioned when you were in here the other day that last year putting was a bit of a struggle for you. This year you said you had three lip-outs today but were you rolling it pretty good?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I was rolling really good today. I gave everything a chance with the exception of one putt. Like I said 18, was inexcusable. Sometimes you get anxious knowing you've got a six-pointer and then you fall back on a three-pointer, next thing you know you've got one. You feel you bogeyed the hole. But really the shot was from the right sand to hit it over the trees to get in that position.

I feel great with my putter. Last year I set the par record. I didn't want to do that anymore. So I made bogeys and birdies. That's what you've got to do, is make bogeys and birdies and not be so consumed with trying to make par every hole, because it's one point.

#### Q. Going into tomorrow, what's the thought process?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I want to be aggressive. I learned a lot watching Mardy Fish last year. He stayed aggressive. And my mindset's been, this tournament, it goes where it goes. I'm concentrating, but I get too locked in on where the ball goes so many times. And this is a better day for me because normally I keep points, track of points in my head. I never did that when I played basketball, never did that when I pitched, I didn't know how many strikeouts I had. In golf I can't help myself but say I've got 12 through 9. I just play each hole.

#### Q. 25 points. You have that in your mind when you start. 75 would probably come pretty close winning. I think Mardy had 76 last year if memory serves.

JOHN SMOLTZ: That's correct. I know that's the number I've been watching for years trying to chase. So I just want



to be in position each day, each day try to get first or last group and be able to see what's going on versus trying to, like I said, force things.

**Q. The putts that lipped out, were they pretty good distance?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: Nice, 10, 12-footers, you go, reach and take it out of the hole, it's like the ball's laughing at you. And again that's changed my mindset, give it a chance. I get too frustrated when a ball that I think should go in doesn't go in. And all in all it was a pretty good day.

**Q. You've been one of the top players here for the last number of years. You've played on a couple of Senior Tour events. How confident are you going into it?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: That helps. I've been in those situations where I know I'm playing against the greatest people in the world on the Champions Tour. So you're a little intimidated when you think you're out of position every time you don't make the right shot. But I think what I've learned out there is I can hit that same quality shot. It's a matter of scoring. Missing it in the right spot and not putting yourself in spots where you think you have to hit a career shot.

So all in all, this golf course demands you to be below the hole, and it demands you be in the fairway. Did a better job of that today.

**Q. With a couple of putts coming back at, are you thinking, oh, man, here we go with the putting again? But you knocked in a bunch today, too?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: That was the thing I was most proud about. I'm normally thinking about seeing balls lip out. They didn't. When they lipped out, I just kept making putts. And move forward.

**Q. Compared to last year, now that the fans are back, do you feel like that helped you at all today the energy?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: Absolutely. It's awesome. I absolutely love it. With that comes a little bit of nerves. The beauty of today, our group was Joe Buck and Joe Mauer and the pace was consistent. So it didn't feel like the 30-minute, 20-minute waits which really helps me because of my body.

But when you get to 17, you know those are the final two holes. You've got to make good swings. And I birdied 17, I don't know how many times I've done it -- if I've done it once or twice, it might be the top. But when I made that putt, that's the kind of feeling you want to have. And 18

has always been an interesting hole for me. But we're getting closer to figuring it out.

**Q. How much baseball were you guys talking about in between shots?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: Me and Joe Mauer definitely talking baseball and going over a few things. Our careers kind of crossed a little bit. We didn't have interleague as much. I think I might have faced him a couple times I'm not even sure about that. But what an incredible hitter he was for his position. And he kind of left or retired when the ball started flying out of the park. So would have benefited him, too.

**Q. Any All-Star conversations?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: We were in the same All-Star Game in Pittsburgh, I think. That was his rookie year or first one, and he talked to me about that being a young player in an All-Star Game. I told him about my first snafu All-Star experience when Tommy Lasorda -- I was supposed to pitch second after Rick Russell and I didn't know how to get to the bullpen.

So Rick Russell started the game. Back then they go two innings, sometimes three. And Tommy told me I would pitch second. I asked some veteran pitchers, could you take me to the bullpen. They said we'll watch the first inning, then we will. The first inning didn't go well. And Rick Russell gave up two runs and a bunch of hits.

Tommy got on the phone said get Smoltzy up. And I was right there. And he looked at me and he said, "Kid, what are you doing? How many pitches will you need."

I said, "Seven to ten and I'll be ready." So I ran down into the bullpen, got ten pitches, came in the game, tie game, first and third, one out.

And Bo Jackson beat out a routine ground ball double play and I got the loss. Other than that I don't remember a thing. (Laughter)

**Q. Every year with you and Glavin and Maddox playing in all these events together, do you guys have a bet with each other? Is there like something that you guys --**

JOHN SMOLTZ: I can honestly tell you that Glavin wants to beat me so bad that he's been working hard taking lessons. But they know there's a big separation between the three of us. But we had so much fun playing golf. And I think when you retire -- and certainly Greg has had a much easier retirement by not doing anything -- we have

fun every year we get a chance to get together. Diamond Resorts, Tahoe and The Hall of Fame when we can do it without COVID.

We still reminisce. We had a trip canceled to Scotland this past year, unfortunately. We promised each other we would do a Scotland trip. And unfortunately that didn't happen. So we'll reschedule.

**Q. What would winning this one mean for you?**

JOHN SMOLTZ: I said on a bunch of interviews, I think they thought I was crazy, my life would be incomplete if I don't win Tahoe. They're like, "you can't be serious." I'm serious. This is the event I've always wanted. It's followed my career. I'm supposed to win a Cy Young, supposed to win a Cy Young and finally did in '96. But you're always trying to feel like, when people tell you should win or win a Cy Young and you're not doing it, even though my expectations are higher -- it's the same feeling here. It's like, oh, I can't believe you haven't won yet. All my buddies back home. I want to be the oldest winner and I can kind of shut them up.

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