

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
June 19, 2019



JOHN SMOLTZ

CHRIS RICHARDS: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to welcome Mr. John Smoltz to the American Family Insurance Championship.

John, you're very familiar with the sports fans here in Wisconsin. How much are you looking forward to playing this week in front of the great crowds here?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Well, six months ago or so when I was given this unbelievable opportunity of participating, I was told by everybody, tour players included, that this is a must-do or a must opportunity because of the support, and I can see why now just in the early stages. You know, the venue and everything.

As my baseball days take me through this area, I've never been in Madison. Obviously a lot in Milwaukee. And there are not only so many hidden gem golf courses, but fanatical sports fans in this state because of the teams that it has represented, obviously football in the Packers and now the Brewers. So I am excited and I've heard the support is phenomenal.

CHRIS RICHARDS: This will be your third start this season. What have you learned along the way? Have you been able to pick up new things with each experience.

JOHN SMOLTZ: I've learned my suitcase is breaking. My schedule is brutal, but I'm trying to find a way to navigate this incredible journey. This has the potential of being the better of the three from a preparation standpoint because fortunately my schedule worked out where last Monday was my last day of work. I finally got a chance to hit some balls and work on the game a little bit.

But it is what it is, and I'm more prepared, I guess. This tournament feels like -- every tournament I played in feels like a year apart. They're spread out, and so that's been a challenge.

But it's just been -- I just can't tell you on my calendar, as crazy as it is, I looked forward to Tucson with great excitement, of course Atlanta where I'm home, and then now, this is my last one. So I've learned in a weird way to try to not get as excited as I was in the previous two to play in the events. That may sound crazy, but the excitement doesn't work in golf. It kind of goes the wrong way.

So I'm trying to slow it down a little bit more, and I think the reps of the first two have helped me be more comfortable coming into this one, a venue I've never seen or played at.

CHRIS RICHARDS: How do you go about setting goals and expectations for yourself?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Well, I'm pretty hard on myself. I get really frustrated when things that I expect I should be better at, so I take a lot of notes. My phone is filled with notes. I wrote notes on the way here on what I'm trying to accomplish. In my highest of highest standards, I would be super disappointed if I couldn't finish three days under par. That's just part of why I'm here, because if I didn't think like that, then it would certainly not be a good thing.

So I like to gauge my game and where it's at and what I've learned and how I breathe under the circumstances. To me, I love pressure, but it's a different kind of pressure. It's an are-you-totally-prepared-type pressure. It would be like going out on the mound right now not having thrown a pitch in 10 years, trying to draw back from my 21 years. It just doesn't work. You've got to feel like your game and what you're trying to do is as adequate and as ready as possible.

And in this game, which unlike my sport, every mistake gets shown. Not in baseball. You can get hidden a lot in baseball. So it's a great challenge for me and it's been already a great year and I'm learning.

Q. John, as good as your game is, when you play alongside these guys, watch these guys, what are the subtle differences between how you go about it, what you do and what the guys who are finishing in the top-10 do?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Yeah, it is quite night and day. There's the part of me that each day you have a chance to be close, but after three days, the separation, you look back and you go, man, that's 18 shots difference. They just don't make mistakes. This is the greatest golfers in the world obviously over 50 years old. Tremendous respect for their careers and what they've been able to do. As I watch each member that I play with in my groups, they just know how to score, it's kind of like when I learned how to pitch without my best stuff. It wasn't pretty, but I could get it done, and that's the difference.

I think managing your golf game -- I think casual golf really hurts me because casual golf I can play with anybody, but casual golf has no real inherent pressure connected to the outcome. What I'm trying to do honestly this tournament is not be so consumed with my score because I probably would guess that those guys couldn't tell you some of their rounds during the middle of the round what they are. I'm the opposite; I know exactly what I've done, how many over par, how many under par. That's the difference when you think about the greatness of these guys just hitting shots, hitting shots and taking what the course gives you.

So I've head a lot of great compliments from them and some advice on when I learn how to manage my game, this would be -- that I can play at this level, which is encouraging, but which also means, you know, that I've got to work on that part of it.

Q. You've kind of been able to squeeze these events into your real-life schedule.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Yeah.

Q. Do you come away from it so far thinking if you were able to just devote yourself to this, like people you're playing with do, that you could be one of them, or do you say, I'm me and I'm never going to quite get to that point?

JOHN SMOLTZ: That's a great question and I do think so. That's a torturous thought process because I've got two more years guaranteed with Fox and MLB Network, so I can't be -- I can't let this take away from my real job, and I want to be the best analyst that I can be.

So I'm living a fantasy world kind of scenario where it's not the prototypical way you would go about a tournament. Just like there's no way you would have taken the route I took for last year's U.S. Senior Open. No way, but I had a job and my schedule was already set.

In my mind, yes, if I could devote the time that is needed to absolutely work on my game, there's no doubt that I would go to another level of my golf game. But being that it is, this tour is filled with the greatest, and in my three opportunities, if I can adjust a little bit to each spot, that would be awesome because I understand where my position is and where my job lies.

But I think about that all the time. I think about strategy moving forward on which tournaments I can try to qualify for and whether or not I would love to try to go to the tour school after -- you know, if the schedule works out.

But there's a lot of things. I've got some balls in the air that I'm trying to juggle. It's definitely challenging, there's no doubt about that.

Q. With the broadcasting job and golf and all the traveling and everything, how much of a toll do you feel that that takes on you physically, mentally?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Yeah, that's been my biggest challenge. That's where I'm most disappointed in myself.

I was the most disciplined, hardest working baseball player in my mind to survive 21 years. I mean, getting in the gym, working out, playing hurt. When I retired, there was a relief to not do that anymore.

Unfortunately, that relief is working on 10 years now and that's been -- the hardest thing is getting in the gym, working out, trying to stay in shape in the hotels, on the road. Every week I set out like, okay, this is the week I start my Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Honestly, that's been a challenge. I would love a better structure in that way, and I'm on my way to trying to navigate that, but that is the biggest -- people don't -- I know there's a lot of people who probably even travel as much or more than me and it's just a very

complicated -- I sit five to seven hours a day in my job.

So I'm not used to that. I'm not a guy that I could sit that long before, but that's what -- you know, sitting at a desk or sitting at a stadium.

So it's the mornings. You know, last eight days at the network, I played golf seven of them and did my shows at night. Didn't get much sleep, but I had to do what I had to do and I'm learning to try and balance that just a little bit better.

Q. Do you take interest in what Tony Romo's tried to do with his exemption, Steph Curry? A, do you watch them? B, do you maybe talk to those guys? I'm just curious as they're experimenting a little bit with this game that they love with obviously their other duties.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Yeah, I know there was a lot of discussion around the Tony Romo piece and the PGA, and I understand it. I mean, the PGA with the Web.com and kind of like, I don't want to call it the minor leagues of baseball because their minor leagues in golf is way better than the minor league players in baseball because there's so many more levels.

But hometown, great push for the tournament, great name recognition, so I get that. I really do get that. People don't understand, and I know Tony does understand it because he's competing at high levels. I think he won the Mid Am here by eight shots or something here in Wisconsin and then went on to win American Sentry Championship, so Tony can flat out play.

And the old adage is when you sit at home, a lot of people think they can do a lot of things. I hope last year's experience personally that I was able to show would show why you can't.

You know, I always have this vision, I was literally working out yesterday watching a game show, and when you're sitting at home you've got all the answers. Time's irrelevant. Like you can't believe people on a game show actually come up with some of the answers they do, but they don't have the time that you have to process. It's the same thing with golf or any other sport that you're not professional at. It's not easy and it's a learning experience.

So with Steph Curry, man, what an athlete. And I get the chance to see them both in a couple weeks, three weeks, and so it's -- people of other sports are always intrigued with this great game of golf. It's an obsession that this sport has that no other sport has. You can play it longer. Once you get to know what this sport's all about -- I didn't like it. I thought it was stupid at the age of 20. I never played it. I mean, I grew up in Michigan and just never played it. Now I have such admiration for the sport itself, for the character with which you carry yourself and obviously the honor in the game.

Guys like Mark Mulder, guys like Tony Romo, same question. If they dedicated themselves, there's a greater chance for those guys than for other people who maybe just all they know is golf. They've experienced the highest level in their other sports and I think there's value in

that, but until you get the amount of reps and time around a golf course, I don't think any of us until -- I have the greatest appreciation now.

I just got off the phone with a buddy of mine and he's like, "All right, top-10 this weekend," and I'm like, "Are you out of your mind? Do you know where I'm at?" But it's that kind of thought process that keeps me young.

Q. You probably heard this one before, but why do pitchers and kickers in particular make such good golfers?

JOHN SMOLTZ: I just think it's time. There's some coordination and some mechanical similarities, but then there's also some things that, you know, as a pitcher you do lateral movement. You go laterally down the hill. You don't want to go laterally in golf, you want to stay centered over the ball.

So there's some similarities, but then there's also some -- actually as a pitcher, it's just time. You get to play once every five days. A kicker gets time to do certain things, I'm sure. Hockey players have a lot of ability to play golf with the way that, depending on what side they hit the puck.

So for me, that's what started me in golf. I had nothing but time. I never fished or golfed when I got to Lakeland, Florida, Class A ball for the Tigers. I'm like, I'm going to go crazy if I don't find something to do. I picked up fishing and golf. Golf obviously became the No. 1 hobby for me.

Q. How good do you think the 2019 Brewers can be?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Oh, man. I thought the Brewers were going to be one of the best teams in the National League going into the season. Unfortunately, they lost two of their best relievers. That hurt, because why I thought they were going to be a better team is guys like Woodruff, Barnes obviously going into the rotation. I would have loved to have seen him stick more and just work out his kinks.

But I think the Brewers are going to go as far as their starting rotation takes them this year because they have more depth. Their offense, although the west coast has kind of put them on a little bit of a skid, but the Central's going to go right down to the wire.

Can't wait to watch the September run because between the Cardinals, the Cubs and the Brewers, you know, the Brewers still have a leg up based on their overall strength of, you know, whether it's Josh Hader or their bullpen or the strategies they deploy. So when you get a duplicate production of an MVP-type year in Mr. Yelich, you're riding pretty good.

I have always said as a baseball player, now as a broadcaster, when baseball is relevant in Milwaukee, baseball is in a good place, and nothing spoke to that more than last year and their run. Really a great run. What did they win, like the last 10 or 11 games of the season?

Something crazy. Almost took down the Dodgers.

Like this time of year every general manager in the world that has a chance to win is looking at how they can add a piece without, you know, sacrificing so much within the organization. So if they add a reliever, which is strange to say because they were loaded last year with relievers, they're going to be right there come September and into October.

Q. How would you pitch Yelich? Does he have any holes in his swing anywhere?

JOHN SMOLTZ: Well, everyone has holes, but he just doesn't have as many.

The biggest thing for me watching a young player like him that has added the power, that's what goes to the next level. This guy was going to win a batting title. Now, all of a sudden he's going to hit 50-some home runs. So I would say he's adapted real well to Miller Park and the slow start he got.

He talked about having trouble seeing there. He went from one of the biggest ballparks at home to one of the best ballparks to hit in, and he has definitely shown that.

I would have to get him swinging away. I would have to throw him a lot of splits away and sliders at his back foot and hope that I could get him a little aggressive. But he's not one of those wild swingers. I love wild swingers, those are where I made my living off of. Today's game is filled with a lot of them, so there's going to be a lot more opportunities to strike guys out, but there's a lot more opportunities to give up home runs, which is by far the greatest rate we've ever seen. I don't know if the layer of the universe has lifted its -- I have no idea why they're going as far as they're going. That seems to be the topic of baseball. They're going an extremely far distance, but we're seeing a lot of home runs.

CHRIS RICHARDS: All right. I think we've covered all our bases. Thanks, John.

JOHN SMOLTZ: Hey, no pun intended.