

Disabled vet to challenge celebs at golf tourney

By John McMullen, Sports Network

There are quite a few stars scheduled for the 25th anniversary of the American Century Championship but only one real hero.

Chad Pfeifer lost his left leg during a deployment with the U.S. Army in Iraq but that won't stop him from appearing in beautiful Lake Tahoe with a field of 80 professional athletes and entertainers, jockeying for \$600,000 in prize money during the charity tournament's silver anniversary.

"I'm no celebrity, that's for sure," Pfeifer told the Sports Network in a phone interview, "(so) it was exciting to get the invitation and be included. It's really cool."

Cool to meet – and compete against – all-time LPGA great Annika Sorenstam and to hang with Charles Barkley, Aaron Rodgers, Jerry Rice, Ray Romano and scores of others who are part of the scene every year in Lake Tahoe.

The 32-year-old Pfeifer, a retired corporal, lost his left leg above the knee on April 12, 2007, when a roadside IED exploded while he was on patrol, the kind of horrific injury which would send most into a tailspin and take any kind of athletics completely off the table.

For Pfeifer, a former baseball player at the junior college level who also enjoyed playing pickup basketball with his friends, it certainly ended any hopes of returning to the diamond or hardwood. When one door closes, however, another can open.

"I grew up as a big baseball player, played basketball and football as well, but played a little college baseball. And

golf was just a sport that allowed me to be a competitor again," he said.

Pfeifer did play golf a few times before joining the Army but only on a casual basis. He really took to the sport when tackling an extensive rehabilitation process and trying to master his prosthetic leg at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

A friend and fellow amputee convinced him the links could be a great outlet, both mentally and physically.

"It really gave me good practice with that prosthetic, walking around up and down hills, into bunkers, just different terrains that the golf course has," Pfeifer said. "It was great practice as far as getting used to the prosthetic leg."

Used to it may be a bit of an understatement.

These days Pfeifer is a tremendous player, a three-time George W. Bush Presidential Center's Warrior Open champion, the National Amputee Golf Association Tournament kingpin in 2011, and a PGA club professional at Goodyear's Golf Club of Estrella in Phoenix.

"I guess I'm pretty good," Pfeifer joked.

Good enough to be installed as a 15-to-1 shot to win the American Century Championship, far better than most of the sports stars and celebrities who will be playing alongside him, an eclectic bunch which also includes football legend John Elway and comedian Larry the Cable Guy.

One competitor Pfeifer isn't expected to hold up against is Sorenstam, who won 72 LPGA tournaments, including ten majors, before stepping away from the game at the end of 2008.

"I don't compete any more, as you know," Sorenstam said. "It's been six years since I stepped away. It will be interesting to see how my game stacks up to these world-renowned athletes and

actors.”

For Pfeifer, though, the tournament is about far more than winning or even testing himself alongside legends like Sorenstam. He hopes his story will resonate with others struggling with disabilities, combat-related or not.

“I hope I can be an inspiration to anyone with disabilities,” he said. “It’s very important to understand there are so many things you can accomplish and if I can give anyone struggling some hope. That’s more important than anything else.”

That doesn’t mean Pfeifer isn’t excited about playing with some of the big names scheduled, however.

“Wow, there are just so many (people) I’m looking forward to seeing,” he said. “So many big names I grew up with it. John Elway, Greg Maddux and certainly Charles Barkley, who I have heard some great things about. And Kenny Lofton for me. I grew up a (Cleveland) Indians fan and he was such a big deal.”

The 25th American Century Championship takes place from July 18-20 at Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course.

“My expectations are just to have fun,” Pfeifer said. “I mean, this is an incredible opportunity for me, not only to test my golf game, just to be on the golf course with legendary athletes. There’s so many names in the field that have been huge for their sports.”