

U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Tuesday August 9, 2016

Bernhard Langer



THE MODERATOR: It's my pleasure to introduce 2010 U.S. Senior Open Champion Bernhard Langer into the Media Center. Bernhard is playing in his ninth U.S. Senior Open this year. In addition to his victory, Bernhard has five other top ten finishes in his eight previous U.S. Senior Open appearances.

Bernhard, when looking at your record, a lot of things are impressive, but what stood out to me was 15 consecutive top ten finishes in Major championships. It's certainly a physical test to be ready week in and week out, but it's also a mental grind. What do you do to stay sharp week in and week out?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, it's nothing new for us guys. We're used to playing -- people say, is four rounds a lot harder than three? It really isn't. I mean, we've played four rounds all our lives, and we still play a lot of golf, whether we play at a Pro-Am or two Pro-Ams beforehand. So it really doesn't make a big difference in terms of that.

But to prepare, well, I try and stay in reasonable shape physically. And I try to prepare while looking at a new golf course like this one, play it at least twice, get a good look. Spent a little bit of time around the greens checking out certain angles, certain pin positions, possible pin positions, you know, certain areas off the tee, areas I'd like to hit off the tee, areas I'd want to avoid.

All this is pretty much ABC golf, I think. Most guys do that. Some do it a bit more thoroughly than others. Some rely on their caddies a lot.

But I think a golf course like this, you have to plot your way around. It's not just give me driver and blast it down there and then hit it on the green. It's not going to happen because if you hit it in this rough, you're going to get punished; and if you hit it in the bunkers, you're going to get punished. You know, if you get out of position, you're going to be out of position over and over again on the same hole, which is not good.

So it's one of the hardest tests I've ever seen, especially this golf course, because the greens are so small, they're so undulated and have corners to it. They're fairly firm as well. It's very, very tough just to get the ball to stop on some of the greens with the clubs we're hitting into.

I mean, I looked at the scorecard, and I think it's par 70, 7,124 yards. If you add 300 or 400 yards, that makes it almost 7,500 yards, par 72. That's Senior golf? That sounds like a young man's game to me. But that's what I mean. It's not just tight and narrow and small greens. It's very long on top of that. Scores are going to be high this week.

THE MODERATOR: Was this the first time, at least a couple days ago, first time you'd been here to Scioto?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yes, very first time.

THE MODERATOR: And Rocco Mediate was just in here. He said the bunkers were evil. The rough was exceptionally long. He likes it tough. Do you feel that you enjoy playing difficult golf courses. Do some of those times, those conditions favor your game?

BERNHARD LANGER: I used to not enjoy conditions like this, but certainly you wouldn't enjoy it week after week because it just beats you up. Once a year, you can handle it, I think. Or twice a year. But it's brutal.

As I said, I hit a couple of shots out of the rough. Just very difficult to control the golf ball or get it moving in the right direction. Even if you hit two quality shots, you know, you're still dealing with some severe greens.

THE MODERATOR: For many years, you used a long putter, anchored stroke. Rule 14-1b was passed this past year, yet you haven't seemed to miss a beat. What did you do this year to prepare for essentially a new putting stroke in 2016?

BERNHARD LANGER: I practiced a great deal. Spent many weeks, months, lots of hours on the putting green, trying different techniques but also working with the putter non-anchored. And in the end, I came to the conclusion that in the short term, it's definitely the easiest for me to putt non-anchored, and it's been okay. I mean, I've missed a few putts that I probably wouldn't have missed otherwise, but that's the game of golf.

It's definitely a little bit harder. But in the short-term, it's still the better way for me to go. Doesn't mean, long-term, I might not switch at some point. But right now, I'm committed to non-anchoring with a long putter.

And I'm not even messing around. But once the offseason comes around, I might try a couple other styles again.

Q. In this year, 13 events played, 3 wins, 11 top tens already. How do you feel about your game heading into this week?

BERNHARD LANGER: I feel pretty good about my game. It's been a phenomenal year. I've already won two Majors, and lots of good finishes. I've been in contention a number of times. Very solid. Just not many complaints really.

There's always -- last week, I finished two shots out of the lead, and I hit one in the water on 18 that cost me on Saturday, but you can always say that.

You're taking chances. Every time you pull a club, you take a chance in executing it. Sometimes you pull it off, and sometimes you don't. But thrilled with my Senior career so far. It's been an amazing ride. Sometimes I've got to pinch myself, all the good stuff that's happened.

I won my 100th tournament this year and then went to 101, which is pretty exceptional. Not many people have done that. So I'm very, very pleased to still be playing at this level at my age.

THE MODERATOR: And Jack Nicklaus, we're here at Jack's place, Scioto, where he grew up playing. He has the record, eight Senior Majors. You're right up there with seven. How much would it mean to you to tie Jack's record here at Scioto?

BERNHARD LANGER: It would be an amazing achievement and honor to do it right here where he started his career. But Jack is in a different class altogether. Nobody might ever achieve what he's done. We're just trying to get a small part of his footsteps and try and follow along.

He's not just a great champion in golf, but he's a wonderful father, a great family man, gives back to charity a great deal, and those are the kinds of things that we should all emulate. He's a wonderful role model for all of us.

Q. Bernhard, it's rare for guys to improve with age, at least at a certain age, and yet some people say that seems to be the case with you. Do you agree with that? In what ways are you a better golfer than 10, 15 years ago, if you can speak to that.

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, I'm a strong believer that, even with age, you can improve your technique because the technique has nothing to do with age really. It's just the technical aspect of you swinging the

club, obviously, and my swing is shorter now than what it was 20 years ago.

I'm not as strong and I'm not as flexible. I can't do the things I did 20 years ago, but I can still improve my technique. And if I do that, with my physical abilities, I can still hit more fairways, hit more greens, learn more about myself and the game of golf and what I can't do, what I shouldn't do, and I think I've achieved some of that. I think my technique has gotten a little bit better, trying to not have a weakness in my game.

There's always things that creeps up here and there but, in general, I'm a reasonable driver of the golf ball. I'm fairly good at hitting fairways in regulation. Now, if my short game holds up, then I should have a chance being up on the leaderboard.

That's my mental side of it. I look at it that way. I seriously feel that I can still get better, and age is a number. Some 60-year-olds, they look like 80, and others look like 40, and they feel like 80 or they feel like 40. So it depends.

Q. Are you as competitive or maybe more so than when you were on the PGA Tour? I mean, has that changed?

BERNHARD LANGER: No, I've always been competitive. I have a very competitive nature. Whatever I do, I want to do it well and good, and that's why I prepare appropriately so I expect something. I'm not here on vacation. I didn't fly to Columbus just to see Columbus and Ohio and say hello and sign a few autographs. All that is wonderful. It's a great part of the job, but I'm here to try and do well and hopefully win the championship.

Q. So last thing. This comes as no surprise to you, your success?

BERNHARD LANGER: A little bit. When I first turned 50, I didn't know what to expect on the Champions Tour. I thought it could be sweet, sour, whatever. I might miss the regular Tour, but I really didn't. I played two or three tournaments out here, and I immediately felt like this is where I want to play the rest of my life. I've done the other thing. I've been there, done that, and it's fine, but it's for young men.

I felt very comfortable out here, and I was hoping to be one of the top five or ten players on this Tour. So far, so good.

Q. Bernhard, how do you keep your enthusiasm for golf?

BERNHARD LANGER: It's simple. First of all, I love the game. I love to compete and be competitive. Thirdly, I time myself in a sense where I take lots of

weeks off and I take time away from the game. People think, when I go home, I beat balls eight hours a day. That's far from it. I often put them away for four or five days and don't touch them at all or just go and hit for an hour and come back home, that kind of thing.

So I take breaks away from the game. So when I come back a week or two weeks later, I'm hungry again, and I enjoy it again.

Q. Bernhard, with your Masters win, you signaled that golf was an international game. Are you going to keep an eye on what's happening in Rio? How much interest is the Olympic golf competition to you?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, well, certainly I follow the Olympics as much as I can. I wish they would show more of the sports which you don't see on a regular basis. But obviously, every country shows their own athletes and whatever they're good at. So you just have to be happy with what you see.

But I will certainly follow some of the golf. I just wish it had been a team event. It took us so long to get golf back into the Olympics, it would have been -- I think it would have been great to have a team event, but that's me. I love team golf. We don't have a lot of it.

Ryder Cup is a great example. I enjoyed the World Cup. I enjoyed any team event because I never played team events. I was never an amateur, never could play any team events.

At the pro level, we don't have a lot of it. So that's the only thing I would change if I was in charge.

Q. Going back to when you were 50, did you have a goal in mind? Did you know that there was like a window of four or five years where you really needed to win, or did you not look at it that way because you've gone beyond that window.

BERNHARD LANGER: I didn't really know until I saw the statistics. They have statistics about everything nowadays, as you can imagine. It's the same in senior golf. They show that most of the tournaments won on the Champions Tour are between age 50 and 55 or so, and then it drops dramatically. So I'm trying to disprove that. I'm trying to be one of those whatever it is, Hale Irwins, Tom Watsons, those guys that have longevity and can win into their sixties.

We'll see where that goes but, again, as I said, age is a certain number. If you have enough game, I can't see any reason why I shouldn't be able to win into my 60s.

Q. Rocco was in here earlier talking about how different the game really is at the younger levels,

the young guys today and how far they hit it and so forth. You still play in the Masters. Do you feel overwhelmed when you go to the Masters now, looking at Dustin Johnson or Jason Day or Rory, how they approach playing Augusta compared to you?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yes, I do. I mean, I played with these guys the last few years. I played with Jason Day on Saturday of the Masters. The clubs he's hitting, I'm not used to. And Dustin Johnson and some of those guys, Bubba Watson, it's just crazy, you know, when I look at it.

Paired with Stenson a couple of times, he hit his 3 wood. You know, he was waiting on 2 to hit the green. I'm like, what's he waiting for? There's no way he's going to get that green into the wind from 280, and he flew it into the middle of the green. I'm going, that's a different game. I don't know that game.

So, yeah, it's tough, and it's tough for me to compete against these guys because I'm hitting three or four more clubs into every green or whatever it is, sometimes two, and those greens are not designed to be hit with 4 irons and 3 irons. But, again, there's more to the game than hitting certain shots. You've still got to get it in the hole.

But it is certainly much harder to play a very, very long golf course like Augusta is nowadays.

Q. Having said that, do the rules of trying to win at a place like Augusta -- well, let's take Augusta for an example. You won there twice. Do the rules of how you won there, have they really changed over the years, or do you still have to do the same things you did to win today?

BERNHARD LANGER: The rules of golf haven't changed dramatically.

Q. But the rules of how guys play, I guess the style of play. Not the rules, but the style of play.

BERNHARD LANGER: The style has changed at Augusta, I think, and I'll tell you why. When Augusta was played for many years without any rough and without a number of trees, Augusta was a second shot golf course. It wasn't about driving. Now it's about driving and second shots and short game, obviously.

But Augusta used to be fairly wide open. There were maybe three or four tight tee shots, and the others were -- I remember looking at 11, and I couldn't decide do I want to be left or right, because it was a 110-yard fairway. It was as wide as St. Andrews, basically, from 1 to 18, 11 was. Now you'd better hit it straight. Otherwise, you're going to be in the trees. They planted 5,000 trees. They've got rough on both sides.

So Augusta is different now than what it used to be. It used to be an angle game. You had to place your driver at a certain angle so you have a better shot into the green. Now you just hit the fairway, and you all have the same angle.

THE MODERATOR: Bernhard Langer, 8:01 off the 10th tee on Thursday.