

U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Wednesday June 27, 2018

Bernhard Langer

THE MODERATOR: Welcome again to the 39th U.S. Senior Open here at the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. Here joining us is U.S. Senior Open champion and World Golf Hall of Famer, Bernhard Langer. He's playing in his 11th US Senior Open, has had six finishes in the top 10. Your first Senior Open was 2008 here at the Broadmoor and one of the things that happened to you was an encounter with a bear when you were playing in your second round. In addition to that tie sixth finish. Tell us about the encounter about the bear.

BERNHARD LANGER: Very unusual experience. I think we were playing 13th or 14th hole. We see all this commotion over out there on the right. And we see this bear running across, and he's coming across that fairway through the rough and he's heading right at us.

I'm with Tom Watson and Dottie Pepper, and I say look, there's a deer coming. And she threw her stuff on the ground and started yelling and ran backwards.

And I debated whether I should run, too, or just stand my ground. I figured, well, I can't outrun the bear, might as well just stay here, stare him down. If he wants a piece of me, he's going to get it anyway.

Luckily, he just ran like ten feet in front of me and headed into the trees over there. But that was -- my heartbeat went up a little bit. It was a pretty unusual experience.

And somebody took a picture. So I got a picture at home with the bear about 15 feet away from me. It's pretty cool.

Q. You still finished tied sixth that week in your first Senior Open and continued play. What about the setup brings out the competitive nature in you that you can score well?

BERNHARD LANGER: Generally any U.S. Open event is extremely difficult setup, generally narrow fairways and a lot of rough. Here on top of that you have extremely undulated greens and that's going to be the key to try to keep the ball below the hole so you have uphill putts not downhill putts that's not going to be easy. Any front pin in here you'll have a downhill putt pretty much.

And many other pins you're going to have severe



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breaks, slopes and it's really -- you gotta, first of all, hit the fairway. If you do that, then you have some chance of attacking some of the pins or hope to make par.

If you don't hit the fairway, most of the time it's 9-iron, wedge, 8-iron, lay-up, you don't see many guys reach the green out of this rough. It's a real test from the very first shot to the very last one.

It's a test with a driver, it's a test with the irons, and definitely the short game, too. The rough around the greens is extremely difficult and putting on these greens is very hard. Everybody says it always slopes from the, what do you call it, the shrine from the mountain down this way and it sure does. Severe slopes going, it's going to be a tough challenge.

Q. Is it similar to the way it was in 2008 or --

BERNHARD LANGER: I thought 2008 was a lot firmer. Fairways are a lot softer, picking up a bunch of mud balls, which is surprising. It hasn't really rained much, according to the locals, so they must be watering a great deal.

But hopefully there will be a bit less of that in the next few days. The weather maintains to be good, I think. We're not expecting a lot of rain. The course is in great shape. The fairways are just a little soft.

Q. You've talked a little bit about the greens. When Fred Couples was in here he called them brutal. How would you describe them?

BERNHARD LANGER: They're as severe as they get, yes. Brutal is a good word for it. I mean, Fred and I played in many Masters over the years. And they're pretty severe and tough. But these probably are another level still. It's not easy to find pin positions. As large as some of these greens are, because of the slope on them.

And I don't know when this course was built, probably a while ago. Not that long ago then, but anyway we sometimes we play courses that are 100 years old and they were designed for Stimpmeter's seven and eight, but now we're playing 12 and the greens are just almost unplayable. So that wouldn't be the case here.

But I'm sure the USGA is going to watch whatever, where they put the pin locations. And hopefully make it

fair and playable.

Q. Fred also said he thought there were 15, 16 people in the field that could win this. Now that you've been here, Bernhard, and looked at the course, do you agree with that or do you even consider that at all?

BERNHARD LANGER: How many?

Q. He thought 15 or 16.

BERNHARD LANGER: There's a lot more than that. You just look at the field you had here. I would say 50, at least 30. But not 15. I think there's a lot more.

It's just -- the caliber of player that we have out here, there's a lot of great champions and a lot of guys that can do well here.

Q. Davis was in here earlier I asked him about what keeps him going after the Hall of Fame and everything else and I was wondering what keeps you going? Is it the love of the game or is it the competition, or some combination thereof?

BERNHARD LANGER: Definitely both. I love the game of golf. I love to compete. And I'm pretty good at it still. I enjoy it.

I know that the clock is ticking. I'm going to be 61 in August. It's not going to last forever. So I'm trying to enjoy my last few years at playing at this level and then we'll see what I'll do after that.

Q. You talk about the clock's ticking on your career. You sit at 37 CHAMPIONS TOUR wins, the guy who is coming in here in a few minutes, Hale Irwin, has 45. Do you ever look at that as a goal or something you're striving to trying to equal or surpass Hale's CHAMPIONS TOUR record for victories?

BERNHARD LANGER: We certainly look at it because it's phenomenal. It's amazing to win 45 tournaments in a span of whatever, 10 or 12 years, whenever he did it. I don't know how old he was when he won his last one. That's very difficult to do on any TOUR. And I've been very blessed to have won 37.

Can I get to 45? I think I can. But I gotta do it soon. I can't wait until I'm 65, expecting to win another eight tournaments. But I won seven last year. I've had a win and three seconds already this year. So it's possible.

But it doesn't get easier. There's new, young guys coming out, 50-year-olds, that hit the ball further than I do, and I'm going to be facing that as I'm going to get maybe a little shorter over the years, there's going to be some bombers coming out that have a huge advantage.

Q. (Inaudible.)

BERNHARD LANGER: How old was he?

Q. 63, maybe.

BERNHARD LANGER: I don't know, I'm not a stat guy. I don't study all that.

Q. To your point about the number of people who can win the event, this is a golf course that is kind of a difficult walk. You're at elevation. And you as a person have always prided himself as being fit. Does that cut down the number of people that will be competitive as well?

BERNHARD LANGER: I think it could. But I think most of the guys out here walk. We don't ride carts any more. Most of us are used to it. But this is a different level, as you say, we're playing at altitude. It's a little harder to breathe.

The course is quite difficult to walk. A lot of up and down and we're huffing and puffing walking to certain tee shots.

So that will be a small part of it. But most of the guys that play regularly on the TOUR are used to that.

Some of the teaching pros may not quite be in shape for that. But I don't know. There could be some of them that are much fitter than me or anybody else out here.

Q. I'm curious, and I apologize that this isn't senior-related open, have you ever been frustrated at a U.S. Open or anything that you've done something like hit a moving ball like Phil did? I don't want you to comment about Phil, I just wonder if you felt that kind of frustration, where you felt like that or you just felt like --

BERNHARD LANGER: I think we all have actually, because, especially in the U.S. Open, sometimes the setup is to the very limit and sometimes beyond the limit.

We know what happened there at Shinnecock a few years ago where they had to water it afterwards because nobody could stop the ball. And I remember playing with Tom Lehman at Olympic Club some years ago and 18 the pin was back left. First of all, he hit a phenomenal second shot in, pitching wedge, almost went in the hole, but then it came back about 30, 40 feet, so he had a straight uphill putt. Almost made the putt and guess where it ended up? By his feet. So he had a straight uphill putt and it came straight back to his feet again. And I think he 4 putted that whole to make a six.

And to me that's goofy golf. That's not -- if you hit good

shots, you ought to be rewarded. If you hit a great wedge in there and then you made a great putt that almost went in, you should have made par at the worst, not a six.

But when you deal with weather and the golf course and pin positions and it can be different. They set the pin at 6 in the morning or something and by 3 or 4:00 in the afternoon it can all change.

But they ought to be experienced enough to not take it to the edge at 6.00 a.m. knowing it could be over the edge a few hours later. That's what I'm saying.

And we have a lot of guys that set up tournaments and pin positions and, yes, it's the U.S. Open. But you don't want to make the best players in the world look stupid. That would be my comment to that.

And have we felt like Phil, yeah, we've all felt like Phil.

Q. I was talking more about the emotion of it.

BERNHARD LANGER: He apologized and I'm glad he did. But there's something inside of us when you feel like if you hit a good shot and you don't get rewarded it's screaming inside of you. But we were taught to not let the emotion get the better of us and we control it most of the time.

Q. Right. That's more of what I was interested in was just the battle within.

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, it's a mental battle. And that's part of the game. It's a mental battle all the way.

Q. You've had a win each of your years on PGA TOUR Champions. Do you still feel like there's a target on you when you tee it up each week; that you're somebody that people need they feel like they need to beat?

BERNHARD LANGER: I'll leave that up to them. I try to play the best golf I can play. And if they feel they have to beat me to win the trophy, so be it.

But I'm not trying to intimidate anybody or whatever. I'm just trying to play the best golf I can, and I know if I play well I might have a chance to win. If I don't play well, I can't expect to win, because there's plenty of other good players out there.

Q. Everybody's been telling us they're hitting the ball good, but they're putting in extra time working on the putting, is that what you've been doing this week too?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yes, of course when you face demanding greens the way they are, you need to get some kind of feel -- they're extremely fast downhill and quite slow uphill. You're constantly dealing with

different speed on your putt. And then, I don't know if it's true or not, I've heard rumors that maybe two or three of the greens will be cut a little bit less than some others, because of the slope on them.

I hope they'll tell us which greens those are, just to be fair. There's nothing wrong with doing that. But it just shows that there's some of them on the edge because of the slope on them.

And we have to get used to that. You could have a 50-foot downhill putt and you putt it three inches and it might run off the green. And then you have a 10-yard uphill putt and you have to hit it like a 20-yard putt because you're going uphill into the grain.

Q. Curious if you watched the World Cup yesterday and have you been able to shake off Germany's performance?

BERNHARD LANGER: I watched it this morning and it was not a good start to the day. It was quite pathetic. They don't deserve to go through and they wouldn't have made it much further the way they're playing.

Quite frankly, if they can't beat South Korea, how are they going to expect to beat Brazil or Spain or some of the other teams that are still part of it.

So they don't have a good team right now. They're rebuilding. And they play like they're scared. Anyways, I was surprised at the statistics that four out of the five last past champions have not made it through the first round or whatever. That's astonishing to me. I know it's four years later, and you lose a bunch of players every four years. But that's still incredible. But a lot of the other countries are getting better.

I don't see a really weak team out there anymore. There were 32 teams playing. There's very few that have no chance of advancing.

Q. What's your comfort level playing at altitude?

BERNHARD LANGER: My comfort level?

Q. Yeah.

BERNHARD LANGER: I'm not sure. I'm guessing whether it's 10 percent or 6 percent or whatever it is. I think some of it has to do with temperature. And in the morning when it's cooler I don't think the ball goes 10 percent. In the afternoon, when it's like now, 95 or something, I think it does. But it also depends if you're a low ball hitter or high ball hitter, if you hit it lower it won't go quite as far, and if you hit it high it might be 12, 15 percent. A guy like Kenny Perry who hits a high draw, he has a huge advantage out here. His long ball is going even further, because it's all carry for him. He doesn't hit that low runner. He just bombs it up there.



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THE MODERATOR: Thank you.