

U.S. Senior Open

Press Conference

Wednesday June 28, 2017

Bernhard Langer



THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, it's my pleasure to welcome Bernhard Langer into the Media Center. Bernhard is playing in his tenth U.S. Senior Open, the champion in 2010 at Sahalee and now a nine-time Senior Major winner after wins at the Tradition and the Senior PGA Championship a little earlier this year.

Now you're up to nine. You've broken Jack Nicklaus' record. Have you spoken to Jack since you broke the record?

BERNHARD LANGER: I haven't seen Jack since the Masters, but he tweeted or sent me a quick text message as well, saying congrats and keep it going. So that was very nice of him.

THE MODERATOR: In all the accomplishments you've had over your career, where does that fit in, being now the leader with nine Senior Major wins?

BERNHARD LANGER: It's hard to say, but whenever you do something that no one has done before, it's pretty unique and special. So I don't know exactly where it fits in, but I'm glad I'm there.

THE MODERATOR: Now you're age 59, I believe. How do you prepare and play differently on the course compared to when you were 29 or 39?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, I don't spend as much time hitting balls and preparing, not quite as many hours as I used to in my 20s and 30s. I don't have that energy, and the body can't take it any longer, hitting hundreds and hundreds of golf balls.

So I'm taking it a little bit easier, just spending more time stretching and resting instead of being out there hitting balls.

THE MODERATOR: Is your routine -- you said you played nine holes today. Is your routine here at Salem any different before a Major Championship than it would be for a different week, maybe a course you've seen before?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, I usually show up a day sooner. I came here Monday morning. I have three practice days instead of two. And, generally, I just play nine holes on a Wednesday and give myself a little bit

of rest. So that's the whole idea.

THE MODERATOR: From what you've seen at Salem Country Club so far, what kind of challenges does it present to you, the players, this week?

BERNHARD LANGER: Plenty of challenges. It's a typical Major golf course, where you have to hit fairways and you have to hit greens. If you're out of position, you're going to struggle. If you short-side yourself, you're going to be dead, as we call it.

And the greens are a challenge by themselves. They have lots of false fronts. Just about every green has a false front, almost every green, and then many of them slope on the back off, and the sides slope off. Some is like a bowl, but most of them slope off, which, if you miss the green, makes it that much harder to get it close.

It's a challenge, especially in the wind, to hit that second shot the precise distance and stop it where you want to stop it.

The other problem or thing we're going to face is many of those greens are sloping back-to-front, which is typical Donald Ross, so the front pin locations, you can't leave it below the hole. If you leave it below the hole, the ball runs off the green because of the false front.

So some of us will be past the hole and facing downhill putts, and even if you're pin high, you're going to have a big breaking putt because the green slopes back to front. So it's a real test and very tough.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it to questions.

Q. You've proven to be able to play any kind of golf course and emerge as a champion, but does this golf course truly fit your game, would you say, or are there any parts of this golf course which may give you additional challenges, even though you just talked about some challenges, in assessing the golf course?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, I'm a strong believer, if you play well, you can play any golf course well because it's hitting it from A to B and then from B to C and having a good short game. If you can do that, you

can play just about any golf course well. Even links course may vary dramatically from a parkland course, but if you're capable to hit the ball where you're looking, I don't see any reason why you shouldn't do well on any golf course anywhere in the world.

So is there challenges? Yeah, there's challenges, the ones I just mentioned -- you know, dealing with the false fronts and trying not to get the ball above the hole and hitting it the precise distance, not just distance but also straight because many of the greens have -- they fall off. They look large, but they're really sloping off in all directions. So you look at the green, it looks pretty big. But then when you really look at it, the flat surfaces, there's hardly any flat surfaces. They're all sloping back-to-front or one way or another.

Q. Bernhard, you're 2 for 2 in Majors right now for the season. How much extra pressure is there, or is there any?

BERNHARD LANGER: No, there's no extra pressure. I just take it like any other tournament and love to do -- love to play well and be in contention on Sunday. Sure, it would be awesome to get three in a row, but there's no real extra pressure for that.

THE MODERATOR: I think we've seen a lot of players over 50 have a nice burst in three or four years, but you've been able to maintain your level of consistency over almost ten years now. How do you think you've been able to do that over the past decade?

BERNHARD LANGER: It's a great question. There's a lot of things that go into being consistent and staying at the top and near the top. It's not just one or two things.

You got to have a decent technique. You got to be mentally tough, have a good team around you, good family. In my case, it's a lot to do with my faith gives me a lot of strength and security.

Just get to know yourself, learn about yourself, what's good for me. And I think I've -- like I mentioned earlier, I don't practice quite as hard as I used to because I learned it's better for me not to.

And get away from the game. If I go home, I put the clubs away for a few days instead of being out on the golf course every day for four, five hours or more.

So you've just got to figure out, at this stage of my life, what works for me and what doesn't.

Q. Since you've been here for three days, you've seen some weather changes. Today, it's the wind's a little more brisk and then, also, the overnight rain. Have you seen any differences with the

course now?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yes. The course is a little softer today for sure. The greens might have been slightly slower because of the rain as well. And the wind makes it very -- whenever you have wind that's over ten miles an hour, it makes it that much harder no matter what direction it blows and where it is, especially when you play in trees because it swirls around and you're not quite sure which direction it's coming from and how it's going to affect the ball.

Q. And then a second question, almost a third of this field, it's their first time playing the U.S. Senior Open. What advice would you give to someone that's playing for the first time? How did you handle it the first time you played a Senior Open?

BERNHARD LANGER: Hm, I don't remember. It was ten years ago or so. But everybody prepares a little bit different. But we all try to -- especially on a new golf course that hardly anybody has seen before. So you really focus on the golf course, and then you focus on your game, you know, what part of my game is not quite clicking, what do I have to work on.

And here, it's everything from the driver to the irons to the pitching. What club do I use? Do I putt it when I miss the green if I'm in the fairway, or do I use a 7 iron or hybrid or lob wedge? There's so many options. It's like playing Augusta, some of these run-off areas. And then sometimes you miss it and you're in the rough, and you don't have any options. You've just got to flop it out of there.

So you got to feel good about all these options and what's best for you. And then you have to really spend time putting a lot because these greens are very, very different in speed. Downhill putt is really fast, and uphill putt is really slow, slower than most of the time on other golf courses just because there's more slope.

You probably have, I don't know what the degrees is, but I'd guess 4 to 8 or 10 degrees of slope on these greens, which you don't see that often on a modern-type golf course because they're not designed that way, because they're designed for speed greens of 13 or 14 and the ball just runs off the green at times.

Some of the Donald Ross courses, when he built them, the greens were probably running 6 or 7 on the stimp meter, and there was no issue having them being pitched at 5 or 6 degrees. The ball would still stay on the green.

Q. I know this is the Senior U.S. Open, but I have a question about a different tournament. What's the thrill that you still get playing at Augusta?

BERNHARD LANGER: The thrill?

Q. The thrill of playing at Augusta?

BERNHARD LANGER: It's just a thrill being there, just being part of the environment and the atmosphere for me, especially, because I've wanted -- I'm in the champions locker with all the great guys up there, and having the past champions dinner and just hanging out with some of the legends of the game and then playing one of the greatest golf courses in the world. So it's pretty unique.

Q. Bernhard, this Tour has seen sort of supernatural growth over your run, maybe a little before you got to it. 30 years ago, guys were done in their early 40s, didn't have a place to go like this Tour. Can you talk about how fortunate you feel to almost have this second, really incredible career since turning 50?

BERNHARD LANGER: It is very fortunate, and we all know it. We're very blessed in this game of golf that we have this opportunity because most other sports, you know, you turn 35, and you're done, pretty much. Tennis, they have a few matches for the over 40s or whatever they are. I don't know how old they are. And, you know, a few other sports may try it, but many of them, they can't. They're just not good enough or not attractive enough.

In golf, it's different. I think you can still improve in your 40s and 50s and probably even in your 60s because it's not all about how fast you are and how strong you are. It's about technique and mental -- the mental part of the game and knowing what to do and what not to do.

Q. You mentioned you don't practice as much as you used to. You don't play as much as you used to. You didn't play last week. How are you filling that down time? Is that new hobbies? Is it just things that you didn't get to do as often as you did, say, on PGA Tours?

BERNHARD LANGER: There's lots to do when I get home. It's never boring. When you're away for a couple of weeks, lots of bills add up and fan mail, and then I enjoy just being with my wife. I have four kids, catch up with them, work out a little bit, and just relax doing other things, just not golf.

I enjoy watching golf on TV, actually. Some of my colleagues don't, but I enjoy it so I know the golf courses for the most part. I know the players, and it's interesting for me to just see how they play certain courses and how they react in certain situations.

But I'm also a great sports fan in general. I watch -- you know, whether it's soccer or skiing or football. It doesn't matter. I watch most things. And just enjoy

bicycle riding.

As I said, working out and spending time with my family and also going to church and having Bible studies or fellowship with other Christians, which I don't get the opportunity to do that out here very much. Yes, we have -- every week, we have a fellowship for one hour, but that's one hour in the week. That's not quite enough for me.

Q. Bernhard, your record in the Senior Open of your victory plus six top tens in the nine Championships, when you haven't sealed the deal, what is the toughest part of it, the toughest part of the struggle, the 72 holes? Is it mental, physical, when you are coming down that stretch on the final day?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, it's a little bit of everything. I don't think it's necessarily physical. We're all capable of playing four rounds. And I know you guys think we don't play four-round tournaments. We do. This is not the only one. Majority are three rounds, but whether you play a Pro-Am that takes five or six hours or another tournament day, it's no extra physical pressure.

But, yeah, a lot of it is mental, and generally the courses are slightly tougher when we play -- or a lot tougher when we play Majors, and you've got to deal with that. You're going to get bad breaks, and a mediocre shot that might have been okay in most tournaments is going to end up in trouble. So you can't hit a lot of mediocre shots. You've got to hit a lot of good shots.

Q. Bernhard, you've got the greatest record in Senior Champions Tour history, I guess, all those top tens. You're almost in the top ten every week, all the Majors, record set of number of Majors. A lot of your peers do not last this long on the Champions Tour. You're 59. You still seem to be as hungry or at least as effective as you ever were. How do you keep self-motivated when you see fellow peers who are terrific players bow out long before they turn 59?

BERNHARD LANGER: I can't talk for the others. I can only talk about myself. When you mention motivation, maybe I was born with motivation. I don't know. I never had an issue with motivation. If I'm going to enter a golf tournament, I want to give it my best and do my best, and so to do that, I need to prepare and be ready for it as good as I know how to do it.

Yes, there are certain times when I'm better prepared than other times. For instance, this week may not be the best preparation I've ever had because I took two weeks off. We had a wedding last weekend, and so I

missed the tournament in Madison, which I usually would have enjoyed playing, and it might have been better for my preparation to have a few tournament rounds in under the belt just before.

But that's another thing. There's other interests in my life, and I know this wedding was important for my family. It was in-laws. So I stayed home. I took a week off. Years ago, I might have missed the wedding and played the golf tournament. So it's a different outlook.

Q. Part two, if I might. I'm asking a lot of the top players this week their secrets to success, to longevity as great players. I know we just covered the term motivation, but can you share with us a couple other maybe of your key sets of elements that have made you successful for all these years?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, first of all, you've got to stay healthy. When you get to my age, a lot of guys have injuries or they have surgeries and then they're off and they're gone. If you have a real bad back or certain surgeries, hip replacement, knee replacement, you hear it all the time, shoulder issues, you can't play, not at the level you need to play to be winning.

So I've been fortunate not having had any surgeries except my thumb that, you know, was 2011 and I was out for six months, and that was my worst year out here. But besides that, things have been pretty good. So you've got to be healthy.

And some guys just don't have that drive. They're just -- you know, they've done it for 40 years or 30 years or whatever, and they'd rather do other things. They don't want to put the hours in to work on their fitness or to work on their flexibility, to even work on their golf game as hard as they probably should.

Some may even have the wrong mental outlook and say, well, I'm 55 now, 56. Statistics say you're not supposed to win anymore at that point, so I'm happy finishing 20th or 30th.

That's not me. When the time comes where I finish 20th and 30th every week and I don't feel like I can win anymore, that may be the time to pack it up, but we'll see when that is.

THE MODERATOR: 8:24 off the 10th tee on Thursday. Best of luck this week.

BERNHARD LANGER: Thank you. Appreciate it.