

# U.S. Senior Open Championship

Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Newport, Rhode Island, USA

Newport Country Club

## Bernhard Langer

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Please welcome the reigning U.S. Open champion Bernhard Langer to the interview room at Newport Country Club.

How does your body feel now that you have a couple of competitions under your belt as you head into the U.S. Senior Open this week?

BERNHARD LANGER: It's getting better, but it's not there yet. I was told it's an injury that generally takes 12 months to be at 100 percent, and I'm not even at five months yet.

I feel it. My leg and my ankle is swollen. It's fatigue. I don't have the range of motion in my foot. I'm like this, and the other leg is like that.

So there's various things that aren't there yet. My balance is not where I want it to be, and my strength. My calf muscle is probably one or two inches smaller than the other leg. I can't get on my tiptoes. Right foot, I can do that. Just my right foot. I tried it on my left, and nothing.

I've got a ways to go, and I'm happy to be playing golf. The good thing is I can get carts in tournaments because right now I can't walk four or five days, 18 holes. It's impossible.

I tried to walk 9 holes, and that was a stretch. That's where we are at the moment. Hopefully improving every week.

**Q. Bernhard, you've been playing high-level golf for many decades now. What's the key to longevity in your golf game?**

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, there's a lot of things. First of all, you have to be reasonably healthy, because if not, you can't do what you want to do and can't swing the way you want to swing.

I was born with a competitive nature, so I have a healthy drive and live a disciplined life, which probably helps. You



need a great support system with coach, manager, caddie, family obviously is even more important, all of that.

And the willingness to put in the work. I'm 66, and a lot of people say, why don't you retire? I guess I could, but I love the game of golf and I love to compete, and I'm still good enough to compete and be up there where I think I can win tournaments.

When that changes, when I feel like I'm going to finish in the bottom third of the field every week I compete, then it's probably time to quit. Hopefully I will know when that is.

**Q. Is there anything specific that you do on the health and wellness side to keep yourself fit?**

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, I don't drink alcohol at all. I drink a little bit, but very, very little. I don't smoke. I exercise every day and stretch. I have done for ever since I can remember. I think that certainly helps to be reasonably fit, to have some stamina, and to feel better.

Just the body functions better when we move the body. If we become too sedentary, sooner or later you're going to pay the price for it. I talked to my PT, physical therapist, and he said, if you lay two weeks in the hospital, just two weeks, don't do anything, guess how much strength you lose? 50 percent. I was shocked.

That only encourages me to do more, do something every day, instead of just laying around for a few days in a row.

Sorry, that was a bit long.

**Q. Were you concerned with your injury? How much can you not do now that you did before, A? B, are you concerned that your swing may have to adapt to the problem with your leg?**

BERNHARD LANGER: Yes, that was my first concern. When my surgeon and my PT told me, okay, we're now two months after surgery, I think you can try and putt a little bit and chip, and then we progressed to hitting 50-yard shots and then maybe 100-yard shots, and a week or two later, we could try a driver or 7-iron or something like that. I was working through that progress.

I told my surgeon, you know, when it comes to golf, you've



got to trust me. I know my body. Told the same thing I told the PT.

So I hit some wedges, no problem. If I can hit a full wedge, I can hit a full 7-iron. Hit a full 7-iron, no problem. Grabbed the 3-iron, no problem. Next day I grabbed the driver, no problem swinging the club. So I told him, you know, that two- or three-week layout you gave me to get to the driver, we're already there. I did it yesterday. So trust me, I can do it and forget that.

But I was very concerned at the beginning that, because of my injury, that I would change my swing, and I didn't want to do that. I didn't want to just come back sooner and create a new swing that probably wouldn't be as good, and then I'd have to spend weeks and months redoing later when I'm better to what I taught myself.

So I got my swing coach, and we went to the range. I said, I don't want to change my swing. I want to swing the way I did before, and if my body doesn't allow me, I'm not going to play.

We looked at it, and he said, it's fine. Just keep doing what you're doing, and there's no issue. So that was very encouraging, because that meant now I can practice and I could compete if I can get a golf cart, because I couldn't walk. As long as they give me a golf cart, I can actually play in tournaments.

**Q. Are you (audio cutting out.)**

BERNHARD LANGER: No, I lost a little bit. I lost about 2 mile an hour club speed, which is probably five yards on the driver. I'm hopeful that that was from the injury and not from old age.

**Q. And one other thing. This golf course, the golf courses you play Senior Open-wise, this seems to be as close as we can come to a links style golf course. Do you feel that way? Do you feel like it's playing a links-style game?**

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, it looks that way, even without the pot bunker, even though some bunkers are pretty deep and pretty severe, especially around the greens. I find a lot of the greens are like bowls, so if you do hit it in the bunker, if you miss the green, you're always having a downhill bunker shot, you know what I mean?

The ball lands on a downslope, and it just takes off. So you don't want to short-side yourself at all here.

The other thing is, yeah, the wind obviously gives it a linksy feeling too. It's blowing. Yesterday was as beautiful a day

as you could ever imagine, and it was still blowing a little bit. We're going to have probably days like this when it feels like 15 or 20, but it probably plays more like 25 or 30 because we're so wide open and exposed, not many trees and right at the edge of the ocean.

The cooler weather grabs the ball more than the hot air, I think.

**Q. I saw during, I think it was a PGA TOUR Champions video just posted a month or so ago, you talked about how Aaron Rodgers and that Achilles and all that kind of -- I think you used the term like lifted your spirits. If you could expand on that, I guess, a little bit. Also, have you talked to any professional athletes regardless of the sport during your recovery?**

BERNHARD LANGER: No, mostly to Aaron. We were on the phone for about an hour and been texting a couple of times because he had the identical injury and the identical surgery with a SpeedBridge, the Arthrex SpeedBridge they call it, and the rest of it, it was all the same.

We had just talked about the PRP and stem cells, which I haven't done yet and probably will not do, but I've had PRP done, which is your own blood spinning and injecting your own blood into the wound or into the area that needs healing.

It was interesting to hear his thoughts on the rehab, what he did and what I was doing, and it was on very similar lines and similar progress as well.

That was encouraging that I told me he went back on the field two months later and threw a few balls. Obviously he couldn't play a game because you don't want to be tackled and he couldn't push off the way he normally would with his injured leg, but I think he should be good to go now. For him it's a year almost, isn't it? Yeah, should be good.

**Q. What are some of your favorite spots on the course here? Coming down the first time, but what are some of your favorite spots?**

BERNHARD LANGER: On this course? I'm not sure I have a favorite. It's all pretty. The golf house is very unique. It's right on top of the hill, and you can see half of the golf course.

It has some beautiful holes. Not sure there's a bad hole on the course. I don't think there is.

Depending on the wind, this golf course could play totally different every day. I mean, really different. You could hit driver, wedge one day, and then driver, 3-wood the next

day on the very same hole. It's going to be very interesting.

**Q. Some players are defined by a missed shot that happens at a critical point and they can't get over it, or they've had a tournament that was of major importance to them and they couldn't get over it. You battled yips. You went through the missed putt at Kiawah. Can you talk about the mental strength you have to get beyond those moments and to put into your own career a second phase through senior golf. Can you speak about the mental challenges that you've had to overcome during those different parts of your life.**

BERNHARD LANGER: Oh, absolutely. I think the game of golf will present these challenges no matter who you are. We're all going to have down times and up times, good times and bad times, and you learn more from the bad times generally than the good times.

As I said, if you play this game well enough, you're going to have moments you regret, moments you wish wouldn't have happened.

Just look at Jack Nicklaus, maybe the greatest player ever. He just won 18 majors, but just as many seconds. I bet he will remember many of those seconds.

**Q. You mentioned that, the losses stick longer than the wins.**

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, and that's how it is. I've had numerous of those, and there's only two ways. You either confront them and learn from it and get better or you pack it in and give up.

So the mental strength, what helped me big time is I became a believer in God in '85 and started reading the Bible, and that gave me a tremendous amount of peace and patience and understanding of what life is all about.

It's not about here and now. It's about eternity. Where do we spend eternity, in hell or heaven, and that's a long time, in eternity. The 80 or 100 years is nothing compared to eternity. I needed to focus more on that.

Just knowing that I'm going to go to heaven gave me a lot of peace because we can know, we can have a guaranteed knowing of going or know where you're going, and that has helped me. It's given me a different outlook, a different perspective on life, and I think it helped me overcome.

For me, it was brilliant to miss that putt at Kiawah, which was actually a good putt, believe it or not, but it missed.

The outcome is still very bad for me and my team. But the very next week I made a 10-foot putt on the last hole to get in the playoff and win the German Masters.

Do I have some of that mental fortitude naturally? Maybe a little bit, but a lot of it came from reading and studying the Bible.

**Q. One last question. What did you know of Newport prior to when you came here, and how did that perception change or modify itself when you actually golfed here?**

BERNHARD LANGER: I knew very little. I'd never seen the course. Hadn't even heard much about it. I just knew it was I believe the Vanderbilts who came here and built most of what we see.

I heard it's a beautiful, old style golf course, and it's far more than that. I've seen a lot of old style golf courses. This is far more impressive than some of the others, I think.

This is very playable at a green speed of 11 or 12. While some courses that are built 100 years ago when everything is pitched back to front and there were designs with stimp meter 6 or 8. If you play them at 11 or 12 the course is not playable. The ball rolls off the green.

So this is very unique and very different. Beautiful.

**Q. One last one. Can you go back to last year and you've had time to possibly reflect on it, about the accomplishment of winning last year, considering age and the milestones that you set, what did that all mean to you in your career?**

BERNHARD LANGER: It really set in a few days and weeks later, and it was quite spectacular. Incredible really when I look back, to win this tournament at age 66 almost. Yeah, I think I was 65 3/4, whatever.

On that type of golf course, the length of the golf, the difficulty of the course, the test we faced. Even the weather was pretty hot and warm. It was very demanding.

It wasn't just that I won, it was almost the way I won. When I looked at the leaderboard after 12 holes on Sunday, I think I had a seven-shot lead, and I didn't expect that really. I wasn't sure I would expect to win, I was hoping to be in contention. It was some of the best golf I played.

To do that at that age was very encouraging to me and hopefully gives many of the other senior players some hope that you can still get better even though you turned 50 or 60.

