

The American Express

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La Quinta, California, USA

PGA WEST Pete Dye Stadium Course

Daniel Berger

Quick Quotes

Q. 4-under on your first round back on TOUR. Kind of take us through the emotions of being back, and I'm sure you've been waiting for this moment.

DANIEL BERGER: No, it's been exciting. Leading up to this week I was kind of on the edge of whether I was ready to play or not. Then you kind of just have to rip the band-aid off after that amount of time and just get out there. I actually played really well today, which was nice. I really didn't hit any bad shots. The couple bogeys I made were two good iron shots. So, just get better every day and get better every tournament and get into the flow of things and seeing the same people and just doing the routine that you're used to doing.

Q. You hit every fairway, every green on the front nine. Did it feel as in control as it looked out there?

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, in preparation, too, it was good. I was hitting it well, putting it well, chipping it well. It's definitely nice to get back and have a nice round under my belt than to go out there and struggle. So, it gives me a little confidence going into the next couple days. I told my caddie, if I play like this for three more days, then we'll be in good position. So, it's nice to be back out.

Q. Would you take us through the issues that you went through. I know back stuff. Read a few things, didn't seem super clear exactly what you were dealing with.

DANIEL BERGER: It's tough, especially with the back, it's hard to be real specific because there's always different factors that can cause you pain. It was really a search in the beginning to really figure out the diagnosis, and then really just hammer down on the rehab. Luckily, no surgery, and just grind it out. When your body tells you you're ready, you're ready.

Q. Sounds like you had a couple -- was it back in December you had it checked and that was when it fully turned the corner?

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DANIEL BERGER: I went to go see a doctor in Canada who really helped me. From there on it was just been kind of getting better from then. Like I keep saying, it's just nice to be back, nice to be at a tournament and competing and playing golf, so I'm happy.

Q. When it was at its worse was it like you couldn't even move? Take us through what it was.

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I don't know if you've ever had back pain before, but you use your back for everything, so sitting, standing, doing any type of daily chore sucks. Again, you find a diagnosis, you find the treatment, you figure out what to do, and the crazy thing is the body finds a way to heal itself if you don't mess it up, so that was the biggest key for me.

Q. At what point were you able to take full swings and start to ramp back up?

DANIEL BERGER: I didn't really touch a club for about like seven, eight months. I would hit a couple balls here and there just to see how it felt. That's kind of the progression. It's like you hit 10 balls one day, wake up, see how you feel the next day. If you feel good, you hit 12 balls. Wake up, feel good, you hit 15 balls. But it's not a linear kind of recovery. There's ups and downs, as anybody that's had a back issue can see, so you really just have to be patient and work your way slowly.

Q. When you first started feeling issues you were like 12th in the world at that point, playing the best golf of your life, and then that happens. How, just mentally, do you, did you kind of deal with that?

DANIEL BERGER: Mentally, I couldn't accept being in pain every day that I was playing, so at that point I was like, this is not fun anymore. It's not fun going out to a golf tournament, not being able to do what you want to do physically. So, that was when I was like, this just can't keep going on anymore. Then, obviously, you come back and I have really nothing. Like you said, I was 10 or 12 in the world, I'm not in any of the majors, not in any of the elevated events, we've had all this stuff going on in the golf world. So, really, I'm kind of starting at ground zero trying to work my way back. But it's not the first time it's happened to me, I've missed time before, so I think that

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prepared me for this time coming back.

Q. Was there any swing tweaks you had to make that you felt like you needed to do to take pressure off the back?

DANIEL BERGER: The biggest thing was the swing. Making a swing change. I started working with a new coach and that made a big difference. Really it's just the stuff that I do before the round. There's no more going out there at 9:00 in the morning and swinging 120. It's the rehab process of getting out there early, doing your stuff, and getting ready to go.

Q. Was there a moment in your rehab where you felt any temptation to come back sooner, given the way you felt?

DANIEL BERGER: Actually, funny, I was going to play in the fall and I had a separate incident that set me back another three months. So, again, it's never a linear kind of recovery, there's ups and downs, and you have to kind of really listen to your body, and when it says I'm ready to go, you do it.

Q. When you were recovering or rehabbing was there other stuff that you were able to do away from golf that didn't give you pain?

DANIEL BERGER: That was the toughest thing was, like, everything bothered me. So, I'm used to being on the boat, playing tennis, playing beach volleyball, running, exercising, I've always been a very outside kind of person. That kind of was taken away. When that happens it's a struggle and you have to figure out ways to kind of be in your own mind and be okay with not being able to do the stuff. That was the hardest part. But once I started to get out there and feel like myself again, that's when I started to be more like Daniel that I was a year ago.

Q. You mentioned that you were pretty happy with the round and it was a good round. Was there -- expectations are dangerous in golf, but were you surprised with how you played today?

DANIEL BERGER: I only played 10 rounds in the last six months, so I'm very in the beginning stages of playing. But, yeah, I practiced at home and I was playing well. Obviously, this is great place to start. The conditions are favorable, and the wind is not up, and the greens are pure. So, I figured if there was any place to start a season, this was it. Again, I played well today and so it's just kind of a great way to come back.

Q. We heard from guys like Patrick Cantlay, who has

to take awhile before rounds when he was dealing with back stuff. Does your preparation now look different as you lead up into a round of what you're doing?

DANIEL BERGER: Completely different. It's like night and day. I used to joke with Pat, because we play a lot at home and I would say, Do you want to play at 8:00 a.m.? And he's like, Absolutely not. Now I understand where he's coming from, because if you're playing at 9:00, it's a 5:00 a.m. start. So, it's just, everything's changed a little bit, but it's well worth going through the extra effort to be able to come out here and do what I love.

Q. When these issues came up was there ever a consideration to do surgery or was that advice that you just went with?

DANIEL BERGER: There always is consideration for surgery. But Western medicine, I think, tends to lead you on more of that path. But, yeah, I mean, I think if you don't mess with your body it finds a way to heal itself. In the beginning, I was trying all these different things and not knowing which one was helping me and which one was making me worse. So, finally, when I just cut the variables down to one or two, and I could find out, okay, this is what made me feel better, that's when I started to really start to stack good days on each other.

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