

Cognizant Classic

Tuesday, February 27, 2024
Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA
PGA National Champion Course

Daniel Berger

Quick Quotes



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Daniel Berger to the interview room here at the Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches.

You're making your eighth start here this week. Do you mind just sharing some thoughts on a hometown event of sorts for you and your excitement to be back.

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I love this place. I've played a lot of golf tournaments here as a junior golfer, as an amateur golfer, so it's always nice to come back. I've been pretty successful here. Had a couple chances to win.

Yeah, it's nice to sleep in your own bed and play in a golf tournament right down the street.

THE MODERATOR: You're making your fourth start this season. Can you share some thoughts on where your game is and your three prior starts? You haven't played since Amex.

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I played two weeks ago at the Waste Management. It's been nice to get back. I took a long time off. It's nice to get back to the Florida swing and be in Florida and in my own bed.

Q. Your time off getting healthy again, is this one of those tournaments you were sort of eyeing because you've played so well here and almost won it, where you could make your comeback story, so to speak, in the winner's circle?

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I was thinking looking at the schedule where I wanted to start. I don't think I felt 100 percent going into the Amex, so the next kind of tournament I was looking at was the Cognizant.

This was another event that I circled on the schedule that I thought I would probably start at, but I started to feel a little bit better.

It's a great event. There's so many friends and family that come out to watch. Just excited to get the week going.

Q. Going basically a year and a half without an official PGA tour event, how is it different for you as far as getting out there, playing golf, warming up. I am assuming is it a lot different because of what you had to go through.

DANIEL BERGER: It is a lot different, yeah. I would say in years past there was wake up, go to the range, hit balls, go to the tee, and now it's a lot more process-oriented. There's a lot more work that goes into it. I feel like there's a different level of professionalism that I bring to it now than I did in years past.

It's part of the game. It's part of what it takes to get out there and play, and I think you see the guys that have been out here for a long time, those are the guys that are doing those things. The Justin Roses, the Stuart Cinks, the Pdraig Harringtons, those are the guys putting in the work so they can feel good and be ready to go, and I feel like that's part of it for me, and it wasn't so years ago.

Q. Last event here, 2022. Leading up to that you had to withdraw. You couldn't defend your title at Pebble, and it was the back issues. I remember at Phoenix you were testing it out to see if you could play here. Was that the start of what you had to go through? Has this been a two-year ordeal or more?

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, it's been a two-year ordeal. That was essentially the start of when I started feeling the stuff in my back, and kind of the last half of the portion that I played in 2022 leading up to the U.S. Open where I stopped playing, I never felt great.

When you play a professional sport it's not like you always feel great, but I was in pain all the time, and then I got to a point where I was just like, this is just not worth playing. My everyday life sucks, and I'm just struggling to play a golf tournament.

You can't win a golf tournament when you can only do 25 percent of what you're used to doing. That's where I really made the decision to step back.



Even when I played here in 2022 I was at 50 percent, and that's not a level that you can compete at day in and day out. That's where the decision was made to kind of step back and get healthy.

Q. The 10th has gone from a par 4 to a par 5. Wanted to get your thoughts on that change and how that might -- does that change your prep? Does that change how you play that hole?

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I saw there's a couple different changes. Like you mentioned, 10 is a par 5 now. I think it's going to be obviously a scoring opportunity because it's going to be a shorter par 5. You'll hit maybe a long iron or a 5 wood into that green.

But it's just another birdie opportunity on a course that doesn't have a lot of birdie opportunities. Maybe a little bit of relief in the middle of the round if you're starting on the front nine to look at the score card and say, hey, if I hit a good drive, there's a chance for a birdie or an eagle and kind of get the round going a little bit.

Q. While you were away the last couple years, professional golf has gone a little crazy. What has it been like to be on the outside looking in as the landscape has changed so dramatically?

DANIEL BERGER: I've tried not to focus on it because I feel like it's a stressful thing to think about all the time. It's everywhere. It's on social media. It's on the internet. You turn on any news channel and they're talking about it. It's difficult to really get away from it.

I feel like I've been slightly lucky in the fact that I haven't been directly involved with all the stuff that's going on. For me, it's been nice to just try to focus on things that I can control and really just try to, day by day, get better and get back to playing.

It's been a heck of a two years for golf.

Q. Some of the guys you're close to, you're friends with, have been in governance roles, have been very involved. Have you seen a toll taken on them?

DANIEL BERGER: I think so, yeah. It's hard for there not to be a toll taken on them.

The confusing part is it's so hard to focus on your game of golf and the other stuff that they're focusing on at the same time, too. For me it would never work. I'm too single minded. I wouldn't be able to focus on all that at once.

It's definitely a challenging time in the game.

Q. When you were growing up, did your father display his ATP Tour trophies anywhere and let you anywhere near them? What did he do with them?

DANIEL BERGER: I honestly don't think I've ever seen one of his trophies in my entire life. I've seen like old pictures of him playing. I've seen old videos of him on YouTube playing big matches. But I honestly have never seen any.

Q. What do you do with yours?

DANIEL BERGER: I have them in my office. I'm proud of them. I like to look at them every once in a while. Yeah, what's the point of winning a golf tournament if you can't look back at it and be proud of it?

Q. When you were going through this adversity could you look at them and take inspiration from them, like this is what is there for you if you can get back?

DANIEL BERGER: That's a great question. I honestly did, yeah. I would sit in my office and look at them and just think back and try to visualize the moments of the shots that I hit coming down the stretch, and knowing that as far away as you feel from that, you're not as far as you think you are.

That was kind of just a small little victory here and there to just be patient and know that eventually you'll be okay.

Q. What is it like playing courses like Crandon growing up and how do they compare to big tournaments like this?

DANIEL BERGER: Well, they're similar in the way that the grass is very familiar to me. This year I think they overseeded the rough, which is a little different. Sometimes they overseed it; sometimes they don't.

I was expecting that Bermuda, which is always really challenging for a lot of guys, and I feel like maybe this year, the course is slightly easier than it has been in years past.

They took the two bunkers away on I believe it's 6, the par 4, which is probably the most challenging hole on the course.

But it might be a better golf hole now that they did that.

I think in my opinion I like it to be as challenging as possible and kind of weed out some of the other players that are unfamiliar with the course, but it's always a great event, and the scores -- when you have a finish like the



Bear Trap, there's always a big number waiting to happen no matter how well you're playing.

That's what I think makes the tournament so exciting.

Q. You get to play so many iconic courses and challenging courses. Do we make too much out of it as the local media, the hometown kid wants to win at PGA National? This is one place that you'd especially like to conquer and you'd be extra happy if you did?

DANIEL BERGER: No, I think it's very fair. This is a big tournament for me. I have all my family and all my friends coming out, and I want to play well for them, and I just love that I'm right here. I get to be in my same routine, going to the gym and being in my bed and being with my dog and my family and all those things that you miss when you go away for a golf tournament. Now it's right here with me.

It's easy to be a little happier when you're at this event.

Q. Speaking of that, your two best finishes was a playoff, the first one, and then two years ago getting caught in that monsoon with Shane. Which one do you look back at and think you had the best chance to win?

DANIEL BERGER: I probably thought a lot more about the one in '22 that I had the five-shot lead. But then again, I've never had a five-shot lead going into the final round of a golf tournament, so it was kind of a new experience for me.

The only way to know how you're going to play is to do it, and the only way to get better from it is to experience it, so I feel like the next time I'll be better off. That was a tough one. I was playing so well, and I really didn't even play that poorly on Sunday. I just didn't -- I hit some good shots. I had a bunker shot I made. I chipped in on the last -- I think on 14 or something. Kind of kept my way in there until the end where that rain did start coming down.

They're all tough. When you're close and you don't win, it's always tough.

Q. When you played that last tournament you played before you took time off at the U.S. Open, at that point did you look at it and say, a month or two, I'm going to go day by day? Did you have any idea that it would be that long before I got back on TOUR?

DANIEL BERGER: No, I did not think it would be that long. I think the thing was I was chasing like the quick fix, like what's going to fix me tomorrow, and the reality is that's not how it works.

It was kind of like what was the straw that broke the camel's back. We don't really know, but you have to adjust and make changes.

Once I figured out what works for me, you just stick to your process, and you do those things, and eventually you get better.

It just took me a longer time. I didn't want to be one of those guys that came back too early and was hurt three months later. I wanted to feel 100 percent and be able to do everything I wanted to do, and that's where I feel now.

Q. Are you 100 percent?

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I feel perfect now.

Q. Did you learn to play the guitar, pick up any new hobbies? How did you spend the time off?

DANIEL BERGER: I've been asked that a lot. They said, did you go on your boat? What did you do? And it was a lot of nothing, to be honest, which was probably the worst part because if you know me you know I'm an active person and don't like to sit around a lot.

That was the toughest part was sitting around and literally doing nothing for eight months before I got back to being a little bit more like myself and feeling comfortable like walking.

Like I would walk for 15 minutes and I'd be in pain, and then I would stop, and then the next day it would be 18 minutes, 20 minutes. It was kind of just building up until I felt comfortable to be normal again.

Q. Did you watch the Ryder Cup?

DANIEL BERGER: That was the one golf tournament I did watch. I did watch the Ryder Cup.

Q. How did that feel?

DANIEL BERGER: I mean, it was exciting. Anytime you get 12 of the best players in the world playing against 12 of the best players, it's fun to watch. But tough not to be there, having played in the one a couple years before that.

It's always a great tournament to watch on TV.

Q. Now that you're 100 percent, what type of activities would you do locally given the chance to do whatever you want?

DANIEL BERGER: Now? Like I would play beach

volleyball, tennis, pickleball, play 36 holes of golf in a day, go fishing for 12 hours on the boat in five-foot seas and feel like a million bucks.

Now I feel like I'm capable of doing that. But a year ago, I was like, no way.

Q. Offshore fishing in five-foot seas --

DANIEL BERGER: Not the best for the back.

Q. Are there any TOUR players who live here who you would hang out and do stuff with?

DANIEL BERGER: No, I was kind of stuck by myself. There's a lot of guys that I reached out to for advice on how to deal with stuff, but most of it was just hanging out on my ante gravity chair in front of the TV.

Q. Now if you were going to call a guy to go fishing, who would it be?

DANIEL BERGER: That's a good question. I probably wouldn't call any of the guys out on TOUR. I'd probably call my brothers. They're like my first mates.

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