



Bernhard Langer

Press Conference
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THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. We're pleased to announce and welcome our two-time Masters winner, Bernhard Langer, to the interview room. Bernhard has announced this is his last Masters, which means this will be his 41st Masters. Congratulations in celebration of those years. We'd like to address your attention to these two screens.

(Video shown.)

You have always represented the Masters and the game in an extraordinary manner. Can you give us some sense and feel about how you feel about this week?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, it's been an incredible journey, for a young man being born in a village of 800 people in an area where golf was nothing, to make it here, to get an invitation to play the Masters first time around when it was extremely difficult for a European or international players to get an invitation, and then to win the first Masters on the third go-around was just a dream come true. It's just incredible.

As I said, golf was nothing in Germany. I had no idea when I turned pro what I was going to be facing. I had no role model. I had no one to compare myself with. I was just the one starting something that nobody has ever done before in Germany.

Coming here the first time, driving down Magnolia Lane, seeing this place was an eye-opener for me. I had never seen a golf course manicured like this or a tournament run as efficiently as this has been, and what's even more astonishing is how they've evolved and improved and continue to make this the best experience for players, for champions, for the patrons, for you -- I believe I can say that, just looking around at this media building. It's incredible.

And the things they continue to do with the Drive, Chip & Putt that I witnessed yesterday again, the kids having a big smile on their faces, the ladies' amateur tournament, the tournaments they sponsor and provide in South America and Asia, and on and on it goes.

The Masters brand has grown to unbelievable heights, and when you look around here, you don't see a tent. Everything is a solid building for one week of the year. You go from the cheap food for the patrons to the parking -- I don't have to tell you. You know all that. I'm just throwing out a few things that make this tournament so special.

For me as a past champion, to have our own locker room, to have our own parking facility, it's really unique, and it means a great deal.

I think I can say this for every champion. We're extremely proud to be wearing the green jacket and representing the Masters all over the world.

THE MODERATOR: What does this week mean for you?

BERNHARD LANGER: It's very emotional. You can tell already my voice is breaking a bit just realizing it's going to be my last competitive Masters. After four decades, it's going to be bittersweet. I think I knew it was time to call it quits as a player. I wanted to do it last year but I couldn't with my achilles surgery. The course is just getting too long and I'm getting shorter and shorter and I'm hitting hybrids where the other kids are hitting 9-irons and 8-irons, maybe even wedges. So I knew I wasn't going to be in contention anymore.

A few years back I asked the chairman of the club, is there a time limit? Do we age out when we're 60? Or what is it? He said, no, you will know when it's time to quit. It's totally up to you.

It is time to quit. I'm just not competitive on this course anymore. We're playing, what, 7,500-plus yards, and I'm used to playing courses around 7,100. I can still compete there but not at this distance.

Q. What was that like for you emotionally watching that video, and secondly, with all these emotions, once you get inside the ropes and hit that first tee shot, will you be able to just play golf without thinking about that?

BERNHARD LANGER: Usually I'm pretty good compartmentalizing, so when I'm inside the ropes, my mind switches to being a competitor, play golf and take care of the task in front of me. But I might get a bit emotional looking around and the spectators, seeing my family, my kids, my grandkids, my brother and other friends that are going to be supporting me this week.

Watching these two videos, obviously they're the two most important wins in my career, and it kind of put a smile on me how bad my English was at the time and the red outfit and all that kind of stuff. I always tease Tiger, I said, See, I was the one wearing a red shirt first; you came later.

Anyway, it brings back wonderful memories. I think the second time in '93 my wife was greeting me with three of our kids, so a lot had changed from '85 to '93. There's just a lot going through my mind.

Q. When you joined the Champions Tour, did you envision that you'd be doing this 17, 18 years later, and if not, what keeps you going?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, it's a good question. No, I had no idea. I just tried to be exempt my whole life, which I was fortunate enough to be. I was exempt on the PGA Tour, I was exempt on the European Tour, even until I turned 50. And I realized in my late 40s it got tougher and tougher out on the Tour, even though I lost in a playoff when I was 49 1/2 at Fort Worth, at Colonial I was in playoff but didn't win it.

Anyways, I just thought, I'll try the Champions Tour for a few weeks and see if I like it or not. I really had no idea what it would be like, and I think it was after three weeks I said, man, this place is great. This is where I want to spend the majority of my golfing life and just kind of played less and less in Europe, less and less on the regular tour and kind of focused on the Champions Tour.

But then even, I was just trying to be one of the better players. I had no idea what kind of Champions Tour career I would have and was blessed with fairly good health and a lot of success.

Q. Your success story is just incredible, particularly from your childhood, what you had to overcome. What would your message be to everyone about longevity, consistency, following your dream?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, those are big words, longevity and consistency, especially in the game of golf. It's so fragile. It's so volatile. It's like the stock market. It just comes and goes. You hear major winners one day, and then you don't hear about them two years later for some reason.

It's a difficult thing. I guess God has blessed me with tremendous talent and being a great competitor, but there's many other things that are important. You need to be healthy. You've got to have a great support system, a good caddie, a good coach, on and on, the list goes on. You've got to be willing to sacrifice, as well, because it's not always easy.

When I tell some of the people I'm a professional golfer out on Tour, they go, that's got to be the greatest job in the

world. It is at times, but also you're away from family. You're away from friends. You're in hotel rooms. It's lonely at times. It's not always rosy and easy.

Q. When you're playing your final round here, be it Friday or Sunday, do you think there's a place on the course or a moment where it might really hit you that this is it?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, if it doesn't hit me earlier on, it will definitely hit me on 18, I know that. But one of my favorite places was always Amen Corner here. It's just a beautiful part of the golf course.

The 13th hole, I've made eagle there on Saturday in '85 to get into contention and I made eagle on Sunday in '93 to win. So that's become one of my favorite holes, not just because I made eagles but just the beauty of the hole and what it demands from you.

Yeah, to answer your question, hopefully I can control myself until the 18th, but there's no guarantees.

Q. Many other legends of the game have played their final rounds at some point. Have you spoken to any of them about navigating the day and controlling your emotions, what they experienced?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, absolutely. I was having breakfast yesterday with Larry Mize, who's one of my better friends. We go to Bible studies together on Tour, and we go way back. We usually back sit together at the Champions Dinner. And he said farewell -- was it last year or two years ago? Anyways, he's already been through it.

He gave a little speech at the Champions Dinner, and he just broke down. He just couldn't say what he wanted to say. It was just overwhelming and too much for him.

I told him -- he said, Yeah, I totally screwed up. I said, No, you didn't; it was just showing how much it meant to you. I said something like, But it was probably even far more important for you because you grew up here in Augusta. You're a local boy, local hero. I'm from Germany, and it means a great deal for me, too, living in Florida now and having married an American and raised my kids in this country and all that.

I'll pick a few more people's brains. I was hoping to talk to Sandy Lyle and Ian Woosnam and a couple of my other buddies who already said goodbye, Mark O'Meara. But it's never easy, not for any of us.

Q. Once more going back to your childhood, was there ever even a thought of playing at a tournament like this despite the fact that you've left a legacy over decades? When did you even hear about the Masters for the first time? What was the thought?

BERNHARD LANGER: You know, I don't recall the exact day or year when I heard about the Masters Tournament, but it was certainly not easy. It was not on television when I was a child. Actually we didn't even have a television until I was about 12 years old, I think. My dad couldn't afford one. Then it only had three channels. I'm sure the Masters wasn't on one of those three channels.

Eventually when I was an assistant pro I probably got a hold of some golf magazines at the club where I worked, and in April the Masters, I'm sure somebody reported about it, so it must have happened then.

But it was this far out there -- America was far away. American golfers were supposed to be the greatest and the best. It was all kind of a dream. I didn't even know I was going to become a tournament player. My goals were just to be good in Europe.

Then as I became one of the better Europeans, obviously my dream stretched out and my goals went across the ocean, as well.

Q. Your favorite shot to hit on the course and your least favorite or your nemesis out there?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, there were many of those (laughing). My three best shots might have been in '93 at 13

because I think I only had a two-shot lead over Chip Beck at the time, and I hit a beautiful draw around the corner, hit a 3-iron off a little downhill, side hill lie. That might be the best 3-iron I've ever hit in my life, to about 10, 12 feet inside of Chip Beck, and I saw -- he putted on the same line as me from further away, so I saw the break, and then I made the eagle putt. That was pretty incredible there.

But the very same hole a few years ago I hit a beautiful 2 hybrid, it took off 50 yards just right on line, and I hit it the way I wanted it, and it hit a tiny little twig. There's some of these big trees that overhang, the branches, and one was coming down, a little twig. And it touched that twig and went 40 yards left into the bushes, and I made 7, hitting a perfect golf shot, literally. That's golf. You can only control so much.

But there's so many hard shots out here because the greens are huge but there's tiny little spots where you have to land the ball, like No. 4, No. 5, or you go on and go. No. 7 is becoming brutal for me because it's so long. When you come in with a 4-iron you can't stop it. And there's various other holes like that.

Q. I'm interested in your resilience and your career, particularly overcoming putting issues. It seems you had to reinvent yourself on multiple occasions with your putting stroke. What lengths did you have to go to to overcome the yips in cases?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, those were the hardest times in my life, in my golfing life, I should say. I've had the yips on four different occasions. It seems like every seven years for some reason, just not lately, thank goodness.

I remember vividly 1989 I was playing in Detroit at the Buick Invitational, so I had already won the Masters and I won the European Money List twice and all that kind of stuff. But I was playing there and I think I've hit 17 greens in regulation one day and 16 the next day, and I was like 11 over par for the two days and missed the cut. It was the absolute low of my career. I couldn't hit the ball any better than I did, and I couldn't putt any worse than I did.

I packed my staff, missing the cut, went back to my hotel and literally got on my knees -- I was already a believer at the time -- and said a prayer, like: God, if You want me done with this game, I'm ready to give it up. Just show me what You want me to do, and I'll pack it up, no more golf.

A friend of mine was praying with me, and he said, I don't think He's done with you yet. He wants you to persevere. I said, Persevere? I've been persevering for years and years, and it's getting worse and worse, that kind of thing. He said, No, just give it a few more weeks.

Now we look back, a lot of things have happened, many good things in my golfing life since 1989, including the second Masters, as well.

Q. You spoke about wanting to call it last year and then the injury. That's a tough injury to recover from. How did this week loom in your mind on those days when rehab was tough?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, it was a big part of it, but rehab was mostly to just regain the ability to walk, to stand, to swing the club, to function in life. You know, at the time I was 66, or -- yeah, actually 66, so that's not an age nowadays. My mother lived until she was 100. I didn't want to live maybe the next 25, 35 years as an invalid or whatever or half a cripple, so the goal was just to get back to getting healthy and strong, and I pushed myself pretty hard.

The problem is the last -- I've been playing competitive golf, I think, since May or so last year, so almost 11 months or something like that. But I've been driving a golf cart most of the time, which is allowed on the Champions Tour, so I'm now trying to walk more and more, and it's not easy. I walked 18 holes yesterday, and I was totally exhausted and done, and I was glad I could do it.

But walking five or six days in a row on this terrain, it's going to be really hard.

Q. When young kids come to you and if they want to have even a quarter of the legendary career that you have had, what kind of character advice would you give them?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, you've got to be totally dedicated nowadays to become really good. There's so much

competition worldwide. The game has grown all over the globe.

As you get up higher and higher and better and better, it gets tougher and tougher. For everyone that gives up, there's a thousand who will take your spot. You've got to be very focused, very determined. You've got to live a disciplined life and be able to sacrifice a few things and focus on what's important.

Q. I'm wondering if you could walk us through your 18 holes yesterday, how you felt game-wise, and if you could speak to the differences that you've seen in the golf course.

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, I've been here every year. I've seen the differences they've made in the golf course over the years. I've played in the '80s when there was no rough, the fairways were wide and then there were pine needles and trees. Then they brought in an intermediate cut, as they call it, planted 5,000 trees plus, then they lengthened the course, then they changed the 11th green. Continuous improvements to challenge the players to kind of what they were facing a long time ago.

I think the goal, if I'm not mistaken, is to have the players hit similar irons into the green as they did in the 1960s or '80s or 2000, whenever it was. They probably are very, very close to that. Not for me, though. I realized again yesterday, I probably should have quit several years ago because where I'm driving it, I sometimes can't see the flag. There's a good chance I can't see the flag on 1 because I don't get it to the top of the hill. There's a very good chance I can't see it on 17 and various other places. There's par-4s when I'm hitting 3-wood into the green when other guys are hitting 8-irons, 9-irons, 7-irons.

This course is not built to be hitting those kind of clubs. Like yesterday I hit a pretty good 3-hybrid into No. 1, and it hit the middle of the green and took off and I was over the green. That's no place to chip from. You don't ever want to go over that green. That's what happens when you have those kind of clubs into the greens. It's time to quit.

Q. When I think of the stereotypical German athlete, I think of your football players and penalty shootouts, and in your best moments you have shown that, too. You're clearly so emotional of a moment and, as you admitted, you will be this week. How emotional usually would you say you are? Do you recognize yourself in this moment?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, I know that I've always been emotional. Just kind of kept it inside of me most of the time. And like I said, sometimes in certain competition, I was very focused on what's at hand, what's the task. But I've seen it in Ryder Cups. I know I've cried over and over at home when things have been worth crying for or about.

I'm not ashamed of it. My dad was the same way and he was my hero, as well. There's nothing wrong with it. There's many things that are worth crying about.

Q. What do you appreciate about this place and this experience that maybe you didn't in your 20s and 30s?

BERNHARD LANGER: No, I've always appreciated a lot of the things about this tournament. It is extremely unique. It's the only major that's happening at the same venue over and over and over, and that's why people, I think, can relate so much.

Like I heard an interview today from some of the young rookies like Max Greyserman and a couple others and it's the first time here, but I feel like they've been here before because they've seen the putts from here and there, they've seen shots on certain holes year after year after year, and that doesn't happen in other major championships because they move around. Even St Andrews, it's in the rotation maybe every five or seven years; it's nothing like this. This place is so special and so unique.

I appreciate that, but there's hundreds of other things I appreciate about the place. Some of them I mentioned earlier on, what makes the Masters so unique and so special and so different from any other golf tournament that we play in. It doesn't go unnoticed. It's just special.

Q. You've always enjoyed sharing your knowledge about this place with younger players. Do you have an estimate of how many questions you've been asked about the nature of Augusta by younger players, and what's going to happen with all the

knowledge now? Is there a book coming out next year that we can expect with secret knowledge about Masters wins?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, there's no secret. There's some knowledge that many other people have, too, that have played here a few times, I think. It's just how to best attack the golf course on each hole. Yeah, hopefully my brain will still function the next few years, and if anybody wants to pick my brain, any of the youngsters, I'll be happy to share it with them.

Q. How does a kid growing up in Germany in a little village where golf is sort of exotic and obscure pursuit even begin to start to construct a golf swing? What did you do very early on, because it had to be, I would think, self-taught?

BERNHARD LANGER: It was self-taught, and I got into the game through my older brother who was caddying. So when I give my testimony or talk about growing up, I would say I fell in love with money first. As a caddie I was earning money as a nine-year-old. That was pretty cool.

But I immediately fell in love with the game. We were able to practice a little bit and chip and putt and hit balls on the range if there were no members to caddie for, and we couldn't afford golf clubs, but one of the members discarded some of his old sticks. They actually had bamboo shafts. It was a 2-wood, a 3-iron, a 7-iron and a putter with a bent shaft. So I always say that's where my putting problems came from.