

# Cognizant Classic

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Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, USA

PGA National Champion Course

## Daniel Berger

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Daniel Berger into the interview room here at the 2025 Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches. It's a home game for you. You've had a couple of close calls here. What are you looking forward to the most about playing this week?

DANIEL BERGER: Mostly playing in front of my friends and family and playing on a course that I'm familiar with. Obviously sleeping in your own bed is tough to beat. We don't get to do that often. It's one of the events that I circle on the schedule every year, and excited to play.

**Q. Daniel, you're in a group with Luke Clanton. Have you played with him before? Have you watched him much?**

DANIEL BERGER: So he works with Jeff Leishman, who was my golf coach for a long time, so I've had a chance to meet him. Obviously Florida State, he goes there now, and I went there. Trey Jones, the coach at FSU, introduced us at Sea Island a couple months ago. Haven't spent a ton of time together with him, but I'm obviously playing with him the next couple days, so looking forward to that.

**Q. So you've seen him play a little bit it seems like. What do you think about his game? What have you noticed?**

DANIEL BERGER: I haven't watched enough of his game to really comment on it, but obviously he's a great player. He's a cut away from earning his PGA TOUR card, and he's winning college golf tournaments and he's competing and contending in PGA TOUR events.

He's got game, so it's going to be fun to watch.

**Q. I feel like as a pro golfer, cadence and rhythm and routine are so important. I'm curious, now that you've been back in it for a little bit, what took the longest to come back, whether it was in your game or your routine or just everything you did out here? What took the longest for you to really get back to where you**

**were pre-injury and break?**

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I would say definitely club head speed. When I first went to see Mark Blackburn over a year ago, I was swinging like 106 miles an hour, which doesn't translate into long drives. That took me probably eight or nine months to get back up to the high 119, 120s.

So now I feel like I can compete with the other guys. It's a huge advantage to hit the ball -- I'm not long by any means, but to get into that 300 carry number was huge for me, and being able to take some bunkers out of play that six months ago I wasn't able to do, now I'm hitting a ton of fairways.

I think statistically I'm pretty high up there the last couple years in driving accuracy and total driving, so playing out of the fairway has been huge for me in the last year.

**Q. Did you do anything specific to get that speed back? What is the speed training or what did that look like for you?**

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I hired a new strength and conditioning coach with a ton of experience in that. I train completely differently than I did before. I never really liked working out. It was never really something that I enjoyed doing. Now I realize how important it is for my health and for my overall golf game.

I do a lot less heavy lifting and I do a lot more speed training where I'm actively trying to move fast and fire quickly, and I think even just practicing hitting balls hard, I never used to go to the driving range and tee up 10 balls and hit them as hard as I could. You get up to a par-5 and you go, I'm going to hit this as hard as I can, but if you've never done that before, you don't have that muscle memory and that fast-twitch in your brain to kind of fire at that speed.

So just doing that more often has kind of translated.

**Q. For the last year since you've come back, it's probably been a lot of how can I get back to where I was. Have you reached a point where it's like, how can I improve on what I was even prior? Have you reached**



**that where you're behind trying to chase old versions of yourself?**

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, I think you're always as a professional golfer trying to get better. Yeah, it took me legitimately a year to feel like I was the same golfer that I was pre-injury. I actually feel like I'm a more knowledgeable golfer, as in like I understand what I need to do. I know my body better. I think that's going to make me a better player in the future.

I think I'm playing better golf now than I was when I was top 20 in the world. It was just a matter of getting enough repetitions in and playing enough golf and coming out to a completely different environment with new players that I've never met before and playing in tournaments that I've never played before. I kind of felt like a rookie last year in a sense, and now I feel like I'm more established like I was pre-injury.

**Q. You debuted last year at Amex. You get asked about the back a lot. Do you get tired of getting asked about it?**

DANIEL BERGER: I feel great, so I don't mind speaking about it. It was probably more difficult to talk about a year ago when I still wasn't even feeling 100 percent. But now it's just like a thing in the past, and I don't really think about it too much. I feel 100 percent healthy.

**Q. I know it's a little course dependent, but how often are you, generally speaking, stepping up on a tee and saying, okay, I'm going to go 100 percent full throttle with this drive?**

DANIEL BERGER: Very little. I mean, probably three times a round.

I think what's happened in my game is I have two different kind of shots. I have what I call the bullet, which is a really kind of low shot that's a fairway finder, and I hit that 80 percent of the time, and then maybe three or four times a round like on a par-5 where it's an advantage to be able to reach it or a bunker that I need to carry on a couple holes, I'll do that.

But thinking about the front nine, I will hit a bullet on every single hole on the front nine, and then maybe on 10 I'll bomb one. 11 is a bullet, 12 is a bullet, 13 is a bullet, 14 is a bullet, 15 is a bullet, 16 is a bullet. I don't really send it that often, which is completely different than if you watch Rory McIlroy. It looks like from what I see he hits it as hard as I can on every hole.

He gains strokes by distance. I think I do it more off of

accuracy. It's just a different way to play.

If I had 190 ball speed, I'd be doing that. But I don't.

**Q. A couple years ago when you were really dialed in and leading this tournament, it obviously didn't end the way you wanted it to. What do you take away from the experience of how well you were playing but not getting the result? Do you take away good memories or harp back on what you could have done? How do you reconcile that?**

DANIEL BERGER: Yeah, it was tough for a while. I thought about it a lot. It ate at me for a while.

But I think in the end, golf is really tough, and you're not playing against a bunch of average players. You're playing against the best players in the world, so there's going to be times where people outplay you or you don't quite hit the shots that you want to hit.

I think in the last year just, like, being able to understand that and process that has helped me a lot, and what I take is that I wanted it way too much at that time because this is a tournament that I think fondly of and I have a lot of great memories here. If I was in that same position again, I would definitely approach it differently.

**Q. For so many years the winning scores were single digits. Last four years the average is almost 14-under par. Is there a difference on the course? Has there been better weather? Is it a combination? Why do you think those scores came down?**

DANIEL BERGER: Well, it's significantly different. They overseeded the golf course so it's not Bermuda anymore. The greens are fantastic; they're the best I've ever seen them.

Chipping is noticeably easier now. A lot of guys have issues chipping off of really tight Bermuda into the grain, and now it's overseed. So the ball sits up. You can put spin on it. You're not going to see guys duff balls like they would when it was pure Bermuda. It's a lot easier.

If you look at that par-4, I believe it's No. 6, they took the two bunkers away. That was the hardest hole on the golf course, and now you can kind of miss it to the right and still reach the green.

They've made some changes. 10 being a par-5 -- I mean, I prefer it to be as hard as possible because I think it suits my game better. But it's still challenging. Coming into the Bear Trap, you're not going to get away with hitting average golf shots. To win the golf tournament, you still

have to hit great shots down the stretch.

**Q. With this being the start of the Florida Swing and you being a local guy at this point, for people who are going to be watching this on TV during broadcasts, they're going to start to hear grain on greens being spoken about a lot. For many people, depending on where they live, they don't have to deal with that. It's not an issue. Can you explain exactly how much you take that into effect and what it is -- as you're playing, are you even cognizantly thinking about grain as much, or throughout your course of lining up a putt and thinking about it, it automatically feeds into your process?**

DANIEL BERGER: I think just being a Florida guy, subconsciously you pick up on things that probably the average person wouldn't pick up on. The coloring of the greens, does it look shiny, does it look dark, what side of the cup is burned out. Those are things that just growing up as a teenager you get used to. But they make a huge difference.

If you have a left-to-right putt but with right-to-left grain, it's clearly not going to break as much. It's a bit of a skill to decide how much break you're going to play based on how the grain is going. But I think it's an advantage. It's a reason why I've probably played well here in the past, because other guys aren't quite as used to it.

**Q. How long does it take a skilled player to be able to sort of incorporate that into the way they address putts or the way they take it on?**

DANIEL BERGER: If they're a good player I think they pick it up pretty quickly because they start to see balls go in the hole a lot more often. I think you just pick up on the nuances. When you look at a 20-footer and you see it's shiny, you know that it's downgrain, you know it's going to be quicker.

Obviously the other side of it would be you see it's dark, it's not as shiny, it's going to be slower. But interestingly enough, early on in my career, I never really thought about it that much, I just kind of putted, and then as I've gotten older I've started to play more grain, and I think it's been helpful for me. It definitely is a factor. It's a major factor.

**Q. Is the Ryder Cup on your mind at all?**

DANIEL BERGER: It is on my mind, but in the end, I'm so far down on the list right now that I really need to just focus on each event at a time and just really stick into the process. I know that I'd be a great addition to the team.

I think early on in my career -- it's harder to pick a guy that hasn't competed in those events because you're not sure, are they going to play, are they going to play well, are they going to be used to the spotlight and that type of stuff that comes with the Ryder Cup. But having played in a Presidents Cup and having played in a Ryder Cup and having been there, I think if it was a close pick between me and someone that maybe wasn't and I continue to play well, I think I would be a great choice.

But obviously I've got a lot of work to do until that spot comes.

**Q. You hear guys when they miss out on teams, it can be hard for them to watch. Obviously it wasn't bad play that kept you out of these last ones, it was injuries, but when those events would pop up, was it hard to watch knowing you wanted to be there?**

DANIEL BERGER: It was easier to watch the last Ryder Cup because I knew I couldn't play. Physically I couldn't play. But when you're healthy and you're like, oh, I could play, why am I not there, that's definitely more difficult. But the last one I physically couldn't play, so I was like -- I watched every shot. I love the Ryder Cup. It's so much fun to watch. It's unlike anything that we do throughout the golf season.

Just having played in one and seen what it's about, it's the best week of the year.

**Q. You've played a lot of junior golf in this area. Is there one memory, recollection that stands out to you of all the years that you played?**

DANIEL BERGER: No, I remember playing -- I think I played the AJGA Polo Classic or something here. It was like a match play event, and I lost to a kid Anthony Paolucci I think was his name on like the 16th hole.

I haven't played a ton of junior golf tournaments out here, not on the Champ course. There was a ton of tournaments on the other courses that they had here that I played in every year.

It was a great place to grow up and play junior golf.

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