



PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW

March 7, 2018

BERNHARD LANGER

CHRIS RICHARDS: Thank you for joining us this morning and welcome to the Toshiba Classic. It's been 17 months, I believe, since the PGA TOUR Champions has been here. Does it feel good to be back, and what's it like coming to an older style golf course, is that something you guys look forward to?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, I think everybody enjoys this golf course. It's, as you say, old style. I don't know how old it is, about 100 years I guess or something like that. It feels like that but maybe not. It's very traditional.

It's great to be back. Yeah, we missed it last year and everybody's looking forward to being here. The weather's great, and the golf course is usually fun to play. It's all a win-win-win situation and we're excited to be back. Golf course has changed. I played yesterday, they took a lot of trees out. Some key trees that made you shape the ball around the couple of palm trees or things like that. It's a lot more open, so I feel it favors the long hitters a lot more now because all the bunkering is about 260, 265, and some of the trees are stopping around that mark. So if you can carry it 280 or 270 in the air, you have a huge advantage now that you didn't have before I think with the trees in place. So it's going to play different. I think it's going to favor the long hitters, but we'll see what happens. You've still got to make some putts and hit it close, I guess.

CHRIS RICHARDS: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Bernhard, I would like to talk a little bit about longevity on the tour and you, of course, have kind of set the current standard for that, Hale Irwin in the earlier days. How do you attribute the success you've had over such a long period of time?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, there's a lot that goes into it, and there's always been a few exceptions. There was -- what's the guy's name that passed away? Gosh, I can't think of him now, one of the all-time greats, big guy.

Q. Arnold Palmer?

BERNHARD LANGER: No, he's older than Arnold. Anyway, it might come back to me. But there are always exceptions, like you said. Hale Irwin, Tom Watson almost won the British Open at age 59, 60, whatever he was. I would like to be one of those exceptions. What goes into it is a great deal. You've got to be healthy to start off with. Many of my colleagues have had operations. You look at Peter Jacobsen and he's had 22 operations or something. You look at others, they've had hip replacement, shoulder surgery, rotator cuff, whatever, tennis elbow, golfer's elbow. I mean, you go on, you can find it out here. I've

been fortunate not to have had any major surgery. I had one on my thumb that was in 2011 when I was basically out of the season for the most part. But for the rest of my life I had injuries with my back, with my neck, with certain things, but never surgery. So I'm reasonably healthy.

I work on my fitness, I stretch a lot. I think my technique has gotten better. I did an interview for a German guy this morning for the Masters and he was asking me the same thing. I said I believe my technique has gotten better the last 15 years, so that enables me to be even more consistent than I was before. I seem to hit more fairways now and more greens in regulation, and the putter held me back in my younger years. I had a lot of putting issues over a stretch of years. I bounced back to be really good and then I got bad again and then I bounced back again. But I probably could have won another 20, 30 tournaments if I wouldn't have had -- and several majors if I wouldn't have had the putting issues at certain times.

So what I'm trying to say is my putting's gotten a little more consistent the last few years. My long game's gotten more consistent, or stronger. My technique's better. I don't have to make changes every other week, you know, where I used to remodel my whole swing. People don't know that because I did it little bit by little bit. Faldo did it all in one go. He said, okay, this is not holding up under pressure, I'm not winning any majors with this swing, so I'm going to redo the whole thing. It took him two years to do it and there was no guarantee he would actually come out of it better, but he did and he ended up winning, what, six majors, five majors?

So it was worth it for him. I never took a risk of redoing everything at once, I just did it petit a petit as we call it, little bit by little bit. Grip, backswing. Once the backswing got better, then the forward swing had to match the backswing. It's a long story, I could talk about it for an hour, but that's what happened over a period of 15, 20 years and that's what got me to the point where I have been the last 12, 15 years where I played really solid golf.

Q. When you first started on this circuit, on the Champions circuit, what were your expectations and how have you met or exceeded those? Did you expect to play successfully as long as you have been?

BERNHARD LANGER: I had no idea what would happen, to tell you the truth. I expected to be one of the top-5 or 10, one of the top-5 or 10 professionals on this tour. I was hoping to be one of the guys that would be up there a lot because I brought -- you know, up to that point I was pretty consistent on the European Tour and wherever I played and I was in contention a lot of times. It got difficult in the late 40s to be in contention on the PGA TOUR, but many of you don't remember when I was 49 and a half or something, I lost a playoff in Ft. Worth on the PGA TOUR. With a bit of luck, I could have won that. I had a 10-foot putt to win and I missed it. So I was still playing good golf against the young guys at that age. So when I came out here I had high expectations. I worked hard at my game and was hoping to be one of the dominant guys.

Have I exceeded it? Yes, I think I have. I don't think I ever dreamt of winning 10 majors, senior majors, more than anybody else has done, or to win 36 times. It's hard to win any tournament out here, but to win 36 events in a stretch of 10 years, that's an amazing achievement, I think.

But again, I really didn't know. I'm playing against the same guys I played all my life. Tom Lehman, Fred Couples, Mark O'Meara, you rattle -- you look up the list and they're pretty much all my age. Some of them are younger, some of them are a little older. And what I've even noticed the last 10 years, the competition is getting fiercer and harder as time goes on. The guys prepare better to come out here, like a Jerry Kelly and Steve Stricker and all these guys that are 48, 49 and they're still trying to play on the PGA TOUR. When they turn 50 they know they can be one of the better players out here and they work at their fitness, at their game, and when they come out here they're prepared and they're ready and that makes it hard because the older guys like myself now, I'm one of the oldest guys out here, we don't want to go away. We want to keep playing out here because we enjoy it, we love it, but there's so many young guys pushing and you only have 80 guys that can play. So it makes that pyramid to the 80 guys that play very, very competitive and tough.

You could look at the 80 participants, or 78, I would think 75 of them could win on any given week. It's literally that strong out here, maybe 70. There's very, very few who if you ask him, do you think you can ever win out here, they all say, yeah, I think I could and I've done it before.

Q. Is the stretching the most important physical thing you do?

BERNHARD LANGER: For me it's one of the more important things, I think, because I'm a very stiff kind of guy. You have guys like Fred Couples where they're double jointed, they go this way and they can touch both hands like that. I'm about this far away, I'm just not built that way. My muscles are too tight, my joints aren't loose enough. So I constantly need to work at that. If I don't, my swing gets shorter and shorter, just doesn't feel as good. It's important for me.

Q. I was reading when you grew up you were a caddie, which I don't think is an experience a lot of the young golfers have now. How did that help you learn the game back then?

BERNHARD LANGER: I'm not sure if it helped me a great deal but it makes me -- I come from a very humble, poor family background. It makes me appreciate what I have. I didn't grow up in a rich family and you're part of a country club right away and everything is given to you. I had to earn it. I had to buy my own first clubs, they weren't handed to me. I didn't have a lesson for seven years, couldn't afford it. So I appreciated when I did have a first lesson, golf lesson, and get some help in trying to figure it out, all those things.

When I first got on Tour I didn't have any money and I had to sleep in my car at times and rent a room for five dollars where there was bugs crawling around. So I appreciate a nice

hotel, a five-star hotel, a good meal, courtesy cars, when I used to take the train and the bus and hold my bag and drag my suitcase.

So times have changed and a lot for the better. That's different, where some people have never gone through that. But the actual caddie experience, I think I appreciate caddies, too, because I know what goes into caddying. Even though it was a long time ago, I still remember.

Q. Martin Kaymer, when he came along, he had you to look up to like Jon Rahm had the Spanish players to look up to. I don't recall a lot of great German players that you had to look up to.

BERNHARD LANGER: Nobody.

Q. You had to kind of create it yourself, right?

BERNHARD LANGER: There was no one there. There was no German guy that had any kind of success on any tour until I came along, so no. Later on I met Gary Player and I kind of took him as my golfing idol because of his size and his work ethic, his fitness regime and his belief in God, and all that struck me as this is a guy I should model myself after, but that was later on.

Q. This season in particular, how will you measure your success? What will be success in your mind and how is that any different now than what it was last season or what it was 10 years ago?

BERNHARD LANGER: It's not going to be different from the last five, six, seven seasons. I mean, I've come off maybe one of my best seasons ever last year winning three majors and seven titles. It's just exceptional. I don't expect to do that this year. I hope to do it, but I don't expect it.

So how do I measure success? Anytime I'm winning or I'm up there, it's a success. And I realize I'm 60 now or older so it's going to get harder every year. So if I can still compete with these younger guys, that's a success. My goals are still the same. I would like to win majors, win tournaments, improve myself, maybe win the Money List, the Schwab Cup Player of the Year, any of that would be success.

Q. Coming off of such a successful season last year, did you find yourself to be in the final pairing with someone in particular, someone that maybe you hoped to have more of those go-arounds with them in the future, and you kind of formed a rivalry with him?

BERNHARD LANGER: No, there's no real rivalry at this stage. Last year Scott McCarron and I were competing for a lot of the top prizes because he won four times, I won seven times. Turned out neither one of us won the Schwab Cup, but we still were in the running all

year long.

Then this year I think Jerry Kelly has a very good chance to be right up there because he's a very strong player. He's a complete package. Steve Stricker is always in contention, so if he plays a little more. But there could be other guys like Brandt Jobe or, I don't know, Joe Durant. As I said, a lot of guys. Tom Lehman if he gets his game together. Anybody out there can play really well on any given week.

Q. If you can look back 10 years ago to when you won the title before here, how differently does the course play now from back when you won it in 2008?

BERNHARD LANGER: It's not that different except this year they took the trees down, as I said. I don't think anything else has changed. I can't think of any new tees or different greens or any of that. As far as I'm concerned, I'm still using the same yardage book from 10 years ago so I would think it hasn't changed a great deal. The sprinkler heads are still in the same place, the distances are all the same. For the exception of this is the first time they've taken a whole bunch of trees out that used to be -- some of them were in the way and made you hit it straight. If you didn't hit it straight, they were really in the way of your second shot. That's the only thing that I see totally different.

Q. You talked about that first set of clubs you bought. How old were you and what was the set like?

BERNHARD LANGER: The set was called Kroydons. Nobody's probably ever heard of them.

Q. That was my first set.

BERNHARD LANGER: Really? That's all I could afford. The main thing was they were new. It wasn't because -- because at that point we were given four clubs by a member that discarded them and it was a 2-wood with a bamboo shaft, a 3-iron, a 7-iron and a putter. No wedges. So when I had all of a sudden a complete set, that was like wow, this is cool.

And how old I was? I started caddying when I was about eight and a half, nine, and I think I bought them when I was about 12, 13, I had saved enough money to buy my own clubs at that point.

Q. What was that course like that you grew up on?

BERNHARD LANGER: It was a nine-hole, very hilly, five miles from where I grew up. It's called Augsburg Country Club. It's the only course that was in town.

Q. There's a lot of outspoken opinions about the ball and whether it should be rolled back on the other tour. Do you have any strong feelings about that?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, I'm the same as most guys. There's a negative because we have to build more land. I'm also a golf course designer, so you used to build courses that were 6,000 yards long, now they're almost 8,000 yards long. So you need more land, you've got to take care of it, you've got to water it, got to maintain it, pay for it and all that kind of stuff. That's the negative side.

The positive side is people want to hit it far. People enjoy us hitting it far so it brings out the people to watch whatever, John Daly, for instance, who kills it every time he pulls a driver out. That's one of the big fascinations about golf. It's kind of fun to make a long putt or hole a bunker shot, but there's nothing like hitting a 300-odd yard drive. You ask a guy, how has your day. Oh, well, I hit a couple of really good drives, that's what they talk about unless they had a hole-in-one or something. It's a double-edged sword in many ways. I don't know what the solution is.

Q. You're hitting the ball, I think, statistically as long now or longer than ever before in your career, is that correct?

BERNHARD LANGER: Not longer, but the last sort of 10 years my driving distance has been all around 280 for some reason. I don't know how that happens, but it's been consistently around that mark for 10 years in a row. Starting to hit my irons a little bit shorter so I'm losing about five yards to my irons now, so I think it's starting to set in where I've got to club up a little more. Old age is setting in.

Q. If they can get the ball to be a little hotter, maybe that's the answer?

BERNHARD LANGER: I'm not sure, I haven't found one, or if I find one that's hotter, it's no good for the short game. So I put it right away because the short game's still more important than five yards off the tee.

Q. They've talked about it, moving the tee back on 13 at Augusta, and I guess they are going to move the tee back on 5. How do you feel about that after playing it for so many years?

BERNHARD LANGER: I think 13 is a good move because the hole was designed to play that way. The hole wasn't designed to a Bubba Watson and hit a wedge or 8-iron in, that's almost unfair. They spent a lot of money buying that property, that few extra 25, 30 yards, and that will make a big difference how that hole will play.

No. 5, I don't really understand it. They're lengthening 5. It's a brutal hole as it is, no matter how far you hit it, because the further you drive it up there, the narrower it gets with these very deep bunkers where you can't reach the green and trees on the right. So I don't really see a sense there because all they're going to do is where players hit 3-wood off the tee now, they move 20 yards back, they're just going to hit the driver in the same spot. So it's really not going to do a whole lot except punish the guys like me because I have to hit driver no matter what and I'm going to be 25 yards further away. And you come into a green that's

angled and elevated and slopes in all directions with a 4-iron, that's not much fun.

Q. Can you describe the sensation of that first Masters victory, and how long will you continue to play down there?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, I'll go backwards. I will continue as long as I think I'm somewhat competitive. I don't want to make a fool of myself shooting in the 80s and just, you know, just being there to be there. It's time to quit and don't just play for that sake. Hopefully, that will be a few more years.

But the first win there was elation. It was my dream come true. I was in contention in '81 and '84 in the British Open; twice I had a chance to win and didn't. Was one of the dominant players on the European Tour from '81 onwards. It was very difficult to get invites to the Masters, the U.S. Open, the PGA, even for the leading players at that time, so it was a thrill to have finally won my first major but also have an exemption to all the majors and to the PGA TOUR at that point.

CHRIS RICHARDS: Anything else? All right. Thank you very much, Bernhard.

BERNHARD LANGER: You're welcome. Pleasure. Have a great week.