

BERNHARD LANGER

LAURA VESCOVI: Welcome, Bernhard Langer, to the Bridgestone SENIOR PLAYERS Championship. Thanks for coming in today. We'll start off, I wanted to ask you how your feelings are coming into the Bridgestone SENIOR PLAYERS considering you're a three-time champion of this event, a major championship. Headed into the week, are you excited? What are your emotions coming in?

BERNHARD LANGER: Definitely excited. I love this tournament, I've done very well in it, and it has been at some great venues and this is certainly a fantastic venue. Most of us have been here on a number of occasions. This was actually the very first tournament I ever played in the U.S., I believe it was 1982, around that time, so it will always have a special memory in my heart.

LAURA VESCOVI: And your preparation out there on the course, you had a chance to play yesterday, correct?

BERNHARD LANGER: I did, yeah. I played nine holes Monday, nine holes yesterday. The course looks in phenomenal shape, really fantastic, fun to play, but very long and difficult. The rough is quite high. The fairways slope, many of them. You have a lot of blind tee shots, blind shots into the green where you don't see the surface. Some of the trees are a little bit in the way, they're grown now and the branches are protecting some of the greens, like No. 3 and 18 and all that. And yeah, it's just a beautiful golf course. It's a great venue and playing extremely long at the moment I think because of the wetness and all the rain we've had lately. Hopefully they won't play us all the way back because I'll be wearing out my hybrids and long irons.

Q. Your first time here, were you intimidated? Had you seen Firestone on TV or anything?

BERNHARD LANGER: No, I hadn't. In Germany we didn't have golf on TV really. I mean, you were fortunate if you saw the Masters for half an hour, or the British Open. That wasn't part of my growing up.

But intimidated? Not necessarily, but in awe maybe more so of how beautiful the courses were manicured and maintained, the practice facilities and everything about the tournament. We didn't have that in Europe at that point in time. We didn't have all the first-class treatment of maybe getting your own car or courtesy cars or having your own locker and food in the locker and all that kind of stuff. That wasn't always a part of the European Tour. It is now, but not in the early days.

Q. Did you have a favorite, like, something that happened or funny story about your PGA TOUR days here, or memory of Akron?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, one thing was very unique. I think the Saturday or the Sunday was actually my birthday and somehow it got into the papers the night before and it was printed that it was my birthday. I think I was co-leader as well or near the lead. So I hit my tee shot on No. 1 on that day and people started singing "Happy birthday to you" and I had never experienced that anywhere else. I thought, well, they're very friendly people here and this is pretty special.

Q. That was the first time, the first year?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah.

Q. Bernhard, so often somebody comes out on the Champions Tour, they're probably licking their chops like maybe Phil is right now or some of the guys, 48, 49, Ernie. They come out at 50 and they take it sort of gang busters for a while in the early years of their 50s and then Father Time is undefeated, it starts taking its toll.

You've had a sustained excellence that's been kind of rare. Maybe Hale Irwin had something like that through the mid 50s and so on, 39 wins, 10 majors. What do you attribute that sustained excellence?

Even a year or two ago my brother and I were watching all the time and week after week you were just pummeling the competition. What do you attribute that sort of sustained excellence at such a high level as approach -- you know, getting towards 60 you were still doing it?

BERNHARD LANGER: Yeah, it's not easy. Things are starting to hurt and ache more so every year it seems. So there's a lot of factors.

First of all, you've got to be healthy. If you're not healthy, you can't practice or swing the club or play the way you want to play and prepare. I've been fortunate to have minor injuries, nothing major that knocked me out for years. I had a thumb surgery, which was 2011, and I was out for about most of the season, but otherwise I managed my injuries to a point where I could play and practice.

I think my technique got a little bit better in the last 15 years and that's something you can do. You're not going to get stronger. You're going to get weaker and you're going to lose flexibility. That's a fact. My backswing is about here now, 20 years ago I was up there. It's just Father Time, as they say.

But technically I can still get better. I can still get the club in better positions, have a better understanding on how to play the game, what I'm capable of, what's good for me in my off time and maybe even become better in the short game and just all around, how to attack a

golf course.

So I was trying to improve in those areas while understanding I'm going to start hitting it a little shorter and lose some strength. So I think that I excelled in that and did fairly well, and enjoy the competition on top of that.

Some people say, well, I've done it now for 30 years, 40 years, whatever it may be, and they don't give it their full attention. I still enjoy competing and playing at the highest level. I've learned to pace myself where I don't play too much or practice too much, so I started taking more time off and worked on my fitness and things like that. All of those little factors combined I think just benefited me personally.

You mentioned some guys are licking their chops when they're 48, 49, they come out here and they're playing really good for a few years. You also find the opposite. You find guys that should be dominating, but they come out here at 50 and they find it's pretty hard, it's pretty difficult to win. There's a lot of competition and it's not easy. You have 80 guys out here and almost every one of them could win on any given week.

Q. I'm looking at the field, it's just a Hall of Fame field. It's incredible. Does the public underestimate the quality of the Champions Tour, do you think, to some degree?

BERNHARD LANGER: I believe they do to some degree, yes. It's one of the unique sports where we can still play at a very high level. Yes, we can't hit 340-yard drives like the young guys do and sometimes we may not putt quite as well, but we still do a lot of other things very well.

Q. Interesting. Question I have, it seems like yesterday that you were putting on green jackets about every other year back in the day. Are there some guys that you enjoy and relish the chance to still compete against, or are there some guys you actually miss as Greg Norman or there's some absences from the Tour that you look back in those days and relish the head to head sometimes right on this golf course?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, there are certain personalities that I played against, like a Payne Stewart or Seve Ballesteros or Greg Norman or some of those, yeah. Would be fantastic to have them out here competing, but wasn't meant to me.

Q. Last question for me, Bernhard. I'm sorry. I was at a speaking engagement of Tom Lehman's Monday night, a very big group, 600 people, and when it got to Q and A, somebody said, "Who do you admire the most," and somewhat predictably he talked about Tiger and his commitment to win and be better, be the best he could be, his drive, but then he said, "The guy that I most admire is Bernhard Langer."

He talked about your -- kind of your balance, you're all in on your faith and then you're all in on your professional golf career. At both levels you do -- in his mind, you know,

it's worthy to be emulated. Does that surprise you to hear your peers, major champions too, speak of you that way and what does that mean to you?

BERNHARD LANGER: Well, it means a great deal. Doesn't surprise me. Maybe a little bit, because there's hundreds of guys to choose from and Tom Lehman has been around for many, many years and knows everybody that's in this profession and other professions.

At the same time, we're good friends and I admire him, too, for the same reasons. He's a great man of faith, puts family first and still dedicates a lot of time to his profession. The.

Q. I just wondered do majors still drive you, you know, just like they did -- I mean, you've had such success on the Champions with the majors, is that still what you're pointing towards?

BERNHARD LANGER: I think we like to play well every day or every week, but yes, we still, the majors are still more important and you play against a stronger field on sometimes harder courses, better venues. So when you win a major, you know you've beaten the best under the most difficult circumstances most of the time.

Q. And do you ever, like, hear comments from the gallery about -- I mean, you know, the way you've maintained your fitness and just, you know, like an inspiration for people who, you know, over-50 crowd kind of? You know what I mean?

BERNHARD LANGER: Oh, yeah, you hear that a lot. I hear comments like, "You haven't changed a bit the last 20 years or so." I wish that were true. Or other things like, "Yeah, keep going, do it for the old guys," that kind of thing, encouraging the over-50s to keep at it and have hope that they can still get better.

LAURA VESCOVI: Wonderful. Thank you, good luck this week.

BERNHARD LANGER: Pleasure, thank you.