

# German Engineering

## Bernhard Langer keeps motoring along the road of success

by Richard Mudry

**T**he ladies locker room at TPC Tampa Bay sits unobtrusively inside the clubhouse for 51 weeks a year. Come the third week in April, though, the place becomes a whirlwind of activity when the Champions Tour takes over the facility.

Open the door to the tiny room and you find a makeshift ceiling-to-floor curtain on your left. Peer inside and you'll find a slew of lights and a camera for those using the area for interviews.

Step over the maze of spaghetti-like cables and there, seated in an alcove, is Bernhard Langer, cool, calm and collected, much as you'd expect him to be.

Inside the cocoon of the room, there is serenity and talk of Langer's PGA TOUR career, his new career on the Champions Tour, and discussion of Christianity, family, friends and other facets of his life.

If you look closely, Langer doesn't appear much older than the 15-year-old who turned professional in 1972, played the European Tour for many years, first became a member of the PGA TOUR in 1985, and later rejoined it in 2001. He's still fit and motivated to play after 58 worldwide wins, three PGA TOUR titles, two of them Masters [1985 and '93], and eight Champions Tour victories and counting.

It's hard to believe that Langer, who turned 52 in August, has come so far, considering where it all began.

He started as a nine-year-old caddie, earning \$1 for each loop on a nine-hole course five miles from his house in Anhausen, Germany, and earned the nickname "Eagle Eye" because he never lost a golf ball, even in heavy rough. He turned professional at 15 and spent three years as a club assistant before the European Tour beckoned.

The member of a hard-working, blue-collar family, Langer's father was not a golfer. But that disciplined work ethic carried over to the son, who during the peak of his career was as devoted to improving his game as anyone past or present.

All that practice led Langer to 10 European Ryder Cup playing appearances and, ultimately, the team's captaincy in 2004. That Langer team beat the U.S. handily and was the crown jewel in his already illustrious career.

In his third year on the Champions Tour, Langer has continued winning—four wins through mid-July—and setting high standards for himself.

In his fourth start in 2007, the summer he turned 50, Langer won the Administrators Small Business Classic by eight strokes, tying the Tour's all-time 54-hole scoring mark of 25-under-par 191. A year later, he won three times, collected Player of the Year and Rookie of the Year honors, led the money list with \$2.035 million and claimed the Byron Nelson Award as the scoring leader, edging Jay Haas by .01 of a stroke.

What lies ahead for the talented golfer? How many years does he see himself on the Champions Tour? More importantly, who is Bernhard Langer, the man, husband and father? As a soft-spoken individual, Langer is often seen as so focused on his career, the person gets lost in the golf.

Writer Richard Mudry sat down with Langer in that ladies locker room and found there is much more to the Boca Raton, FL, resident than meets the eye.

**You've been a professional since 1972 and won all over the world. How satisfying is that in terms of longevity and success?**

I never envisioned a long career like this. I was just trying to make a living. To do it for over 35 years is quite amazing. One of the hardest things to do is achieve consistency. I'm very blessed.

**How do you continue to motivate yourself?**

Motivation has never been a problem. Mentally, if I do something I want to do it right. If I show up at a golf tournament, I want to give a 100 percent effort. Otherwise, I might as well stay home.

**Are you disappointed you didn't win more on the PGA TOUR?**



In my prime, for the most part, I was a world player. Even as a member of the PGA TOUR, I maintained my European Tour membership. I divided my time between the two until I was in my late 40s. That made it harder to win on the PGA TOUR.

**You had several chances to win the British Open. What are your memories of those close calls?**

I had three seconds and two thirds. I should have won there, but it was either my putting, bad breaks or someone just beat me, it all seemed to happen. Two of those Opens stand out. In 1984 at St. Andrews, I couldn't, should've won. I outplayed Seve [Ballesteros] by four shots tee to green but he outscored me on the greens and he beat me by two shots. In 1985 at Royal St. George's in Sandwich, I had a two-shot lead heading into the final round. I had a couple of bad breaks and ended up losing to Sandy Lyle by two shots. Those are the two that really hurt.

**The U.S. Open wasn't very kind to you. Your game seemed suited for those difficult conditions. Have you been able to figure out why the U.S. Open didn't quite fit?**

I'd disagree with your assessment about the U.S. Open fitting my game. I never felt I was good enough to win the U.S. Open. My driving was not good enough, nor was my wedge game. And the European Tour didn't have the rough that they had in the U.S. Open, and I didn't know how to play out of it. That's probably why I did better at the Masters, because of the wider fairways.

**Is your work ethic still as strong as it was in your prime?**

I do not put as many hours on the driving range and putting green these days. I rest more. My body can't take all that practice. I've learned that as I've grown older. I hit fewer balls and concentrate on hitting those with quality. I've hit so many practice shots in my career that I should have an idea about my golf swing at this stage.

**You were the first No. 1 world-ranked player in 1986, and two decades later you were still ranked in the top 100. What's the secret?**

It is a difficult thing to do. But I was always driven to succeed. I like to compete no matter what I am doing, whether it is tennis or

ping pong. I like to win. That's a part of me. I don't have a lot of motivational problems. I still enjoy the game, and I've learned you've got to have a stable personal life and be fit and healthy to do that.

**During your career you've battled putting problems more times than anyone should. Can you remember when it all began?**

You mean the yips. I've had them on four different occasions. They started at age 18 in 1976 on the European Tour. One of the first events I played was in Spain and the greens were really fast, and it was something I was not used to. I couldn't cope with it and I put a lot of pressure on myself. To get over it was difficult the first time. I tried a different way to grip the putter. I'd had a conventional overlap grip until then. I tried cross-handed to get a different feel. Then I went to split cross-handed. I won two Masters that way. At that point in time it was very different and not easily accepted by most. It didn't matter to me what it looked like. It mattered how it felt. In 1997, I went to the long [48-inch] putter.



**Was there ever a point during those years when the torment pushed you to the brink of doing something serious?**

Like quitting? There were a couple of times. In 1989, my yips were really bad. I'd missed a few cuts in a row. At that point, I became a believer in God. I got on my knees praying. I asked God, "If You want me to do something else and give it [golf] up—if You've got something else for me to do—then I will." A good friend, Jim Hiskey, told me that God wanted me to persevere. Jim and I had a couple of conversations about it for two days. I think we might have been in Flint [Michigan] at the Buick Open. But there were days when I was down in the dumps with my confidence and questioning what I would do for the future.

**Your mental focus has always been strong. Is that something you learned or something that came from your upbringing?**

Some of it is natural. I also learned a lot of it from the Bible. People go to sports psychologists these days but all of their teachings are in the Bible. They tell you to stay in the present and forget the past. That's in the Bible. The Bible also talks a lot about abilities. The Bible is where you can learn a lot of it [mental toughness], and it's definitely cheaper than a sports psychologist. There's no way to misunderstand the Bible. I've definitely noticed a stronger mental feeling in me, and it also gives you priorities. Golf is not my No. 1 priority anymore, but I try to do the best I can when I'm playing it.

**In light of what Seve went through with his**

**apparent successful battle with brain cancer, what are your recollections of him as a player, person and Ryder Cup captain?**

We used to be big rivals. He was one of the greatest competitors to ever play the game. I've got wonderful memories of the Ryder Cup and World Match Play when I was paired against him. When I won my first Masters, I was paired with him on Sunday. He was our [Ryder Cup] captain in Spain [1997]. We've had many private conversations about golf over the years. What used to be a rivalry, though, became a friendship. I found him to be always opinionated and a very proud man. As a player, he had a tremendous short game. It's sad to see what has happened to him in the last few years. First, he lost his game. Then he went through a divorce and all that comes with that. And now he's battling cancer. I hope he recovers. Like everyone, I've tried calling him, and I've sent him some e-mails through his brothers to let him know I'm thinking of him.

**Who is your best friend in golf and why?**

I've got two. One is my brother Erwin, who is also my manager. The other is Larry Moody. He's the one who led me to Christ. He's my mentor in spiritual things, like family issues when I've needed help. He's been a tremendous help doing the Bible study. In 1985, when I won the Masters, Bobby Clampett invited me to a weekly Bible study meeting and that's where I first met Larry.

**You married an American woman and have been married for many years. How did you and Vikki meet?**

We met in 1983 at the [Jackie Gleason] Inverrary Classic. She was watching her then brother-in-law [Randy Cavanaugh, who was married at the time to Vikki's sister Carol] play in the tournament. Her brother-in-law and I ran into each other at the end of the day. He introduced me to Vikki and asked if I would join them for dinner. There were 10 people at the table, so it wasn't just us. But it was love at first sight. I stayed in touch. She was a flight attendant for Eastern Air Lines at the time. I finally told her that being separated and in a long-distance relationship was not working. I told her either we take it to the next level or drop it. We found a way for her to take a month off. We both liked each other and nine months later we were married.

**Once you were married, how did you decide where to live and start a family?**

Beginning in 1984, we'd live six months here and six months there [in Germany]. We did that until 2000. After that, we decided to move here full time. We make a trip in the summer to Germany when the [four] kids are out of school, usually June or July, and the last three winters we've gone back for Christmas because it was important to us after my father died 2½ years ago. So we visit my mother and my brother and sister.

**Are the children fluent in German, and after living in the U.S., are they more Americanized than you'd like?**

Stefan Langer (left), caddying for his dad in the 2008 Ginn Championship, was once a promising golfer but now is into soccer.

The two older children [Jackie and Stefan] are pretty good at speaking German. They spent more time there than the other two [Christina and Jason]. The older children learned German in school over here. The younger two are not quite as good speaking the language. We don't speak German in our house. But I've told Stefan it would be a tremendous benefit to learn it for possible business work later. I've also always told him there will always be German people in his life. I don't mind them being in America at all. We've not hung on to German traditions and the kids enjoy both parts of the world.

**Your father jumped off a Russian POW train headed to Siberia during World War II and settled in Germany. Did you ever talk about that with him and how did it affect you?**

He didn't want to talk about it. He wanted to forget those years. It had to be tough. He didn't even want to visit his [old] home. He was told [by military] that he had to be out of his home in 10 hours or they would kill him. We always thought it would be cool to go back and figure out where he lived. After he escaped from the train, he hid in the trees during the day and walked at night until he reached Germany. It would be meaningless to go back now because what stories he could tell me are gone after his death.

**Your oldest son Stefan, 19, has shown a talent for the game. How is his progress coming?**

Stefan's progress has stopped. He does not even play golf now. He decided he wanted

to do other things. He had a bad year in golf and it wasn't going the way he wanted. He knew to play good golf you pretty much have to give up other things. He wasn't ready for that. So now he mostly plays soccer. I also think it is harder for the son of a famous golfer. There's outside pressure. Whenever the son of a famous golfer shows up, people expect him to be good because of the name he has.

**How proud were you when the two of you won the Father/Son Challenge in Orlando a couple of times?**

We won it two years in a row [2005 and 2006]. It's one of the highlights in my career.

**For better or worse, people view you as a serious person all the time. Is that a mistaken image of you?**

I don't know if it is a mistake. I can be fun. My friends know how much fun I can be. We've had a lot of fun times. I'm not funny like Fuzzy Zoeller or Lee Trevino, but I can have a great time.

**What's the silliest thing you've ever done? Have you ever been a prankster?**

I'm sure there have been many silly things I've done. I can't think of one right now, though. Sorry.

**What sorts of family outings do the Langers go on? I believe you snow ski. Does the entire family ski, and who is the best skier?**

There are lots of things we do as a family. We have family devotionals in the mornings.

**LANGER'S PARTNERS**  
**DRIVER:** Adams Speedline [9.5 degrees] with Graphite Design Purple Ice shaft  
**FAIRWAY WOOD:** Adams Insight 3-wood [12.5 degrees] with Graphite Design Purple Ice shaft  
**HYBRID:** Adams Idea Pro [18 degrees] with RT Technologies Midas shaft  
**IRONS:** Adams Idea Pro Forged [4-PW]  
**WEDGES:** Cleveland 588 [56 degrees] and MacGregor V-Foil [60 degrees]  
**PUTTER:** Odyssey White Hot 2-Ball Long  
**BALL:** Titleist Pro V1  
**SHOES:** adidas Softspikes  
**CORPORATE:** Bogner, The Linde Group, Mercedes-Benz, Rolex, Schuco

We also take bike rides and walks; take ski vacations and summer vacations. We do a lot of things together because it means a lot to spend time together as a family. Who is the best skier? Stefan is catching up with me when we go skiing in Utah, Colorado or Europe.

**You've traveled all over the world. Give us your favorite places to visit?**

Bavaria, Austria, Switzerland, New Zealand, Hawaii, Australia and the Mediterranean. Another one would be Israel. They are all such beautiful places, and I find spirituality in the last one.

**Is there anything you do to relax that would surprise people?**

I enjoy being outdoors in nature. I play tennis and enjoy a casual round of golf. My nine-year-old plays golf. So does my wife. When we play one of those casual rounds, it's hard for me to stay focused but it's fun for all of us.

**You were elected to the World Golf Hall of Fame in 2002. Did that election become the culmination of all your work?**

It was a big honor, especially for a German. Golf is still a minority sport in Germany, even though it has grown tremendously in the last 25 years. To be voted into the World Golf Hall of Fame, with my background, is tremendously rewarding.

**Finally, you turned 52 in August. How much longer are you going to play?**

I've thought about it a little, but as long as I'm healthy and enjoy playing the game, I'll continue to play. If one of those things stops, that will be the end of it. I've got some course design work I do. I do one a year. I've designed 18 to 20 courses, mostly in Europe, and never in America. I've never been asked to do one here. My company runs golf tournaments in Europe. So I've got various possibilities.

MICHAEL C. WENAR (3); HUNTER MARTIN/GETTY IMAGES; SCOTT A. MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

