

## BERNHARD LANGER STILL LEADING THE WAY

After 25 years at the top the German is taking the Seniors game by storm

**Q:** Having won the Money List last year on the Champions Tour in the U.S. along with Player of the Year and Rookie of the Year, you're leading the Tour again this season. You're obviously enjoying playing Seniors golf.

**A:** The Champions Tour is a lot of fun for me because I'm in contention on a regular basis – not just three or four times a year. When I joined the Tour I was hoping to be one of the dominant players. I was trying to win tournaments. That's what we practice and work for, to have a chance to win the golf tournament on Sunday. Fortunately, since I joined the Tour towards the end of 2007 I've won seven times and earned more than \$3.5 million. But it's really the thrill of being in contention that matters. Winning never gets old. Life on Tour is still very similar to playing The European Tour and still very competitive. The only difference is I am one of the youngest and not one of the oldest. We play slightly shorter courses on the champions Tour and they seem to suit my game. There's no cut and only three competitive rounds. It's easier for me to plan my life and my travel schedule so I can often return home from the tournament on Sunday night.

**Q:** You played your first Senior Open Championship last July at Royal Troon – your first tournament on the European

Senior Tour and you played your second at the Casa Serena Open in September, finishing fourth and first respectively. How did you feel about playing in Europe again?

**A:** It was great. I have wonderful memories from my time in Europe. I played on The European Tour for nearly 30 years, winning the Order of Merit twice and finishing in the top ten in the table 14 times – the last time in 2001 when I finished sixth. My last win was in 2002 when I tied with Colin Montgomerie in a play off at the Volvo Masters in Valderrama when we ran out of light.

I was only two shots off making the play off in the Senior Open last year at Royal Troon with John Cook and Bruce Vaughan and I was two shots ahead of Tom Watson and Greg Norman.

I won the Casa Serena Open near Prague, finishing three shots clear of my Ryder Cup colleague Ian Woosnam. I shot 67, 67, 67 with only one bogey over the three days which was very pleasing.

The event was a great thrill for me because my father was born near Prague and my brother organised the tournament. Finishing in a tie for ninth in the BMW International Open on The European Tour in Munich last month was also very satisfying, particularly being in contention right up until the closing holes.



Above: Bernhard Langer proudly holds the trophy after winning the Casa Serena Open in Prague last September – his first victory on the European Senior Tour.

Right: Langer raises his cap to acknowledge the cheers of the galleries during the 2008 Casa Serena Open.



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– BERNHARD LANGER

**Q:** This week you will be competing again with many of your former Ryder Cup colleagues, such as Lyle, Woosnam, Faldo, James, Rocca, Brand, Darcy, Rivero and Torrance who, with you, were responsible for turning The Ryder Cup into a serious competition in the 1980s. How does it feel to be competing with them again at Senior level?

**A:** It was fantastic to meet up with so many old friends at Royal Troon and then at Casa Serena last year. We've played against each other for more than 30 years and we played together in several Ryder Cup Teams. Playing in 10 Ryder Cups as a player and representing Europe in one as Captain is a long time. Being on the winning side five times and captaining the team at Oakland Hills in 2004 to such an outstanding victory are among my greatest memories. It's fun still being out there and competing against each other.

**Q:** You came close to winning The Open – second in 1981 at Royal St Georges and again in 1984 at St Andrews, and third in '85, '86, '93 and 2001. Would it be the next best thing to win the Senior Open Championship?

**A:** It was always one of my goals to win The Open, but it just didn't happen for me. It would be great to win the Senior Open at Sunningdale. I came close to winning the Senior Open last year but it's still one of my ambitions to win it within the next few years.

**Q:** What are your memories of Sunningdale, where you won back in 1985 at The European Open?

**A:** My most bizarre recollection is taking two whiffs (fresh air shots) in the heather at the second, which happened to be my favourite hole on the course. It's a very tough and unusual par-4 where if you walk off with par it seems like making birdie. But I still managed to shoot 64, 67 over the weekend to beat John O'Leary with an 11-under total of 269. What an amazing year that was for me. I won three tournaments back-to-back, the Australian Masters, my first Masters Tournament at Augusta National and the Sea Pines Heritage Classic, followed by the German Open and The European Open in successive weeks. I ended



Left: Bernhard Langer poses with the trophy after winning the Mitsubishi Electric Championship at Hualalai, Hawaii, on the Champions Tour in January.

Below: Bernhard Langer is all smiles at winning his second Masters Tournament in 1993 as he is helped on with the Green Jacket by the 1992 Champion Fred Couples.



Left: European Ryder Cup Captain Bernhard Langer celebrates with the fans after Europe had won the 35<sup>th</sup> Ryder Cup 18.5 - 9.5, at Oakland Hills, Michigan, in 2004.

the season winning the Sun City Million Dollar Challenge in South Africa. I had two seconds and two thirds and finished second on the Order of Merit, having played only nine events on The European Tour. I also tasted Ryder Cup success that year for the first time, in Europe's 16.5-11.5 victory at The Belfry.

**Q:** How easily did you make the transition from playing on the regular PGA Tour to playing Senior golf?

**A:** When I turned 45 and through to 49, it was difficult to win on the PGA Tour where I spent most of my time the last ten years playing on the regular Tour. I lost a play-off on the PGA Tour at the Colonial in 2007. So I was knocking on the door here and there, and when I joined the Champions Tour in September 2007 I was playing quite solid golf.

**Q:** You have always kept yourself very fit but are there limitations when you pass the age of 50?

**A:** I've always been a strong believer in preparing very well. If you don't prepare, you can't expect to win anything. I have high expectations, so I try to prepare accordingly. I'm still not working as hard as I did in my 20s and 30s because my body can't take it. I can't take pounding balls for four or five hours any

more. I spent a little bit more time on my short game and in the physio truck working out and stretching, which seems to work for me pretty good. Mind you, I'm not Gary Player. In terms of fitness, for a 73 year old to be as fit as Gary and play golf like he does is phenomenal.

**Q:** What are the highlights of your career?

**A:** I've had such a long and wonderful career and so many good things have happened to me since I joined The European Tour in 1976 it's difficult to name them all. Obviously, my two Masters wins were the highlight of my career, next to the Ryder Cup.

Every professional golfer wants to win Majors and to have won The Masters means I'm invited back for the rest of my life. To be introduced on the first tee as U.S. Masters Champion and to be in an elite group of people who have achieved that is something that will always stay with me and something I will always be known for.

It also had a big financial impact on my life, too. I became known around the world once I won a Major and people recognised me much more than before. Winning my own tournament (*the Mercedes-Benz Championship, formerly the German Masters*) four times and the German Open five times is also very special for me.

**Q:** Are you enjoying playing Seniors golf as much as you enjoyed playing on the regular Tour?

**A:** I am definitely enjoying my Seniors golf as much as I enjoyed playing all those years before. It might even be more fun, because on the Seniors Tour we know we only have a few more years left in competitive golf. You just seem to enjoy it more. You have guys of your own age, at the same stage of life. We all have grown-up children and a lot of things in common and we know there are more important things in life than playing golf. So there are more things to talk about. It's a lot of fun playing the tournaments and also hanging out with the guys before and after the event.

**Q:** Do you ever suffer from nerves when you're playing a big event like the Senior Open?

**A:** A little bit, but I'm at a stage in my career where I really want to enjoy my golf. I just want to have fun and enjoy the few more years that I might have. I don't want to grind away like I used to, and I have nothing to prove. I've been very blessed, I've won a lot of tournaments and achieved a lot of things, so I'm just trying to have fun and I know that this will certainly be a fun week. ■

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Bernhard Langer gives a thumbs up after virtually making a clean sweep of awards on his first full season on the Champions Tour in the United States: The 2008 Jack Nicklaus Player of the Year Award; the Arnold Palmer Award for leading money-winner; the Byron Nelson Award as scoring leader and the Rookie of the Year Award, during the Player of the Year Dinner in Florida.