



Bernhard Langer

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Cold reality

BERNHARD LANGER WINS 2ND CONSECUTIVE SENIOR MAJOR AFTER COUPLES' 'SNOWMAN'

By James Achenbach

Sammamish, Wash.

It was chilly, not cold, in suburban Seattle, but local fans went frigid when their hometown favorite, Fred Couples, was ambushed by a snowman.

An 8 on the second hole doomed Couples to second place in the U.S. Senior Open at Sahalee Country Club.

Couples and Bernhard Langer, the steady German, were tied for the lead heading into the final round Aug. 1. Couples birdied the first hole to take a one-stroke lead, but it didn't last long.

On the par-5 second hole, Couples chunked a 69-yard shot into a pond in front of the green, blasted his next shot over the green into heavy grass, missed a 4-foot putt, took an 8 and lost four strokes to Langer.

The second is a reachable par 5, and Couples faced a 220-yard second shot from the first cut of rough over that pond. Because of a questionable lie, he decided to lay up.

"It was the right decision," said his

caddie, Joe LaCava. "We didn't know what the ball would do out of that lie."

Couples, though, hit his layup shot too far, leaving himself a delicate half-wedge shot from a tight lie.

"I was maybe a little too close," Couples said of the 69-yard shot.

"The ground was hard, and I just totally chunked it. And then it became a comedy of errors. I went back (on his next shot) about 10 yards (to about 80 yards) and thought I had 90 yards. My mind wasn't quite right."

One chunk, one wrong yardage, one snowman. The championship was decided on the second hole.

Langer, who won his second consecutive senior major, following up his victory a week earlier at the Senior British Open, was sympathetic.

"We've all done that," he said of Couples' fat shot that didn't come close to carrying the pond. "There isn't much grass down there, and it's very easy to do what he did."

Meanwhile, Langer hit the second green with a 4-iron from 198 yards

and faced a 14-foot eagle putt. He barely missed, settling for a birdie 4 that gave him half as many strokes on the hole as Couples.

At No. 3, Langer and Couples made matching birdies, meaning Couples had birdied two of the first three holes and still lost three strokes to Langer.

The deficit was too much for Couples to overcome. He closed the margin to two strokes on the 16th green but eventually lost by three. Langer ended up 8 under par (272), three ahead of Couples (275). The only other players to break par for the tournament were Olin Browne and John Cook, each at 2-under 278.

After his struggles on No. 2, Couples played well. In the next 15 holes, he had 12 pars and three birdies before a bogey at 18 when Langer had the title in hand.

Langer was amazingly steady: 15 pars, three birdies, no bogeys.

Although Couples is one of the longest hitters in golf, Langer dominated him on the par 5s all week. The German was 5 under on the par 5s, while Couples was 3 over, a difference of eight shots.

"If I could walk out there tomorrow," Couples mused about one of those par 5s, the second hole, "I would go for the green, no matter where I hit it. I think I would beat 8, that's for sure."

Snowman 1, Fred Couples 0. ○