

Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador Bernhard Langer prepares for the 2020 Masters.

*2nd Masters interview with Bernhard Langer,
conducted by Robin Barwick on Wednesday, 11 November 2020*

How was the Champions Dinner last night?

It was a wonderful dinner. We were in a much larger room than usual, downstairs, and we sat two metres apart from each other, so not as close and intimate as in past years, but the atmosphere was still very similar and we had a great evening together.

Tiger gave a speech that was very emotional. He thanked many of us for helping him over the years and he talked about how it was very emotional for him to win here last year because he didn't know if it would ever happen again. His kids were there in 2019 and he said that giving them a hug when he won reminded him of how Tiger used to give his own parents a hug when he won before. It was a great speech.

Did some other past champions speak as well?

Gary Player made a few remarks, and I did too, on the spur of the moment. I felt I should say something on behalf of the international players. I said how the Masters used to be a closed shop for American golfers, but now, to look around the room, we have champions from all over the world: Sandy Lyle from Scotland, Nick Faldo from England, Trevor Immelman from South Africa, Vijay Singh from Fiji, Adam Scott from Australia, and then you have a local boy like Larry Mize from Augusta itself. The tournament reaches around the globe now and so do its champions, and these champions represent the game and the Tournament wherever they go. I said how we together can help to grow the game. That was part of it.

Can you see Tiger Woods hanging up his spikes soon?

I don't think so, not yet. I think Tiger has a very competitive edge to his nature and he is going to try to play for a few years yet, if his body holds up. When you see him, you think he is the immortal athlete. He looks trim and as strong as you can imagine from the outside. We all know he has had surgeries, but he can still create a lot of clubhead speed and with the improved equipment Tiger still hits the ball long enough to be able to compete anywhere. I don't think Tiger has even considered quitting the game yet.

On that note, I wasn't sure if there was an unwritten rule for an age limit for past champions to play in the Masters, so I did ask chairman Fred Ridley the question. I am 63 and I am the oldest player in the field this year. He said that as long as we can stand upright and play golf, we are welcome to play, and that we will all know when the time is right to stop playing.

How many holes have you played so far and what are your first impressions of the Augusta National golf course in these autumn conditions?

I played nine holes on Monday afternoon and nine on Tuesday, so I have played all 18 holes on top of all my practice.

The club has been over-seeding with rye grass in recent weeks and it is not as thick or like a carpet as it is in spring. It will be perfect again for next April but still the golf course is in pretty good shape. It is very wet, and it rained a lot last night, so the golf ball stops quickly, and the golf course is playing extremely long. Meanwhile the rough is much higher and thicker than I have ever seen it.

How about the greens?

The greens are slower than I have ever seen them. I guess they are running at about 11 [as a Stimpmetre measurement] and usually they are somewhere between 13 and 15, but the club might speed them up for the tournament rounds.

Are you playing longer clubs into the greens than usual?

Yes. Last night I was walking back to the Champions' parking lot and Fred Couples walked towards me, shaking his head. He said, "Bernhard, Bernhard, what are you hitting into holes one, five, seven, eleven, 14, 17, 18?"

He meant the second shots into the par fours. I said, "Hold on. One was a 4-iron, five was a 3-wood, seven was a 2-hybrid, then a 3-wood..."

Fred said, "That makes me feel better. I was hitting 2-hybrids and 3-irons and I have never had to do that before."

Everyone is going to play longer clubs than usual, but the conditions are going to favour the longer hitters. Instead of hitting a 9-iron they might take a 6-iron, whereas I have never had to hit so many 3-woods into par fours than I have this week. The ball is not running at all and there is a lot of humidity in the air.

You have an 11:49 tee time in the first round on Thursday. What is your pre-round routine?

The drive is about 15 minutes and I usually show up three hours before my tee time. I'll go to the fitness trailer for about 40 minutes or an hour to do some stretches and exercises, then I'll have breakfast. About 75 minutes before my tee time I go out and start practicing.

11:49 is a comfortable tee time but on Friday I tee off at 7:44am in the second round so I will get up at around 3:45am.

What do you make of the space and comfort in the new Mercedes-Benz S-Class?

The new S-Class is just outstanding when it comes to comfort and Mercedes-Benz has set new standards here. I have never experienced a more comfortable car. Whether it is the driver or the passenger seats, it's luxury at its best.

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Bernhard Langer is a Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador.
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