



LANGER • COMES • CLEAN

From a distance, it's difficult to tell any difference at all in Bernhard Langer's pre- and post-anchoring ban putting stroke. But the winner of more than 100 professional tournaments is adamant he's a man of integrity and not breaking the rules.

WORDS **JUSTIN DOYLE** PHOTOGRAPHY **GETTY IMAGES**

A seismic tremor with many aftershocks shook the golf world last year as the great Bernhard Langer became the centre of accusations that he was, against the recent rule changes, 'anchoring' his putter. Some went as far as to call him a "cheat."

In terms of major victories, Langer may not stand alongside modern greats of the game like Jack Nicklaus; Tom Watson; Gary Player and Tiger Woods. But, with more than 100 victories to his name, he is one of the truly great European golfers. Along with Severiano Ballesteros, he

most certainly pioneered the way for his fellow continental Europeans.

In fact, when official World Rankings were initiated, he became Europe and the World's first World No.1 golfer in 1986. Away from golf and the general public's eye, the list of awards are far too numerous to mention but some make even more impressive reading.

When one thinks about world history and in particular World War II, then consider that this German was decorated with an OBE in the Queen's Honours List! He has also been recognised by his beloved Germany with their ►

highest awards and US President Donald Trump recently referred to him as “that very famous golfer Bernhard Langer”.

Many are also aware of his devout Christian beliefs and practice as well as his charity work.

So how on earth did he land himself in the dock of golf’s court so-to-speak and what is this issue all about. Is he anchoring?

Officially, under the rules of golf, ‘anchoring’ is when the club, or the gripping hand, or a part of the forearm is held against the body. This relieves the player from making a free swing by restricting the movement of the club as if it were physically attached to the player’s body. Thereby it provides extra support and stability for the stroke.

But writing for the Golf Channel in July 2017, professional golfer and TV analyst Brandel Chamblee poured confusion on the issue of anchoring. He wrote that the aforementioned rule is rendered meaningless when the word ‘intent’ is encrypted into the rule and that golf bodies including the USGA accept this.

In other words, if a player is pulled up for anchoring, then the ‘get out of jail card’ is that there was no ‘intent’. So as the player is shown the replay, if he or she states they did not ‘intend’ to do it, they are let off with a caution.

First off, what made the Langer controversy even more astonishing was that the accusations and finger-pointing were made, not primarily by the media, but by some fellow professionals. It then gathered apace with other golfers also accusing him.

Before this all began, Langer tried many different types of putters and strokes in an effort to move away from anything that resembled anchoring. He was aware of a rules ban on anchoring due to come into force in 2016.

By his own admission he tried the ‘Matt Kuchar arm-lock’ as well as ordinary putters with a cross-handed grip and a claw grip. But he returned to the long putter with a crucial decision to lift his hand away from his chest as he was about to putt.

By doing this he removed anchoring or so he thought. The ban on anchoring was duly enforced by the USGA and R&A in January 2016 and so, when he won the Chubb Classic on the Champions Tour a month later, the first murmurings of suspicion arose.

Those noises grew even louder at the US Masters in April. Veteran Langer was causing a sensation by being right up there at the top of the leaderboard after the third round. In fact, I was flying from the UK at the time and when I asked a man next to me at check-in, how Langer was doing, he told me he was in second place.

Quite literally, I raised my eyebrows. At precisely the same time and thousands of miles away in America, so many golfers, golf fans and rules officials were also experiencing similar emotions.

Many put two and two together and saw suspicion in a strong link between the recent rules ban on anchoring and Langer. To millions of viewers worldwide he was seemingly using the same old anchoring type grip of the long putter that he had used for years.

When Langer contacted me via email just after Christmas about a different matter, I raised this



The spotlight has been on Bernhard Langer’s putting action for some time.

“
IF WE BELIEVE
THAT THE CLUB IS
CLOSE TO BEING
ANCHORED, THEN
WE WILL ASK HIM.
IF HE SAYS HE IS
NOT, THEN HE
IS NOT.
”

– JOHN PARAMOR

issue with him. After all, it does not seem to be going away and so he really needed to address fully these accusations of cheating.

To his credit he did.

“The anchoring issue is an old one. It has been dealt with at least a dozen times on TV, in print and otherwise. I am not anchoring and I would never break the Rules of Golf.”

Yes Bernhard. You have plenty of followers who would believe your word but what about all those who accuse you of anchoring? That is not enough so you really need to be more convincing:

“The USGA Officials; R&A Officials; American PGA Officials; PGA Tour Rules Officials have all confirmed with me that I am definitely within the Rules of golf and that they have no issue with my putting style,” he added.

When I pressed him on this vote of approval from golf’s hierarchy, and asked if he has any proof by way of letters or emails from any of them stating that he is not anchoring, he said: ▶





“There are no letters. This was not necessary in the circumstances where we had eye to eye/verbal communication about the issue. I have also played in all their Major events the last year and so, as far as I’m concerned, this is the end of the discussion.”

It was still not convincing. I got the sense that this subject is still annoying him. Maybe it is because it is still there and furthermore, with those explanations, you can just hear dogs in the street and at the 19th hole talking about brown envelopes; vested interests; Bernard being a multi-millionaire and exclusive member of the Masters green jacket club and perhaps sharing a glass of German lager with those in power.

It was time to go digging for more. I researched and trawled the web even looking at video footage of Langer demonstrating his putting technique in a video for Golf Channel. But sure as heck that would not wash either as one would expect Langer to putt correctly for a golf video.

However, one article caught my eye and it seemed at first glance to encapsulate everything. It was written for an online website called ‘ThoughtCo’. Under a headline ‘How is Bernhard Langer Getting Away with Anchoring? He isn’t’,

“ I AM A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND WE ARE PLAYING A GAME OF INTEGRITY. I COULD NOT LIVE WITH MYSELF KNOWING THAT I AM BREAKING THE RULES. ”
-BERNHARD LANGER

Brent Kelley wrote:

“When you think about golfers whose careers were saved by a switch to a long putter and an anchored putting style, Bernhard Langer may be the first name that comes to mind. After years of struggling with the yips, Langer became a good putter by anchoring his broomstick to his sternum, and he won – and won, and won some more – on the Champions Tour. But then golf’s governing bodies, the USGA and R&A, banned anchoring the putter, or any other golf club, against one’s body. That ban went into effect on January 1st 2016.

“And how did Langer handle that ban? He moved the grip-end of his putter ever so slightly away from his chest, and kept right on winning.

From a distance, it’s difficult to tell any difference at all in Langer’s post-ban putting style, and that has caused considerable controversy. And today, Langer keeps rolling on, using what to some appears to be an anchored stroke.

“But isn’t Langer still anchoring his long putter? No, he’s not – even if it appears from distance that he is. Here is Langer’s post-Rule 14-1b putting routine with his long putter:

- He anchors the putter during his practice strokes before stepping over the ball.
- Once he steps over the ball, he moves his top hand – the one holding the butt end of his long putter – slightly away from his chest.
- That’s it. Getting the top hand off his chest – even slightly and even if the fabric of his shirt ▶



Langer poses with the Senior British Open trophy alongside his family.

falling away from his body just a smidge makes it appear from a distance that Langer's hand is anchored – satisfies the requirements of Rule 14-1b.”

It sounds even more convincing but the semblance of anchoring remains. It was now time to contact someone who is closer to the rules and action than most – enter into the argument European Tour Chief Referee, John Paramor.

Paramor would no doubt have been sought out by some or all of those bodies, Langer mentioned, who gave him the all clear – and most especially the R&A.

“Unfortunately, the entire rule governing the ‘Anchoring Stroke’ namely ‘Rule 14-1b’ is about

testing the integrity of the player. There is no practical way that we can test whether a player is anchoring or not,” Paramor said.

His use of the words ‘unfortunately’; ‘integrity’ and ‘test’ seem to tie in with Brandel Chamblee’s ‘intent’ and ‘get-out-of-jail card’. But with specific regard to Langer, how did/would Paramor test his integrity?

“If we believe that the club is close to being anchored, then we will ask him. If he says he is not, then he is not,” Paramor added.

Feeling a bit stuck in ‘no-man’s-land’ and no real answer to this, there was just one final question for Paramor – why did this all kick off and why was it Bernhard Langer of all people.

After all, so many other big name golfers use the long putter.

“As I said, there is no practical way of proving anchoring. So when this happens and there is no proof, sadly it opens the door for some people to make all sorts of accusations. I put it down to jealousy,” Paramor said.

And then, with one final swing of his unanchored club, Langer cracked the whole nut wide open. He sank the subject as if sinking yet another title-winning putt when, similar to the last lines of a championship winning speech, he said ...

“I am a man of integrity and we are playing a game of integrity. I could not live with myself knowing that I am breaking the rules.”

And therein folks lies the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth of this matter. Yep, ‘BINGO!’ and a very obvious and glaring truth missed by most of us in this saga. It is something that is in every golfer’s DNA.

From you and me, to fun golfers; society golfers; club golfers, amateurs and right up to professionals. The vast majority of us play this gentleman’s game in a spirit of honesty and integrity. It is what the game lives and swears by.

‘Integrity’... and, to repeat Paramor’s very words on ‘testing the integrity of the player’ – in this case Bernhard Langer – if he says he is not, he is not! ●



European Tour Chief Referee John Paramor says there is no problem with Langer’s putting action.

JUSTIN DOYLE is one of Encyclopaedia Britannica’s golf experts. He is also the author of seven books including two biographies about Rory McIlroy and an autobiography with the late Ireland and European Ryder Cup hero, Christy O’Connor Junior.