

Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador Bernhard Langer reflects on record-breaking Masters.

4th Masters interview with Bernhard Langer, conducted by Robin Barwick on Monday, 16 November 2020

Congratulations on a record-breaking week at the Masters. Having become the oldest golfer to make the cut at the Masters, aged 63, you were unshakeable over the weekend to finish a share of 29th. How did you find the weekend rounds?

People who have not played Augusta National really can't know what I am going through in the Masters, in a sense. I was paired with Rory McIlroy on Saturday and then with Bryson DeChambeau yesterday, and they are two of the longest hitters on tour right now. It was incredible to watch them hit the ball. It is like a rocket is taking off.

If we all hit good drives on the same hole, I am often playing a two hybrid into the green and they are hitting a pitching wedge into the same green. That is about the difference. They hit their drives between 40 and 80 yards past my ball, and then they need two or three clubs less for the same shot distance. To do this over 72 holes is such a disadvantage. To somehow get the ball around that golf course and to compete is quite a challenge but it is fun for me to watch these guys.

Can you give us an example of the different clubs you take from DeChambeau on a hole at Augusta National?

Let's take the par-5 13th: I hit driver and couldn't reach the green so I laid up with a four-iron and then had 70 yards left to the pin. DeChambeau hit a driver and nine iron next to the hole and he holed the putt for an eagle. DeChambeau drives his golf ball over trees and cuts off doglegs. Another example is the par-five second hole: I hit a driver and a two-hybrid and I had 80 yards left, whereas he hit driver and then a seven-iron onto the green.

You finished on 285, three under par, which is your best Masters score since you also finished on 285 in 2004. What is most satisfying about your performance?

The most satisfying thing is to play 72 holes and finish under par. That is quite an achievement. It is not easily done because the golf course has never played this long. The course is usually a little more firm when we play the Masters in April but this time around, in November, the golf course was really wet and I had to hit longer clubs into the greens than I have ever done.

The other side is that the greens were softer, but I would say that this year I have played some of my best golf, in terms of what I am capable of doing with the clubs I have to play into these greens.

A little side story is that a friend had a bet before the tournament started that I would beat Phil Mickelson. Mickelson is an American hero and he still hits the golf ball pretty far but in the end I beat him by six shots, so I am happy to have helped a friend win that bet.

You also beat DeChambeau by two strokes in the final round. What did you make of his game yesterday?

For as long as DeChambeau drives the ball he does keep the ball pretty straight. I was surprised by that. It's the same with Rory. They are both straight drivers. But DeChambeau struggles more with his irons and with his knowledge of the golf course. He missed some greens in the wrong place, so short-sided himself, and then you are posting bogeys and getting frustrated.

Bryson wasn't playing smart enough sometimes, but he will learn the course management the more he plays the golf course. He had a chip on the seventh hole. He had three options to play the shot and he chose the worst option and it cost him a shot. With my course knowledge he probably would have played a totally different shot and it would have saved him a stroke. That's how it goes at Augusta. You have to play the golf course a number of times and Bryson has not played the golf course enough to figure it out yet. Every time Bryson plays Augusta National he will learn from his mistakes. They will get stored in his memory bank. Often the best way to learn is from making mistakes.

After two rounds you said Dustin Johnson might be the man to beat, even when the leader board was so tightly packed. What impresses you about Johnson's performance?

First of all, Johnson does not get rattled very easily. His ball striking is also a great strength. He drives the ball extremely straight. He is one of the longest drivers and he hits a lot of good irons. He also putted fantastically well last week. That is a lethal combination.

I talked to him a couple of times on the driving range at Augusta and he seemed very relaxed yet also very focused. He seemed to be in a good spot, not overwhelmed by the occasion. He struck me as someone who has it together. He does not show a lot of emotion.

He is world number one and in his last seven tournaments he has won three, finished second in three and sixth in the other. That is incredible.

So is the next barrier to break to play your age?

That has been my goal for about a year. I have a bet going with Scott McCarron. Last year I was 62 and I got close a couple of times. I told Scott that I want to shoot my age and I want to do it soon, so we bet dinner that I would do it last year. If I didn't shoot my age I would owe him dinner. So I owe Scott a dinner and we have the bet going for this year too. It's just that right now I can't take him out to dinner because of the tour bubble. He is going to have to wait until the pandemic is over.

I came close to shooting my age at the recent Schwab Cup. I shot 64 so I came up one short. I was just trying to go low and play as well as I can, and then when I signed my score card, I saw that I was one shot off my age. It is going to happen sooner or later. It is one of these things that gets easier as you get older. When you are 72 or 75 it is easier to shoot your age than when you are 62. I expect to shoot my age quite a bit in the years to come but I would like to do it soon.

Looking ahead, you and son Jason are reigning champs in the PNC Championship. Do you plan to defend your title as a pair?

Correct. We had a family gathering a couple of years back because all the kids enjoy playing in that tournament and I enjoy giving them all a chance to play in it. We agreed that if any pair of us wins the tournament then we would have the opportunity to defend the title.

Jason is another young golfer who hits the ball a long way, right?

He does. He is not as long as the tour golfers, but he can certainly create some clubhead speed and he certainly hits the ball quite a way past me. This is helpful because I don't hit the ball far enough anymore for the PNC. There are other teams there who are much younger, so I am very glad to have Jason on my side. Hopefully, he will hit a few straight ones so we can take advantage of his distance.

You are in the middle of this revised 2020-21 PGA Tour Champions season. Was it the right call to extend the season over to next year?

I am on the player advisory council and we made that decision because we did not know how many tournaments we were going to play this year with the pandemic. I would have won the Schwab Cup again if we finished this year but hopefully I will still have a chance at the title next year. Right now, I am leading but as more golfers turn 50 it gets harder and harder.

Inevitably, the competition for existing PGA TOUR Champions golfers gets tougher each year as more golfers turn 50, but have players like Ernie Els, Phil Mickelson, Darren Clarke and Miguel Angel Jimenez taken it to a new level?

Yes, over the last two or three years we have had some particularly strong golfers join our tour. Ernie and Jim Furyk play every week on our tour now. Mickelson has only played in two events so far, but he won them both. Mike Weir is a major champion, KJ Choi is a great player, Retief Goosen still hits the golf ball miles and he plays every week. These guys are all committed to the tour and they are all very competitive. Robert Karlsson from Sweden is a very solid player and he is making an impact and so is Tim Herron. These guys have all won tournaments many times and they are going to continue to win on the PGA TOUR Champions. It makes it harder for me to dominate but it is great to see these guys come out and it challenges me to work hard to stay on top of my game and try to find ways to improve and to stay competitive with these 50-year-olds, who I call rookies.

You became a grandfather this year. How is that going?

Our grandchildren are doing great and we absolutely love being grandparents. It is a lot of fun.

After enjoying a dedicated Mercedes-Benz vehicle at Augusta, what will you be driving next?

I will be enjoying my own Mercedes-Benz SL 450 back in my hometown. It's always a great pleasure to drive my own Mercedes-Benz and I really enjoyed driving it around the recent tournaments on the PGA TOUR Champions.

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