

Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador Bernhard Langer looks forward to 37th Masters appearance

1st Masters interview with Bernhard Langer, conducted by Robin Barwick on Monday, 9 November 2020

You will make your 37th appearance in the Masters this week. Forgive the personal question but do you know that at 63, you are the oldest golfer in the field?

I did not know but I can see why I would be. I have been creeping up there.

It is a two-sided coin. On one side I can't believe I am now the oldest player, but on the other side I am very grateful that I am still competing at this age, which not many people can do.

I was sitting next to Larry Mize a couple of years ago at the Past Champions Dinner. We were saying that 20 or 30 years ago, we were two of the youngest guys at the dinner, looking up to the older guys, and that it won't be long before we are the old guys, with the young guys maybe looking up to us. Maybe we have arrived at that point already.

You made your Masters debut in 1982, aged 24, and you were the first German golfer to reach the Masters. Did you feel like an outsider or was it just exciting to be breaking new ground?

It was all of that. It was very exciting to have made it there because in those days the only way a European golfer could guarantee their invite was to win the Masters or the European Order of Merit in the previous year. That's how I go into the 1982 Masters, by winning the 1981 Order of Merit. It was great to finally play at Augusta and to compete against all those huge names we constantly heard about: Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino, Gary Player, all these names we looked up to.

There were times when Europeans were too much in awe of them. Once I played against them more often, I realised I could be as good as any of them on any given week.

What were your first impressions of Augusta National in 1982?

I liked Augusta right away. The main reason is that the fairways were wide and there was no rough, just pine needles, and that was better for me because I was not always the straightest driver. There was a premium on irons accuracy. That is why I did not like playing in the U.S. Open so much, but I was fairly good with imagination around the greens and I was a good irons player.

From missing the cut in 1982, you won your first Green Jacket in 1985. Did that feel like a rapid rise at the time?

Yes, absolutely. I learned my lesson the first time around in 1982, when I three-putted eleven times in 36 holes to miss the cut by one. I was enjoying a great year in 1985 and I felt like I belonged here, like I was one of the best players in the world and that I should have a chance of winning the Masters. I spent a lot of time studying the course and in 1985 I think I only three-putted once over 72 holes.

In the final round of the 1985 Masters you were paired with Seve Ballesteros. Was that comfortable, intimidating or both?

It was not necessarily comfortable, but we were used to each other. We were two of the dominant players and we often got paired together on a weekend, competing for a title. Just in July 1984 Seve and I were paired together in the final round of The Open at St Andrews, in the second-to-last group, when Seve won with his famous fist pump. Nine months later there we were again, paired together in the second-to-last group on the Sunday of a major, with Ray Floyd and Curtis Strange behind us.

Seve and I were opposites in many ways. He showed a lot of emotion whereas I kept my emotions inside, but the results were extremely good for both of us. In that final round I didn't really focus on Seve. I learned to play my own game and make the best of it.

Were you conscious of representing your country in the Masters, and of representing Europe?

Absolutely. Seve and I wished each other good luck on the first tee as we would always do, and we shared a comment about bringing the Green Jacket back to Europe. With Floyd and Strange behind us we were two Europeans and two Americans. We had all played in a few Ryder Cups and there was always this rivalry between Europe and the United States and the whole world thought the Americans were better. We wanted to prove that the Europeans were just as good.

You shot 64 in Phoenix yesterday, on the PGA TOUR Champions, so do you come to your 37th Masters full of confidence?

I almost shot my age, I came just one short again. It makes a difference. I feel my game is in good shape. I have had days recently when I have putted quite well and then other days when I have missed the odd putt and I wish I wouldn't miss any of those four or five footers. Even one or two of those misses are too many. But my game is close. At Augusta I need to focus on my iron game and on my putting from 10 feet and in.

Have you seen the forecast for this autumnal Masters?

It looks like we are going to get some rain which will make the golf course play long and make the greens play slow. I would rather the golf course play firmer because it makes the golf course play harder, but it also makes it play shorter and it brings in more local knowledge. If the course is soft the younger guys can fly the ball right at the flag, which makes the golf course easier for the long hitters.

This afternoon [Monday] you will make the slow journey up Magnolia Lane. Is that still a special feeling, on Masters Monday?

It is always a special feeling, no matter what day of the week or what time of the year, to drive up Magnolia Lane. Not just that but I am driving a wonderful Mercedes-Benz. I always drive myself to the golf course and to drive up Magnolia Lane in a Mercedes-Benz feels like you have made it and you are on top of the world. It is always the start of an exciting day ahead.

You are one of the very first people to have experienced the all-new Mercedes-Benz S-Class. How was that?

As always, when Mercedes-Benz launches a new product, especially one like their flagship - and the S-Class definitely is the flagship - it sets new standards in almost every kind of way. Beyond the interior and exterior design, which I really like, I especially appreciate the innovations that come with the new S-Class, since they really add value for me. The chance to use the car as my personal caddie with all its features - for example, by just saying "Hey Mercedes" - is definitely outstanding.

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Bernhard Langer is a Mercedes-Benz brand ambassador.
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