

# Betfred British Masters hosted by Danny Willett

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

Sutton, Coldfield, England

The Belfry

## Richard Bland

### Press Conference

**TOM CARLISLE:** Sat here as defending champion this week, how surreal is it not only being defending champion for your first win after your 478th start but also making your 500th appearance this year this week? Tell us how you're feeling.

**RICHARD BLAND:** Yeah, it's very special. Obviously with what went on, yeah, 12 months ago, it's obviously a dream come true. Something I had worked for for 20 years. And yeah, I knew way that's getting closer to 500 and so I kind of looked at the schedule, when it would come out, and I kind of knew it would be very close.

So I kind of tweaked it around a little bit. I had sort of not played here or there to make it this week. So I thought, make it that even more special, something I'm very, very proud of.

**TOM CARLISLE:** A lot happened since then, the first tee shot at The Open, 11th on the rankings end of the year, recently broken into the Top-50 in the world. Could you have ever imagined this would have happened?

**RICHARD BLAND:** Probably in 2019 when I'm back on The Challenge Tour, absolutely not. Obviously, yes, I thought I had it in me, of course, but when you lose your card at the age of 46, a lot of people are writing you off, and yeah, so to come back the way that I've come back, when I finish playing, whenever that will be, that will probably be something I'm most proud of.

Because I think a lot of people might just go, you know what, that's it, I'm done. I never thought that. Took a lot of hard work. But I guess it's made it that much more special to be doing this when probably at my age, I probably shouldn't. So yeah, I'm certainly enjoying it.

**TOM CARLISLE:** What's it like for the first time you arrived on sight and see your face plastered around?

**RICHARD BLAND:** I came back, I think it was late October to do the SKY documentary. So we spent a day here, so



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that was very, very special. I can still remember pretty much every shot. Certainly the back nine, most of the last day. This place now is somewhere that will always be very, very close to my heart.

How I'll feel on the first tee tomorrow morning, not too sure. Probably be a tear in the eye, I would think. I'm going to have all my family here with me. So it's just a very special tournament, not only for me but obviously for the DP World and yeah, just feels great to be back.

#### **Q. How many sort of friends and family have you got here? How have you done getting tickets?**

**RICHARD BLAND:** I haven't done any yet. I text my sister last night. Just my family. Friends, they have bought tickets and what-have-you. So yeah I need to go into tour office and beg, plead, see if I can get a couple more season tickets than what I would normally be allowed. I know they are really excited to come up and watch me play over the next four days.

Yeah, hopefully Sunday can be somewhere there, thereabouts and try and give it a run on the back nine again.

#### **Q. Can you detail us the tweaking of your schedule to make sure this was 500?**

**RICHARD BLAND:** Obviously I could have played the first week in Spain. But a lot, again, it was going to depend on if I got into the Masters or not. So getting into the Match Play, I was going to play Spain, both tournaments in Spain but getting into the Match Play, I then withdrew from the first tournament in Spain. Obviously would have been nice to play.

I didn't have great memories there because the last time I was there was Q-School in 2018, so always not such a nice place to go back to. But yeah, I heard great things about the tournament but obviously a shame about the weather.

It was great to be back at PGA Catalunya last week, back seeing the guys after a few weeks. Course was in great shape and the Tour did a fantastic job there.

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I know we had a few tournaments that were sort of canceled as well due to COVID. It wasn't too much in the end but I was having to wait to see if I was going to get into tournaments or not from the World Ranking. I'm glad I'm here and made it happen. Just looking forward to it now.

**Q. As Keith mentioned during his speech, your win here did make headlines and you got a lot of messages from all over the world. How strange was that and can you look back on that?**

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, when I was sat here talking to you guys 12 months ago, obviously my phone was ringing off the hook and what have you. That's something you can't prepare for. You can prepare for standing over a 3-footer to hole the putt for your first tournament win, of course. But what came after it, no.

In all fairness, I was glad I had a week off after this event because like you said the next four or five days was just a blur, you were being pulled, left, right and center with media commitments.

But I think the messages that I got from social media, from people all across the globe, that's something that, no, I wasn't ready for, and it was quite emotional to read some of the messages; that they were losing faith in whatever journey they were on, and my win sort of helped them to sort of reevaluate; you know, what I'm going to keep going. If he can do it, I can do it. I hope they got there. If they haven't, keep trying.

I've still got the same phone, so they are all here. I'll never get rid of them. So whenever this phone goes, I'll never delete what's on this phone. They will stay with me forever. Yeah, it just made the whole win that much more special.

**Q. Do you feel your colleagues and contemporaries treat you any differently with what you've achieved?**

RICHARD BLAND: No. Obviously everybody was great afterwards. I think a lot of people were pleased for me because they know -- and if they are trying to win their theirs first event or multiple events, they know what it feels like. Took me a little bit longer. They have had that experience if they have won before.

So no, I want them to treat me as the Blandy that they knew 15 months ago before I won. And the same as what they treat me now. I still hang out with Howler and Ollie Wilson and Richie McEvoy.

Great to catch up with them last week. Not seen them a little bit. We had dinner just the four of us every single

nights. We have our WhatsApp group on the Senior Tour. That's what our WhatsApp group is. We are always sort of, like we all text to say well done to Mac, last week, finishing third, so pleased for him. We are sort of close-knit the four of us. We have been out on Tour for God knows how many years.

But what was nice up until last year, I was the only one with a zero by my name. It was nice to get that by my name. The four of us were all winners, and so yeah like I said, we all still have the same kind of banter. That's one thing that I think is very, very special out here is we kind of are like a big family really. That's one thing I love about DP World.

**Q. In your age bracket, obviously a very appealing purse going into Centurion. Have you asked for an exemption or release for that?**

RICHARD BLAND: I have. And if it's okay. That's where I want to leave it.

For me right now, I want to concentrate on this tournament. I want to respect Betfred, obviously the British Masters, obviously Danny who is a wonderful host.

So yes, I have, but right now, this DP World is my hundred percent focus this week. I want to make good defence of my title and we'll leave it there if that's okay with you guys.

**Q. What about the rest of your schedule?**

RICHARD BLAND: I'm off to US PGA in, what, ten days. I've got -- I'm playing the Colonial week after in Dallas. I think a lot depends on my World Ranking. I think if I can be in the Top-50 after PGA, I think there's a possibility of Memorial, which I think will be quite a tournament to play, Jack's tournament, that would be very, very special. And then U.S. Open. I think, again, it's Top 60 after the PGA gets into the U.S. Open.

So yeah, with what happened at Torrey last year, I'd love another crack at that. U.S. Open is the ultimate test and that's what every golfer wants.

So yeah, The Open to look forward to, the 150th at St Andrews, my first Open at St Andrews. To be fair, I prefer the first tee shot there at St George's, I think it will be a little bit easier. I think that's going to be so, so special that it's there. I think that's going to be the highlight this year to be able to play there in the 150th. That's going to be a huge thrill. Going to be pretty busy the week until The Open and then I get married the week after, so looking forward to that.

**Q. What's your fiancée's name?**

RICHARD BLAND: Catrin, or Cate as we know. She's Swedish. Catrin is her Swedish name. But in English, we call her Cate.

**Q. Where are you getting married?**

RICHARD BLAND: Very, very quiet, just having sort of a gathering of family and close friends at my sister's. Hopefully the weather is going to be kind. It will be outdoors. So yeah, we will pray for good weather.

So yeah, it will be a very special day.

**Q. How nice will it be to be able to follow tournaments effectively with the ranking, you don't have to worry?**

RICHARD BLAND: It's nice. Obviously the U.S. Open at the minute still a little bit up in the air. Because at the minute I'm sort of hanging around the 50. Last week I was inside and this week I'm just outside. It's hard to get a bit of a schedule and that's something I've never had to deal with before. Because when you're 250th in the world, it doesn't matter. You just know, right, this is where you're going to play.

But it's a nice problem to have. I really enjoyed playing Texas Valero and thank you to them for the insight that they gave me. That was my first full PGA TOUR event. Yeah, I had played the Match Play, but you can see the difference out there. It's not as close-knit as; I certainly didn't get that feeling but that's only one event.

I think they have their family with them a bit more than out here. Guys do bring their families and what have you but it's much more there. You don't see too many players together. Whereas like here, I just walk into breakfast this morning and there's players. Yeah, it's a little bit up in the air but again, I kind of -- it's a nice problem to have.

TOM CARLISLE: Thank you much very much for your time. Good luck this week.

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