

U.S. Senior Open Championship

Monday, July 1, 2024

Newport, Rhode Island, USA

Newport Country Club

Richard Bland

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Please welcome 2024 U.S. Senior Open champion Richard Bland to the interview room at Newport Country Club.

Richard, you're the 12th player to win in their U.S. Senior Open debut, second Englishman to win the U.S. Senior Open, and have now won two straight senior majors. Has it sunk in yet, and how do you feel?

RICHARD BLAND: Not even close. I think this one's going to take a little while. Your first two senior tournaments to be majors, and to come out on top is -- I was just hoping going into the PGA that I was good enough to contend. I hadn't played against these guys.

I knew, if I played the way I know I can play, it should be good enough to be able to compete. But, yeah, to be stood here with two majors is -- yeah, I'm at a loss for words at the moment now.

Q. You said on Saturday you were a little frustrated with how you played and you need a low round chance to take it home. Obviously that played out over yesterday and today, but what did you do differently?

RICHARD BLAND: Nothing really. Yeah, I was frustrated on Saturday, but sometimes that's just golf. You're not going to have it all your way for 72 holes. You're going to have five, six holes where it's just not going your way, nine holes.

I think the birdie on 15 was pretty key on Saturday, and then to finish with a birdie on 18 as well. To kind of -- when you knew you weren't playing anywhere near your best and to shoot 1-under, I think I could have -- if I'd have just kind of limped home and shot 71, I'm probably out of the tournament.

My goal going into yesterday was certainly to birdie the first two, absolute worst. If I could maybe find a 3 at the 1st. But it was just to come out strong, especially when you



know then you've got the difficult 3rd with the way the wind's blowing. But to then steal a 3 there as well was huge for me.

So you know you're like, okay, I'm in this now. Yeah, then it was just kind of -- I felt like I was kind of keeping pace with the leaders.

Obviously you get the delay, then you come back this morning and you know, with the way this wind is playing, kind of the holes that I've played kind of all week have been kind of driver, wedge, and now they're completely different. You're hitting 3-woods into the last there.

So it kind of felt like it was going to be harder to chase. You're trying to chase but also not make mistakes. He kind of maybe trips over once or twice, which I think maybe he did early. I think he came back to 14 pretty quick.

Yeah, once you get in the playoff it's kind of a flip of a coin time really. It's going to be one shot. I guess any shot, it was the bunker shot there on 18.

Q. It was a pretty quick turnaround. Sign the scorecard, hit a couple putts, and you teed off on 10. How did your strategy change, or what was your mindset going into the playoff?

RICHARD BLAND: I kind of -- I thought I hit a good putt on 10. You know that 10 is going to be your chance, then it's just kind of just hang onto it going up 18 because it's not going to be one with a 3.

Yeah, I had a sort of gap wedge come out of the rough perfect on 10 to 10 feet. I had the similar putt in regulation, but the wind was off the left. And the break is probably double what I thought the break was today.

I thought I hit a really good putt, and it just -- I don't know whether the wind was just holding it on its line a little bit more. I obviously just missed on the high side.

Then, yeah, when you're playing 18, it's just you're trying not to make a mistake. You know probably -- you're certainly not going to lose it with a 4, and obviously we both made 5s on the second sudden death hole. Fortunately, it went my way.



Q. The bunker shot you played, can you just speak to the look that you had there and maybe how much more pleased you were to be on that side of the green. As opposed to the previous time you played the hole, you didn't play the shot down.

RICHARD BLAND: The previous shot, I'm trying to hit -- yeah, I've got a 5-wood with me this week, but it's in the locker, and I needed it both times. I'm standing there trying to hit a 3-wood up the hill trying to hit like a high cut.

In a playoff, you just want to be able to stand there and hit a nice full shot. Actually, when I went -- so with the last playoff hole, with my tee shot being an extra sort of 15 yards, allowed me to then like, right, I can now hit like a strong 7-wood.

It was just trying to pitch it somewhere near the front, hit it low, and pitch it on the front and just try to run it up the hill.

On that, right, if I'm going to miss anything, I'm going to miss left because you've always got a chance. Yeah, like I said in that interview down there, the trap shot, if you're playing it normal, just playing with your mates, you'd up-and-down it 100 times out of 100. It wasn't that tough of a shot.

My main aim was just to get it right because he had, what, 20 feet across the slope. He's got to know that I'm making 4. That was my objective there. If I can get this as close as I possibly can, so it puts the pressure on him that he now knows he's got to hole it.

An unbelievable putt. 4 feet out, yeah, I'm thinking I'm going back down to the 18th tee again. It couldn't miss. Fortunate enough for me, it stayed on the top side. Yeah, two inches to win at the U.S. Open, I can handle those.

Q. I wonder if you're a leaderboard watcher at all? And I ask that because yesterday obviously you're five shots behind coming in, but you got off to such a terrific start, making birdies early. I wonder if at any point you took a peek and thought, okay, I'm right in this thing?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I'm usually a leaderboard watcher. I want to know what's going on. Yeah, like you want to know whether you've got to keep pushing or whether it's okay. You can just be a little bit more conservative. Obviously you've still got to be aggressive because the greens are quite soft with the rain that we have.

So you've still got to be quite aggressive, but it gives you the opportunity to pick the times when you can be

aggressive. So, yeah, I was -- I always want to know where I am to see whether, right, I've got to take some shots on or I can just be a little bit more conservative. So, yeah.

Q. Where would you rank the approach shot to 15 and the bunker shot in the playoff? Where would you rank those?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, the approach shot at 15, I think I had about 140 yards, and I knew, right, okay, if I could pitch it like 135, it kind of releases down to that hole.

So me and James, my caddie, we kind of worked out that the flag was playing probably around about 125. We thought it was probably 15 -- because it wasn't straight down, a little off the left.

Yeah, with a bit of adrenaline, my 50-degree wedge is normally about 120. So I thought, right -- I sort of factored in, right, if I just go ahead and hit it, hopefully it should be perfect.

And I think it pitched, what, about a foot past the hole, I think, and then just came back.

Yeah, to be fair, I think the birdie on 14 was probably bigger, to be going in that hole -- again, that's been 3-wood, wedge all week. Then suddenly you hit driver and wood into there today. So to make 3 there, and especially having just bogeyed 13, that was huge. That was huge.

Q. Where would you say that bunker shot ranks in your golf career?

RICHARD BLAND: It's up there. When everything's on the line, you've always got to think that he's going to hole that putt. Obviously it does creep into your mind, right, if I get this up-and-down there's a good chance that I'm U.S. Open champion.

So, yeah, but I just wanted to be just fully committed to it. I didn't want to kind of just hit the sort of like duff and run shot. It was one that, right, I can be aggressive with this. And even if it pitched two, three feet past the hole, I probably knew it was going to spin.

It was just one where I had to stay aggressive, stay committed, and it came out perfect.

Q. Let me take you back like three years. Where would you say Richard Bland, the golfer, is before you had the good run at Torrey Pines at the U.S. Open and where you're at now?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I'm a way better golfer than I was back then, but I think that's the caliber of players that I'm playing against on LIV.

To play against Bryson, who won just the other week at Pinehurst, to play against him, to play against Jon Rahm, Cam Smith, D.J., Brooks, they're the best players in the world. I don't care what the world ranking says.

If I'm going to compete with those guys, I have to bring my game. I have to. I can't bring my C game, and it won't stack up against those. It just elevates my game, and I think it's done that unbelievably over the last three years.

It's just made me a better player. You're not always going to be playing your best golf, but I'm the best player I've ever been.

Q. You're going back to the U.S. Open, and you'll see many of those same faces at Oakmont. How does that feel?

RICHARD BLAND: I haven't played Oakmont. I've seen it on TV. I know you guys -- I know what you guys like to do with U.S. Opens, so just go easy on us olders (laughter). Maybe you can stick a tee up maybe for me.

Yeah, whenever you get to play a U.S. Open, it was my first ever tournament in America in at Bethpage in '09, and I was just blown away by it. We're always kind of like, oh, being from Europe or from the UK, our major is The Open, but I was blown away by the U.S. Open. It's my second tournament to play in apart from an Open.

I love the challenge that you guys set. Obviously to be leading it -- well, tied for the lead at Torrey in '21, again, it was just a huge learning curve for me. I learned so much over that weekend. Okay, it didn't go my way, but I'm not the first guy that's had a bad weekend in a U.S. Open; I'm sure I won't be the last. And that's helped put me to where I am today.

Yeah, I'm already looking -- I'll be looking at flights to Oakmont for next year very, very soon.

Q. I know your brother has had some health issues. Just want to know how much he was on your mind today, and how much you're playing through?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, he's always there kind of in the back of all of our minds. It's been a tough 15, 16 months for him and the family. Hopefully he's going to have some surgery soon to get rid of the tumor from his lung.

We had some good news that it's not going to be hugely

invasive surgery. It's only going to be keyhole, and it's going to be only an overnight stay. When he had his surgery three, four months ago for his bowel cancer, he was in hospital for nearly six weeks, and it was a 15-hour operation.

Yeah, we're just praying that hopefully that once this is gone, that's it for him. It's one of those diseases that's just -- you know, we wish we could eradicate. You wouldn't want to wish it on anyone's life. You hear the statistics that it's kind of one in every two people get it, and you always kind of think, you know what, it won't happen to us. When it does, it's like a train wreck. It's an absolute train wreck.

I was fortunate to win the PGA and obviously win -- I think I get the replica for that this week. I've always said that that's his. He can have that. That was always for him. But this one right here, this one's for me and my wife.

I'm just looking forward to getting back home and seeing the family. I've been away for four weeks now. Yeah, really looking forward to getting home.

THE MODERATOR: Thinking of you and your family. 2024 U.S. Senior Open champion, Richard Bland.

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