

KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship

Harbor Shores

Benton Harbor, Michigan, USA

Sunday, May 26, 2024

Richard Bland

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: 2024 KitchenAid Senior PGA champion Richard Bland is with us now. Richard, first of all, congratulations.

RICHARD BLAND: Thank you.

Q. You told us earlier in the week that you were hoping to make the most of this invite, and now here you are. How do you feel walking out of here with the Bourne Trophy?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, just trying to just take it all in right now. It's not really sunk in too much. I'm sure it will over the next two, three days.

Yeah, I'm sure glad I wrote that email in kind of December to Bob Jeffrey. As I just said in the champion's toast, I got an invite last year. PGA of America kindly invited me last year but I couldn't fulfill the obligation of playing. It clashed with another event.

And, yeah, I checked the schedule around December last year and saw that it was a free week, and I reached out to Bob and he came back and said, yeah, we would love to come have you play.

So, yeah, so I'm thankful for the PGA of America for that. Yeah, they might have my ugly mug around for a few more tournaments now.

Yeah, right now just kind of being pulled pillar to post, which is fine. Yeah, I'm just so happy right now.

Q. A lot happening fast. What are your initial emotions of winning your first over-50 event?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, a lot of pride. A lot of satisfaction. Won for my brother as well.

So, yeah, I didn't -- you know, there are a lot of great players out here, so coming into this week I was hoping

that I had a good enough game to compete, and I'm glad that I've shown that obviously to myself for my own confidence going forward.

So, yeah, hopefully there is more to come.

Q. Ask you about two moments in the round. How big was the par putt to make the save at 14? Then take us through 15?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I kind of thought I hit the fairway down 14, and then to get there and just be in the rough with a front flag was -- you know, it was one of those, even though I was only 150 yards, if someone offered me 4 I would've picked it up.

To see Greg hole a 30-footer after, you know, I kind of -- I didn't hit that bad of a first putt, but just the slope I had to go across really kind of took the ball a lot harder right than I thought.

So, yeah, eight-, nine-footer I holed up there was key. To go two behind there was probably -- I'm not saying the tournament was Greg's, but...

So, yeah, that kind of at least kept me in touch with him. And then yeah, probably hit the best 4-iron in my life into 15, just it was a little -- I had to take a little bit off it and try and hold it against the wind and came out absolutely perfect.

Yeah, to then roll it in and kind of flip the lead back to me was key with like three to play.

Q. What did you have in there?

RICHARD BLAND: I think I had about 215. I thought about hitting 5, but 5 would have to go on the wind, and myself and my caddie, James, we were kind of discussing both and he just kind of said, look, it's what shot you see right now.

I just kind of thought the 4 would be a little bit more in control, and, yeah, it was the right decision.

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Q. How long was the putt?

RICHARD BLAND: Eight foot, eight, nine feet maybe. So, yeah. Obviously Greg didn't hit that great of a pitch in so I knew that was going to be key. He probably wasn't going to make 4. If I could make 3 there and get a two-shot swing, that was going to be huge.

Q. Then your approach into 16 was big, too.

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah.

Q. Tell us what you saw there, what you ended up playing.

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, because the weather was getting pretty nasty right there, even on 16th tee. It's not the nicest of tee shots at the best of times. Suddenly when the wind was kicking up and really started raining hard I was like, right, just get up there and hit it because it's not going to get any better in the next 20 seconds. Just get up there and hit it almost.

So I wasn't really too worried about -- as long as it didn't go left in the water, didn't worry too much where it was. Just missed the fairway on the right there and I think I had 180 and I just tried to stay aggressive.

I pulled it, if I'm being honest with you, probably about a yard left of the flag. I was trying to hit it about five yards right of the flag. Again, there I thought if Greg can see that I had a chance to make 3, then puts the pressure back on him.

Yeah, obviously what happened then with him with his chip shot was unfortunate; not something you want to see.

But, yeah, so then obviously had to wait a while to hit the putt.

Q. Talk a little bit about your putting from yesterday to today.

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, as I said earlier, I felt like I putted -- even in the second round I didn't putt particularly well even though I shot 5-under.

You know, I was so frustrated when I finished yesterday that actually I -- the other putter that I bought, I went out and practiced with that. I was literally, right, I'm going to use this tomorrow. That was it.

So I think I was just using a bit of scare tactics on my gamer, and -- but I got here a little earlier this morning and did probably an hour on the putting green with my gamer

just to, you know, sort of kick it up the backside so to speak, and fortunately it worked.

Q. So the gamer got the message?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah. When it got sort of taken out of the bag and put in the locker last night when I went out and putted for an hour, maybe it knew it was in trouble. Just came out this morning and just kind of -- normally I would warm up and do a few drills but decided not to do that. I just wanted to, just, right, I'm just going to hit putts. Just going to hit putts.

Yeah, I had the speed of the greens better today and holed out well, so, yeah, maybe it's got a little bit more time in the bag. We'll see.

Q. The putt you made at 14 came after 13 where you had three-putted.

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah. Again there, I thought -- when I hit my first putt I thought I hit a good putt. I knew the last third of the putt would be pretty quick, so wasn't something that I was going to be running at the hole.

Just the pace really surprised me. Then the second putt I thought I holed it as soon as I hit it. Just didn't really move. I thought it was an outside left putt. Hit it exactly on the line I wanted to hit and just never moved.

So even though I walked off losing a shot to Greg, it wasn't like -- in my head it wasn't a bad three-putt. I know there is never a good three-putt, but it wasn't like, right, I hit a really poor first putt or I just -- the pace just wasn't in the putt.

Then, yeah, all you can do is stand there and hit -- if you hit your line, that's all you can do. I did that and didn't go in. Okay, we move on, so...

Q. I don't want you to get too emotional, but talk a little bit about your brother, his name and...

RICHARD BLAND: Heath. Yeah, he got diagnosed about a year ago now with bowel cancer. He had chemotherapy and radiology and what have you but didn't take away the -- the tumor didn't grow, so he had to have surgery, so he's had his bowel and I think his prostate and bladder removed. So now he's two colostomy bags.

And then they put him in remission and went for a scan about two weeks ago and saw a little sort of shadow on his lung and said, we need to look at this. Last Thursday he got diagnosed with lung cancer.

Q. Older brother?



RICHARD BLAND: Yeah. We'll find out next week what is next for him. So, yeah, I'm just so pleased that I could do this for him. Like I said, this doesn't feel like it's my tournament, it's his.

Q. Did you have a chance to talk with him?

RICHARD BLAND: I haven't, no. I'll see him tomorrow. But, no, I had to call the wife. She takes priority. Yeah, I'll speak to him tomorrow.

Q. You had the big putt on 14 obviously and then the eagle on 15 and the shot on 16 and then the weather...

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah.

Q. You seized control of the tournament at that point. How do you handle the break?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, came in and got some food and a good friend of mine who we used to play DP World a lot together, Bradley Dredge, because we were supposed to be going to Chicago together to get the flight a bit later. And Dredge is always great with the banter and keeping it lighthearted.

So just had some food and we were just, yeah, just calling each other stupid names like we always do. So it kept me very relaxed. Took my mind off it.

When I went out to go back playing again I still felt pretty calm. Yeah, and even on 17, you know, it's amazing. Sometimes you think that you've got sort of the two pars to win a senior tournament you would be quite nervous, but it's amazing when you're actually in that position how calm you can be.

So, yeah, it was good that a couple of my friends were in the players' lounge and I could just chat. We were talking about Southampton, my football team. They've just earned their way back to the Premiership today in the playoff finals, so it's been a good day.

Q. You said in the champion's toast you saw Harbor Shores the first time Monday.

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah.

Q. What did you instantly like about it? Why did it suit you?

RICHARD BLAND: I just think that even though it's fairly generous off the tee that you still have to put it in the fairway. The greens are quite undulating, and if you just

get it a little out of shape round here you're going to struggle, like I did yesterday.

You don't have to be an awful lot off to struggle, because if you just then miss it in the wrong spots it's almost impossible to get it up and down. That's kind of how was it with me yesterday. I didn't feel like I -- my swing felt no different to how it felt today and I'm what, 11 shots better?

So that's what golf is at times. Yeah, I knew if you play well tee to green you're going to give yourself a lot of chances because there are a lot of short irons into holes. I do a lot of work on my distance control with short irons, so, yeah, I kind of -- I was sort of licking my lips in some respects at what I saw. I'm glad it worked out.

Q. Richard, it was kind of a surreal moment as you're walking up to 18 and they get to announce you on your last green. How were you feeling and can you take us through that?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, you know, I was trying to sort of take it in, but also I still got to finish the job. You know, right, okay, Greg holing it down the green and me tripping over myself.

Yeah, once I kind of hit the first putt down to a couple inches I thought, I can take care of that. So, yeah, it's nice playing with a three-shot lead down the last. Once the tee shot was away, then that's fine. Right, I think I can do it from here.

You still just want to finish the job off properly. I know you want to enjoy the walk, which I did, but I would rather finish the job and enjoy all this. Yeah, very special, very special.

Q. And James, your caddie, I noticed the first smile that you let in that it kind of hit you. The rest of time you're keeping your composure and staying serious. How was that moment?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, James is a great caddie. He's been with me this year. We did one tournament last year, and we spoke at the end of the year about working full time this year.

So he's very experienced. Actually caddied a little bit out here I think for Rob Carlson a few years ago, so got a lot of experience. Yeah, he's not a man of many words. Probably me the same.

So we go through it together and if he says something then you know what he's saying is gonna be relevant.

But, yeah, I know my game inside out so I don't really need

a huge amount of help in what clubs to hit out there. If I've pulled a real bad one he'll step in. Usually we're pretty much on the same page.

Yeah, no, it was great to have someone like him with you down the stretch that you know he's in the panicking even if I am.

Yeah, he's a calming guy to be around.

Q. When you won the British Masters it was a really popular victory among your peers on the DP World Tour. You were in your late 40s. What kept you going all those years?

RICHARD BLAND: I think when I lost my card in 2018. Again, probably not a lot of people know this, my brother has had a tough time of it. He was in a coma for six weeks over Christmas end of 2017; actually died twice.

So when I started back playing in January we didn't know whether he was going to survive or not. It wasn't until about July, August that we knew he was pretty much okay.

And, yeah, those first years I just -- first months of that year I just wasn't at the races so I lost my card. It doesn't make you a bad player.

Yeah, I knew I still had something to offer to the game. A few people told me, is that it? Are you going to find something else to do? That never entered my head.

I was always like, I've still got something left in this game, and I kept working hard. Went back to the Challenge Tour and got my card straight back, and fortunately it's been a kind of like an upward trend from there.

My school report always said he was a slow learner, so I've kind of figured it out in the end I think.

Q. Richard, looking to next year this event goes to Congressional. Do you have any history there?

RICHARD BLAND: Wow. No, but obviously I've seen it on TV with U.S. Opens I think when Ernie won and Rory won there a few years back.

So, yeah, can't wait to get there. Yeah, I'm going to enjoy this first. I'm going to enjoy the heck out of this.

THE MODERATOR: Good for you. Congrats.

RICHARD BLAND: Thanks. Thanks, guys.

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