

Senior PGA Championship

Congressional Country Club

Bethesda, Maryland, USA

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Richard Bland

Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining us today. I'm Greg Dillard, the PGA of America's championships public relations director, and we're fortunate to spend some time this morning with the 2024 Senior PGA champion, Richard Bland. Richard will be defending his title in just a few short weeks at the 2025 Senior PGA Championship at Congressional Country Club.

Richard, thanks for making some time for us today.

RICHARD BLAND: You're welcome, guys. Glad to be here. Looking forward to Congressional in a few weeks and see if I can do it again.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go back to last year; now that it's been almost a year since your first major victory, what do you remember most about that week?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I remember quite a lot. Such a special week for me. To win such an iconic event the first time trying, yeah, there's been a lot of sort of satisfaction that's come out of it. It was just a great week from start to finish.

I kind of got out of the blocks pretty quick, early, I think sort of tied for the lead for the first day, and kind of backed that up on day 2 and a little bit of a struggle on day 3. And to shoot 8-under on Sunday to win, you can only dream of those things, to shoot that kind of score in a major championship and kind of finish strong down the stretch, as well. Something I'm hugely proud of.

Q. Looking ahead to this year, what are your thoughts on an iconic venue like Congressional? Are you familiar with the Blue Course at all?

RICHARD BLAND: I'm not. Of course I've obviously heard an awful lot about Congressional with the U.S. Opens it's held, so I've seen, of course, a little bit on TV.

Obviously can't wait to see it. My first look is going to be the Monday of that week. Unfortunately with sort of scheduling this year that I've had, I haven't been able to

get there and have a look at it.

But yeah, I'll certainly be out on the course on Monday. Tuesday and Wednesday, preparing the best I can to put a good week together and hopefully be in there with a shout come Sunday.

Q. What can you see preparation look like for you when you're playing a course you haven't played before, just kind of the mindset or how you go about preparing for a tournament if you haven't seen the course before?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I think Monday is going to be very important for me. I'll probably try and get out on to the course on my own with my caddie James and just kind of look at how holes play, what's the best strategy off the tee, whether it's to be aggressive or to be a little bit more strategic. Then yeah, kind of around the greens, the best places to miss, that kind of stuff, depending on where pin positions are, and just try and get a feel for how the greens are running pace-wise.

There is a little bit more work to do, but I'm hopefully going to try and get out there I think early on Monday morning and try and get a lot of that done, spend a good amount of time out on the course really trying to get the feel of it.

Of course we know that how it will play will probably differ quite a bit from Monday to, say, the start day on Thursday. But yeah, just get as much information from the course that I can, just so whatever scenario comes my way through the week, you're prepared for it the best you can.

I just want to stand on that tee on Thursday feeling that I'm prepared, I'm ready, and then you can kind of just go play, and what will be will be.

Q. How do you assess the state of your game right now with this major championship around the corner?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, we could all say we want to be playing a little bit better. I don't feel like my game is a million miles away. Obviously my last outing in Miami



wasn't great, which is disappointing, but it's a tough course, and it was tough conditions. It's probably my worst week in about three years.

I didn't really worry too much about it. Of course you're always due a bad week at times. That's just the way the game is.

I tried not to dwell on that too much, tried to stay positive. This year has been a little bit -- I've had a couple of good weeks and I've had some sort of middle-of-the-road kind of weeks. But I feel like if I can get a little bit of momentum the next two weeks going into Quail -- Quail is going to be really tough, the PGA, the week before, so if I can put up a good show there, as well, and just try and build some confidence going into the Senior PGA. Yeah, I'm sure once I'm there getting the feel of the place and being the defending champion, I'm sure I'm probably going to be walking a little taller that week. I can't wait to get going.

Q. Richard, obviously you're in Mexico now I'm assuming --

RICHARD BLAND: Yes.

Q. You've got a schedule, Mexico, Korea, Quail, PGA Seniors, Washington, D.C. That seems like a lot for a young 52-year-old guy.

RICHARD BLAND: It is a lot, yeah. Yeah, there's a lot of air miles coming. Getting from here to South Korea is probably 16, 17 hours of flying, and then pretty much going straight into that week, and then having to fly halfway around the world back home. I'll have about five, six days at home, and then I fly to Charlotte on the Sunday.

So yeah, I think that week in between is going to be very important for me, making sure that I get as much rest as I can, but also being prepared. At my age, I have to listen to what my body is telling me a lot.

I'm not going to kind of -- if I'm feeling not that great in my body, then maybe I'll only go work on my short game and my putting, that kind of stuff. There's still stuff I can do. But as regards my long game, obviously my body needs to be feeling good to be able to do that. It's very, very easy to slip into some bad habits, some bad swing thoughts if your body is not feeling how it should when you're hitting golf balls.

There's stuff I can still do. There will be plenty of mobility work to do, gym work, that kind of stuff, trying to get my body back to where I want it to be as quick as I can so I can prepare the best I can.

That's kind of the way the game is now. Doing mobility work, stretching, that kind of stuff, that's working on your game now. I think probably 20 years ago that wasn't the case. Nobody kind of considered working in the gym as actually that's working on your golf game. But because everybody does it now, that's how it seems.

Even if you're not actually hitting golf balls, you can still work on your game, and that's what I'll be doing.

Yeah, there's a lot of air miles, but I've been doing it all my life, so it's nothing I haven't done before.

Q. When you won the British Masters, before that and after that, how much in your mind did your career change, and looking at it now, would you have ever anticipated before that win that you'd be where you are?

RICHARD BLAND: No, probably not. To win your first event at 48 years old is not the conventional way, I guess. But I guess I've never done anything conventional.

But yeah, the British Masters was a huge springboard for me, a huge confidence boost, self-belief boost going forward. The one thing I'm most proud of is that after that first win, I didn't kind of just sit back and go, right, I've kind of fulfilled a dream of winning on the DP World, and at that age just to kind of drift away and -- which is very, very easy to do at that age. My standard stayed very high, and I was able to crack the top 50 in the world at 49 years old.

Then yeah, obviously when LIV came along, it was an unbelievable opportunity for me, and I still say it's made me a better player playing against the caliber of players you're playing week in, week out.

I have to play my best golf to have a chance of competing against Brooks and Jon Rahm and Bryson and those guys. I can't just sort of amble around and, okay, I've played okay today and expect to beat them. That's not going to happen. So it forces me to raise my game.

I think that was a huge contributing factor to me winning the two majors last year. Because of the standard of golf that I'm playing against, some of the best players in the world, it just elevates my game, and I think that showed in the two majors.

Obviously I still have to play well. I can't just amble around in the Senior PGA in a month's time and expect to compete. I've got to bring my best stuff just to have a chance. But when you're in that mindset the whole time, it just helps. Hopefully it'll be good enough again.

Q. Obviously this isn't necessarily about you, but obviously Rory won the Masters, and being from the UK, I'm just wondering, and a European Tour player, I'm wondering what you were doing and what your thoughts are and how much that elevates European golf in general.

RICHARD BLAND: Oh, yeah, I think we were all watching. It was one of those days you just couldn't take your eyes away from it, what was happening. It looked like he'd got it done and then he didn't and then he looked like he'd got it done again and then he didn't. Only Augusta can throw that kind of drama up. You don't seem to have that at an Open or a PGA or that kind of -- Augusta just has that mystique about it that it can just do the crazy things.

But for Rory to do that, the first European to win the Grand Slam after 11 years of trying, yeah, I was so pleased for him. I think everybody kind of probably wanted Rory to win that day, especially with what happened last year at Pinehurst at the U.S. Open.

To play some of the golf that he played with the pressure that he must have been under is crazy. I can't even fathom what he was probably feeling playing that last hole.

I would certainly say it's elevated the European side hugely for the Ryder Cup later this year. To be in that club that he's now in, it takes your career to a whole new level. Whether he doesn't win another golf tournament for the rest of his life, he's now one of the icons of the game, and that will be forever. He truly deserves it. I was really, really pleased for him.

It will be interesting to see how he now goes on and -- he could go on and win double-digit majors no problem now if it frees him up because I guess he's never going to face anything on the golf course like he faced on that Sunday, and he knows he can handle everything that comes his way now. It could be the kind of second career for him. I guess only time will tell.

Q. Did you feel the same way when you won the British Masters, that it freed you up?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, maybe in some way. But I think it just gives you that inner -- it's not something that you're constantly aware of, but you have that -- it just reaffirms that belief, the confidence you have in yourself. It just kind of rubber stamps it a little bit more. So what Rory will feel like now going into Quail, he'll probably feel like he's bulletproof, and so he should.

A win at any level can only help your confidence, help your self-belief. And it certainly was that for me. Fortunately I

was able to take that forward for the past, I guess, now four years. How long it'll last, who knows. We'll see. But I'm certainly enjoying it while it's happening.

Q. Richard, golf addicts like myself are always searching to learn something from the game. You shoot the low round of the tournament to win it last year. What did you learn about yourself down the stretch?

RICHARD BLAND: That when the shot was required, I could stand up and hit it. The shot that I hit into 15, which probably ultimately put me back as favorite to win the tournament -- I think I hit a 4-iron, and it wasn't a full 4-iron. Me and my caddie, I remember we stood there between a 5 and a 4-iron, and to stand there and sort of take a little bit of yardage off a 4-iron and try to hold it up into quite a strong right-to-left wind and hit it to eight, ten feet was probably one of the best shots of my career. So yeah, to be able to stand there and hit that shot at that time when I think I was one behind, yeah, kind of probably won me the tournament.

The weather was coming in at that point. We could see that. It would very easily be able to sort of bail it a little bit right. There was plenty of room right there, but it wouldn't have been an easy up-and-down. So to stand there and take that shot on and to pull it off, yeah, probably ultimately won me the tournament.

You kind of don't think of it at the time, but (audio interruption) but afterwards as you go over the round and the things that you did well and the things that you didn't do so well and where you could improve, that was, like I said, probably -- whenever I hang the clubs up will go down as probably one of the best shots that I've ever hit. And to do it at that time, that stage of a tournament, yeah, I took a huge amount of confidence from that.

Q. When you get introduced on the first tee as Senior PGA champion, does that sometimes hit you, like oh, yeah, I did that? You talked about walking lighter on the ground when you come here to Congressional. Does that sometimes strike you, like that's right, I am the Senior PGA champion?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, and it'll be a very proud moment for me. Once it's announced I'll probably have to take a couple of deep breaths and just compose myself because not everybody gets to be called that. There's only one guy going to be called that in a month's time, and that's me. That's something that I'm really looking forward to, and I hope that I'm being called that in 2026, as well.

I'm going there to win. (Audio interruption) the best I can

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for it and put up the best fight I possibly can. I'm not going to kind of just give the trophy away easily. They're going to have to wrestle it from me. Hopefully I'll be good enough that week that they don't.

But I'm fully aware of the challenge that's in front of me, so I've been around the block too long to know that it's going to be easy or I've just got to turn up. That's not the case at all. I'm going to have to go out and play my best golf just to have a chance, and hopefully I can.

Q. You touched on it and people know about your story, but for those who don't, your story is very atypical. How would you explain it to someone, almost 500 tournaments before you won your first on the European Tour, your greatest success in your late 40s and beyond. How would you explain that to somebody?

RICHARD BLAND: Good question. Probably I can't. Yeah, just a lot of perseverance. Just never give up. (Audio interruption) you feel like you're on the right road, just believe in it, stick to it, and if you work hard enough, good things will come, whether it's sooner or it's later.

I guess that's somewhere -- I don't know. But I know that day, I guess the golfing gods were looking down on me at the Belfry and go, you know what, this guy has served his time; let's let him certainly have one, and I'm thankful for that.

But yeah, I always believed that I could do it. I had my chances (audio interruption) too much. But certainly I remember that day at the Belfry on that Sunday that, right, okay, I just never really got too far ahead of myself; I can't control anything more than the very next shot that I'm hitting. I know it's very cliché. We all talk about it.

But that's all it was. It was just all about the very next shot. It wasn't about, oh, you've got this hole coming up or you've got this to deal with in half an hour's time. I can't control that. I can only control that when I'm there.

Whenever I'm in contention now, I kind of double down on that, those thought processes. In every round you can only control the very next thing you're about to do, and whatever that is, you then have to deal with it and go and do exactly the same again, and hopefully at the end of the day you sign for a good score.

But yeah, I would just put it down to a lot of perseverance.

Q. To win your first two attempts at majors on the Champions Tour, I think only Arnold Palmer had done that previously. I'm sure you're trying to win every

tournament you're playing, but to actually win the first two, that's absurd.

RICHARD BLAND: Going into the PGA, yeah, there was a little bit of the unknown. There was a lot of great players playing. I knew, all right, if I play the way I know I can play, I'd like to think that I'll be in there come Sunday. That doesn't mean to say that you're going to go win or whatever, but if I can play the golf that I know I can play and you stay out of your own way (audio interruption) was hugely satisfying. But then to go and back that up at the Open was -- yeah, you've got to pinch yourself a little bit.

I still believe at the Open I got a little bit lucky with the weather delay because I felt the way the course was playing that afternoon, even though I was playing really well, it made the tough holes play easier with the way the wind was blowing at Newport. It made the tough holes play easier because they were downwind.

I honestly don't think -- this is only my thoughts and opinions on it, but I think if we would have finished that day, I don't think we would have caught -- for the life of me I can't remember his name. So to come back the next day and the wind in a completely different direction made the tougher holes play tough. Being maybe one of the longer guys on the Senior Tour, that (audio interruption) to catch him and fortunately win the playoff.

To win two was the stuff of dreams. Unfortunately I can't defend the Senior Open this year, which is hugely disappointing, but it is what it is. There's a LIV event that week. Hopefully I'll be able to play more in the future. Hopefully schedule willing, next year I'll be able to play both, and who knows, maybe the British, as well, which would be very special if that could ever happen.

Q. Working on a story about golfers 50 and over, not your level, not the pros, but middle handicappers. What advice would you give golfers based on your career and your success for golfers who are 50 and middle handicappers? Any general advice?

RICHARD BLAND: Just enjoy the game. Just enjoy it. If you can stay fairly fit and mobile, that's always going to help you because as we get older, your body slows down, aches and pains. Of course, we all get that. But if you can kind of look after yourself -- but more than anything, just enjoy the game.

The guys that go work 9:00 to 5:00, whatever work they're in, they look forward to their golf at the weekends or whenever it is they go play. So you can't expect -- because if you can't put the time into working on your game, you can't expect a huge amount out of it. It would

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be the same in any job. If you didn't do your research on an article that you're going to write, probably the article is not going to be that great because you might get your facts wrong or you might misquote something or whatever.

It's the same with us. If we're not prepared when we stand on that first tee -- I've always been a firm believer, you kind of don't deserve to play well. You might play well, but you've got to earn it. It's the old-fashioned way. You've got to go out and earn it.

But for the amateurs, just try and enjoy the game as much as you can. Of course it's a hugely frustrating game no matter what level you play at, but if you can enjoy it the best you can, more than likely your scores will be better than if you don't enjoy it and you get uptight over it or whatever.

So the more you can enjoy it, I think the better you'll be.

Q. I was just wondering if you could take us back to the day that you saw your brother for the first time after winning, whether that was the day that you gave him the replica trophy. I don't know if you had it at the time or not, but how special that was that day.

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, that was very special. That's probably one of the only times I played a golf tournament where I had kind of an ulterior motive to win. Obviously he'd just been diagnosed with cancer for the second time, and I only found out about three, four days, I think, before I was due to leave. Yeah, I wasn't sure whether I was even going to go.

But I'm thankful that I did. Yeah, the first time that we saw each other was very emotional. Unfortunately I couldn't give him the replica at that point. It was probably another maybe six, seven weeks before I got that. But as soon as I had it, he came up to the house and got it, and that sits -- he lives with my sister as he's been going through his treatment and what have you, so he lives with my sister permanently now in Southampton, so it's in her house, so it sits proudly there. It always will.

So yeah, it was very, very special to be able to do that and dedicate that win to him.

But yeah, as I said, when we won the U.S. Open -- the PGA was for him, but the Open was for me. He wasn't going to get his hands on that one. That was for me.

But yeah, hopefully I can do it again, and I think I'll be keeping -- if it does happen, I'll be keeping the replica this time.

I know he's supported me the whole way, which means a huge amount, and being able to do something like that for him, yeah, I'm sure helped him through his battle. Fortunately he's pretty much come out the other side of it now, which is huge, but there's still road ahead of him. The stuff that he has to go through every day with -- he'll never go to the toilet ever again, that kind of thing. He has two sort of stoma bags. So it see him having to wrestle with those every day when he sits down and he goes to sleep and he has to connect himself to another one, that's his life now.

But he's never got down about it. He's never complained about it. That's hugely inspiring. No matter how bad life you think gets because of your golf, as we all say, there's a lot of people a lot worse off than what I am, and it gives you a lot of perspective.

Sometimes you lose sight of that on the golf course, but the quicker I can come back to that kind of perspective, usually the better I can on a golf course. He's never that far away from my thoughts. Even though, like we say, he seems to be getting healthier, getting stronger, he's back working a little bit, every day is a battle for him, and he squares up to that battle.

Every day he's won it, so it's something he should be proud of, and we're all proud of him. Hopefully I can do it again.

Q. Do you feel like his battle has been a contributing factor to your success these last couple years?

RICHARD BLAND: Oh, definitely, definitely. I've tried to motivate it in a good way for me, to give him something to watch, to see me play well, to see me in contention. It gives him something to look forward to because when you've got that horrible disease, sometimes there's not an awful lot to look forward to.

So if I can just kind of put a smile on his face and give him something to watch on the TV and see me do well, then if that helps him, then that kind of -- then I'm doing my job. That's the least I can do for him.

Yeah, hopefully I can do that again soon.

Q. How much do groupings affect the way you play? I know you said that you're a competitor and you kind of get in your zone and play your game, but you got off to a great start at the Senior PGA last year as well as the U.S. Open. I'm curious, familiarity, is there anything about groupings that help the way you play?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, obviously you hope that you have a nice group of guys that you know so you're able to

have a chat here and there on the way around. So yeah, of course.

I know I'm probably going to be -- I'm going to get a good group at the PGA, at the Senior PGA. I certainly hope so.

But yeah, it's good. You're probably going to play with some of the guys that are the favorites that week, so you're able to kind of -- not as much as you kind of stand there and watch them play and you get embroiled in how they play, but you can kind of look them in the eye and see where their game is at.

So yeah, I enjoy that. Obviously you've also -- when you play morning and afternoon, you hope, depending on what the weather is going to be like that week that you kind of get the right side of the draw to give yourself the best possible chance going into the weekend.

At the end of the day, whoever you play with, you've just got to go out there and play well. Everybody that's playing at Congressional has been around the block many times. We all have. That's why we're all the age that we are.

It's nothing that no one has not seen before. Obviously it's nice to get a good pairing, but like I said, we've all been around the block and we're all there to do a job. I guess at the end of the day who you play with doesn't really matter. It's always nice when you're out and you've got a friendly face and someone that you can talk to here and there.

In those moments where you need to kind of switch off and kind of relax in between shots, you've got someone, some people that you're playing with that you can do that. But when you've got to get your game face back on, then we've all done it plenty of times and we all switch back into the playing mode.

So yeah, but we'll see who the PGA of America pair me with. Hopefully it's a good one.

Q. You mentioned the draw itself, going early or going late. I'm curious your range routine or your time warming up on the putting green and your physio. How much is that different late versus early?

RICHARD BLAND: The time of when I will get to a golf course doesn't necessarily change.

Okay, if you're playing at 8:00 in the morning, it just means you set your alarm a lot easier, and if you're playing at 2:00 in the afternoon, okay, you have a little bit more time in the morning just to relax, chill and just maybe watch a bit of the golf if it's on the TV, see how the course is playing that day.

But as regards how the preparation goes, it doesn't really change for me. I'll be at the course probably maybe two and a half, two hours before my tee time and allow myself enough time to stretch and warm up and be ready for when the gun goes at whatever time that'll be. It makes no difference to me.

Q. Your pre-round warmup is about an hour?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, a little longer than that. Probably about an hour and 20. I like to do a few putting drills maybe for 10, 20 minutes and then go and hit some chips. I like to be on the range for about an hour before I tee off. So yeah, I would probably maybe do 20 minutes, half an hour of chipping and putting before that, and then hit some balls for maybe 40 minutes, do a little bit of distance control stuff with my wedges to start with just to try and dial those in as best as I can, ending up with a few drivers, and five, six minutes back on the putting green, a little bit of pace putting, hole a few short ones, and then, yeah, just be on the tee five minutes before ready to go. That doesn't change whether I'm playing at 8:00 in the morning or 2:00 in the afternoon.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks again for your time. Good luck this week. We'll see you in a couple weeks.

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