

U.S. Open Championship 2021

Friday, June 18, 2021

San Diego, California, USA

Torrey Pines Golf Course

Richard Bland

Flash Interview



Q. Where did you feel the state of your game was coming into this week and did you expect this of yourself?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I knew it was pretty good. I was coming off a couple of good results, a win and a third in Europe. I was feeling pretty good about my game. I've been driving the ball well for five, six weeks now, which is the cornerstone if you're going to put a fight up for a U.S. Open.

When I saw this place on Monday, I kind of -- yeah, it kind of set up to my eye. There's not too many sort of doglegs. It's all there just straight in front of me, and that's the kind of golf course I like. There's nothing kind of jumping out and grabbing you or anything like that.

When I saw the course Monday, yeah, you know what, I thought, I can play around here.

Q. We seem to define golfers by majors. You've played in very few. Just wondered what your view of majors was through your career? Have you sat and watched them and enjoyed them or did you kind of feel like a loss a little bit for not having been able to play in more?

RICHARD BLAND: Oh, of course. I'm a professional golfer, but I'm also a golf fan. I love watch the Masters, especially I've been fortunate enough to play there with a friend of mine. There's nothing like the back nine of a Masters.

Hopefully if I can keep playing the way I'm playing, maybe next year I might be able to experience it, or the year after that would be unbelievable. That would be a proper dream come true.

You know, in the qualifying that we have in Europe, I think I've lost in a playoff four times for this, for a U.S. Open, and I've lost three times in an Open qualifying. I could have maybe played closer to double figure majors, but it's not quite to be, and I'm not going to lose any sleep over that. I'm just enjoying this one right now.

Q. I'm just wondering, in the aftermath of your win last month, what were the most powerful emotional things that came out of it and the byproducts of that, whether it was emotional or tangible things?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, you know, the first two or three days were a bit of a blur, as much the first 24 hours more hangover than anything. The social media side of it I wasn't ready for, just getting messages from people all over the globe, from Australia, from here, from America, South America, China, just saying how inspired they were by it. That's something I wasn't expecting. I'm just a guy who's won a golf tournament really, when you boil it down.

But as it all sunk in, I think it was just more satisfaction than anything that I kind of got what I've always wanted. I want more. Every golfer wants more. Hopefully I can do it again.

It's kind of nice when you look on the European Tour website now, I've got that "1" by my name.

Q. Prior to the win how would you have defined your career as a guy who's been trying and trying to get that first win?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I think if you don't win on Tour, whether it be the PGA TOUR or the European Tour, you're always going to have that sort of -- I'm just thinking of the right word. Yeah, that kind of -- when you look back on it, of a bit disappointment of slightly underachieving maybe.

You know, there's a guy in Europe now I think at 524 who's still not won, Davy Drysdale. I'm sure he'll get there. But yeah, for me it was just the satisfaction that I kept going. I never gave up, and I kind of got there in the end.

Q. How do you stick with it when there's 20 years between victories? That's a lot of time to process getting close and not quite getting over the hump.

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, but golf is all I know. When times got tough and I lost my card two or three times, I think, what am I going to do, go and get an office job? I'm



not that intelligent, I'm afraid. So it was just, right, okay, I've always been someone that can get my head down and work hard, and I always knew I had the game to compete on the European Tour at the highest level. I've always known that.

But as any golf career, you're going to have peaks and troughs. Of course you are. But I just think every kind of sportsman, sportswoman, they have that never-die or that never-quit attitude, no matter whether it's golf or it's tennis or it's boxing, whatever it is. The old saying is you get knocked down seven times, you get up eight. I've always had that kind of attitude that you just keep going. You never know in this game, you just keep going.

Q. I read that after the British Masters you celebrated with some pints and a lamb roast. What would that look like here if you're in that position on Sunday?

RICHARD BLAND: Well, I've got a flight back on Sunday night because I'm due to play in Munich next week. I'd probably maybe skip that one, I think, and I might buy a new ticket and fly home a couple of days later.

Q. Most guys who come in here have Ping or Titleist across their hat. What's the story behind --

RICHARD BLAND: This is just my golf club back home, the Wisley. I don't have a hat kind of deal at the minute. So if anyone is offering...

But yeah, I kind of said to the golf club, look, it would be quite nice if I wore the hat, and they gave me sort of like 10 hats to come out here with, so yeah, it's just the golf club that I'm a member at back home.

Q. What's the story behind your driver head cover?

RICHARD BLAND: I'm involved with a charity in South Africa called Birdies For Rhinos, so there's about 20 of us now, mainly on the European Tour, a few ladies. I think Justin Rose is involved with it, as well. So every birdie that we make throughout the year we donate some money to help save rhino poaching and what have you.

Animals are all sort of quite close to my heart. Two things I can't stand is three-putting and animal cruelty.

So yeah, a couple of the South African lads asked me to come on board, and it's been an honor to do it. So yeah, I just thought -- I've always had like a head cover, an animal or something like that, so why not have a rhino.

Q. When you mentioned a minute ago giving the gym guys a run for their money, is that a figure of speech or

do you actively avoid the gym?

RICHARD BLAND: No, for me now it's more sort of flexibility. As we get older, you know, kind of -- everything kind of creaks in the morning and there's a new ache to wake up to. For me it's just more on the flexibility side now. Obviously try and keep your speed up, as well. So no, it's just a figure of speech, really.

Q. Your Twitter bio, is that a bit of humor on there?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, well, we're in a sport where you're going to miss some cuts, so yeah, I try not to take the Twitter sort of too seriously. I've had a few weeks off, weekends off in my career, so yeah. And putting I'm a Southampton fan on there, as well, is probably -- as most people would probably know in England that's probably quite humorous, as well, because you shouldn't be owning up to that.

Q. You were sort of talking about how you view your career. I guess there's two ways to look at it. You've been playing golf for a long time and maybe you haven't had the success that you maybe have wanted to. You can also say, hey, look, I've been playing golf a long time while a lot of people have had office jobs; you're kind of living out a dream. Is that kind of how you look at it?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, I'm fortunate with what I do. I think we all are, whether you're playing on the European Tour, you're playing on the PGA TOUR, whatever. I think any amateur golfer would probably give their right arm to play it as a living. I think they might think something different if they did play it for a living, but yeah, I've always been -- thought of it as I'm very fortunate that I can travel the world and play some of the best courses in the world and some of the biggest tournaments in the world.

I'm certainly not looking at my career just now as sort of lack of success or anything like that. I just feel privileged that I can do what I can do.

Q. You've been asked a lot about Phil Mickelson's win, obviously, and you said a little while ago that this is kind of for us oldies. Do you have a theory or explanation as to why that is?

RICHARD BLAND: I think when you look at it, you look at kind of Lee and Stewart and Phil -- okay, Lee is not quite -- unfortunately he's not got his major, whether that comes this week or sometime in the future, I'm sure what Phil did has given Lee a huge sort of confidence boost in that way, that okay, his major career isn't over.

Stewart has won a major and Phil has obviously won I think six now, so they've been world-class players for a long, long time. You don't lose that overnight. It's the old saying that class is permanent, and that is with them.

I played 18 holes with Lee on Monday, and he still hits it as good as anybody. I think as we've all known with Lee, if he chips and putts well, then he's going to contend because he's still probably right up there tee to green as one of the best in the world. It wouldn't surprise me, I kind of saw his name a little bit this week. I think he was hovering around sort of level, 1-under, so it wouldn't surprise me at all if he was in there come Sunday afternoon.

Q. A lot of us in here know your swing coach pretty well; what made you stick with him all these years and how has he helped you?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, Tim, we got together 20 years ago. In golfing terms we just kind of speak the same language. I've always been a firm believer of the way I want to swing a golf club, you get the coach that kind of teaches that. That's what Tim does.

Every time we work together -- I go away knowing exactly what I want to work on. We don't really do an awful lot now. I saw him twice last week. I think we were drinking coffee for most of it.

We haven't really changed anything for a while. It's just you can just sort of fine tune here and there. That's all it is. The kind of -- we're not trying to sort of reinvent the wheel.

But he's just the best coach in the world for me. As I said after my win to SKY, if I had another 20 years of a career, he would be my coach for 20 years. He's part of the furniture. Just took me 20 years to listen to him.

Q. Watching you out there, it seemed like you were very present, looking around, seeing people and maybe not pressing or anything like that. I just wonder what was it like? Were you aware of your position? How were you kind of just going through those four and a half hours?

RICHARD BLAND: Yeah, you know, yeah, I was very aware. I'm not someone that doesn't look at boards. I like to know where I am.

Yeah, you know, you just kind of take it -- it's nice really to play in front of the fans again. Unfortunately we're not quite there yet in Europe. I think we had a tournament a couple weeks ago that we had some, I think in Germany. In Europe we're not quite there yet, so it's really nice to have that interaction with the crowd again. I think we've all

missed that.

Yeah, and I think it just kind of gets you while you're walking down the fairway, it kind of gets you away a little bit. I've always got this kind of thing that probably when I get to about 20 yards of the ball I take my glove out of my pocket, and that's it then, like right, I'm kind of switched on again and getting back ready to figure out where the wind is, what yardage I'm going to have and from there.

But yeah, more than anything it's just been nice to play in front of the crowds.

Q. Do you remember the first time you looked over and actually saw your name at the top?

RICHARD BLAND: I kind of guessed I thought when I made birdie on 4, I kind of guessed that maybe, because I knew obviously I think 4 led after yesterday. That got me to 5, so I thought okay, yeah, maybe I might have a share of it. I didn't know what Louis was doing. There's not too many boards around sort of 2, 3, 4, 5, so I think the next one I saw was on the 6th tee. So yeah, I knew -- then I saw I had the lead there. So yeah, I birdied 6. Obviously a little disappointed a dropped shot at 8, but it is what it is.

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