

Richard Bland – The Journey of a champion Part 1

In 1985 golf was a game played mainly by middle aged, middle class men who seemed to enjoy wearing brightly coloured clothing to go along with their rather full heads of hair. Den and Ann



Bland who had relocated from Burton upon Trent, Staffordshire played golf at Dibden Golf course and had joined Bramshott Hill golf Club. They encouraged their two sons Heath and Richard to take up the game and join the growing Junior Section at the Club. The Junior section had some fantastic young players already playing at



very high standards and having some very low handicaps. One such Junior golfer was Mike Smith who was later the winner of the British Youth Championship, a great

golfing talent, who was tragically killed in a car accident. Other members of the Junior section including Mark Mills and Trevor Ball went on to become golf professionals working not just in England but going on the ply around the world. Surrounded by such golfing talent, having a brother who himself was a very good golfer, a mum and dad very keen on the game and a highly regarded resident teaching



professional (Alan Bridge) certainly helped Richard begin his journey to becoming a Champion. It would certainly not take long for this young golfer to be winning events and trophies.



Richard's golfing ability was quickly identified by Alan Bridge, who had already helped develop the talents of the likes of Clive Bonner, Nigel Graves and Mike Smith. With the help of Alan's expert knowledge and coaching Richard's handicap kept tumbling and the trophies just kept coming and in 1989 at the

age of 16 Richard became the youngest golfer ever to be Club Champion of Bramshott Hill Golf Club, also being Junior Club Champion in the same year. Club success soon turned to County honours as Richard became Hampshire Boys Champion in 1990 and repeated this success in 1991, when he was also voted best prospect in the County. In 1992 went on to represent the County at both Youth and Men's level. He also became Hampshire Youth Champion and narrowly missed out on becoming Hampshire County Champion,

finishing runner-up. County success led to national and

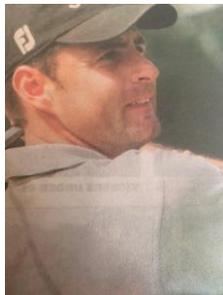
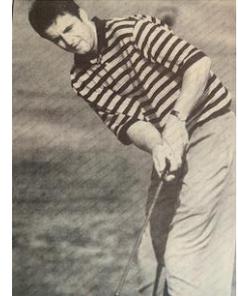


international success when in 1993 he became Under 21s European Masters Champion, runner-up in the English Match-play and represented England against Scotland in a Youth's International Match. These achievements led to Richard being included in English teams featuring the likes of golfers who went on to go on early success on the European Tour, such as Lee Westwood.



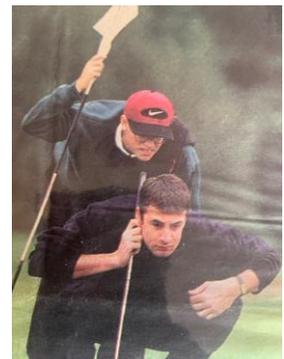
Richard Bland – The Journey of a champion Part 2

In 1996 at the age of 22, after such an impressive amateur golfing record, it was the right time for Richard to become a professional golfer. His first competition as such took place at Barton-On-Sea Golf Club competing in the Hampshire Young Professionals Championship. At the half way stage Richard was in a five way tie for first place. The wind and difficulties with his short game eventually took their toll and Richard went on to finish third. Success was not far away as Richard went on to set a new record when he won the Hampshire Professional Championship after winning the amateur version three years in succession. This victory along with victory at the South Winchester



Pro-Am helped ensure Richard was soon topping the table Hampshire PGA Assistants Order of Merit. Richard would most likely of remained at the top of the table but a rib injury hampered his plans and meant Ricard would finish his first season as a professional in third place in the order of merit. Injuries to his ribs were set to continue into the following season after Richard was involved in a go-karting accident which delayed his ability to start the new season and hampered his plans to go to qualify for his European

Tour card. Richard went to Qualifying school in 1997 and played well enough to earn his card on the Challenge Tour. After four years playing on the challenge Tour, In 2001 Richard won for the first time, at the season ending Challenge Tour Grand Final. The win elevated him in the rankings sufficiently to gain a place on the European Tour for 2002.



After teeing off in his first tournament on the European Tour at the South African Open Richard went on to have his best tournament finish, a tie for 2nd place at the Murphy's Irish Open, losing in a playoff, He went on to end the year in 73rd place on the European Order of Merit.



In subsequent seasons, he failed to win enough money to maintain his card on the European Tour several times but regained his playing status each time, via the Challenge Tour rankings in 2004, 2008, and 2019, and via qualifying school in 2007 and 2011. Richard often commented that his ability to overcome adversity and regain his card was down to his close friendship with, former Saints legend, Matt Le Tissier. Matt had been instrumental in helping with Richard's positive thinking and self-belief.

However, time on the tour had taken its toll of Richard. The travelling, the practice, the ups and the downs was making him seriously consider his future. He was approaching his 50s and to gain enough points to remain of tour was having an impact. However, his life was about to change.

Richard Bland – The Journey of a champion Part 3



In May 2021, in his 478th start on the European Tour, Richard achieved his first victory at the Betfred British Masters. Richard parred the first extra hole at the Belfry after Guido Migliozzi three-putted from long range to become the oldest first-time winner on the European Tour. The now 48-year-old carded a superb final round of 66 to set the clubhouse target on 13 under par, but looked in danger of being denied victory by Migliozzi. Richard held his nerve and victory was his.

Unsurprisingly, Richard was an emotional man speaking to his coach Tim Barter and his family after claiming his first European Tour win, something he had been working for and dreaming about ever since he started at Didben Golf Course all those years ago.



As Richard would tell anyone, it's not about the money, it's not about the fame, it's not even about the doors that are now open to him as a well-known sporting personality. It is about the dream, the ambition and about knowing that true effort and hard work mixed with a little talent and luck can mean any young golfer can go on and be a champion.

In June 2021, Richard played in the U.S. Open for just the second time in his career. At 48 years old, he became the oldest player to ever hold a share of the lead after two rounds, later falling back over the weekend to finish in a tie for 50th. With eight top-10 finishes during the 2021 European Tour season, Richard finished a career-best 11th place on the Race to Dubai rankings.



In January 2022, Richard finished as runner-up at the Dubai Desert Classic after draining a monster putt on the last and forcing Rory McIlroy into having to make birdie to win. Narrowly losing to Viktor Hovland in a playoff.

Being just outside the Top 50 in the Official World Golf Ranking in March 2022, Richard looked to find form in order to qualify for the Masters Tournament.

He won his group at the WGC-Dell Technologies Match Play, halving with Bryson DeChambeau and beating Talor Gooch and Lee Westwood along the way.

However, he was defeated in the last 16 by Dustin Johnson, ultimately just missing out on progressing to the Top 50. Richard made his full PGA Tour debut the following week at the Valero Texas Open, needing a

victory to get into The Masters. He recorded a Top-30 finish, seeing him move to a highest ranking of 48th in the World not bad from a lad who started his golfing career at a municipal golf course in Dibden, Southampton, belonging to a small club called **Bramshott Hill Golf Club**.

