



Talking with ... Padres pitcher Clayton Richard

- Jeff Sanders, San Diego Union-Tribune / April 20, 2018

Clayton Richard made history last week with a pinch-hit single for the Padres' only hit in a loss to the Giants. The 34-year-old starting pitcher is actually 3-for-4 as a pinch-hitter in his 10-year career.

Union-Tribune: Andy Green called on you for a pinch-hit last week. What are the mechanics of how that happens for a starting pitcher on an off day?

Richard: Usually the game is not going the way we hoped, unfortunately. You go from your day of work is done and rooting on the guys to mentally locking it in and physically getting ready to put together an at-bat. That can be difficult at times because of the mental and physical aspect of it. ... So I was sitting on the bench. The game was going in that direction and Andy gave me a heads up to get ready just in case that situation arises.

U-T: He says you're swinging the bat the best of the pitchers right now. What goes into how you're feeling at the plate right now and maintaining that?

Richard: (Laughs) Keeping it simple is my best bet. Trying to minimize and not do too much. When I get in trouble and when a lot of guys get in trouble

is when we're trying to do too much.

U-T: On that pinch-hit, do you think it helped that you weren't in the game and prepared and overthinking it?

Richard: (Laughs) Maybe. Mentally, you're definitely not worried about an at-bat coming up. You're just reacting and I think a lot of times that's what the best hitters do. You just react. If they've done their preparation, then they know they are ready. I'm not saying I'm that guy, but I've noticed that among the elite hitters is they do all the work to prepare and when the time comes they are able to just go out there and play the game.

U-T: Knowing what you have to do to get ready to hit, do you marvel at what Shohei Ohtani is doing with the Angels?

Richard: It's incredible. It really is. It's remarkable. It's historic. The person people are comparing him to is Babe Ruth. When you have to make that comparison you're doing something really special.

U-T: Are Ohtani's highlights something you find yourself watching?

Richard: A little bit. We have so much going on, that I don't have as much time. I know that he's doing well and that's really cool to see happening. I wish him the best because it's a historic undertaking.

U-T: Could you imagine altering your schedule to prepare to hit and pitch the way Ohtani does?

Richard: It would be a long day at the yard.

U-T: How would you go about it if you decided, today, that you wanted to make hitting a bigger part of your game?

Richard: You would figure out how to get rest. And then get your swings in and still make sure you're taking care of your arm. The days would be long. It would take a toll. We'll have to see how it plays out with him over the course of 162.

U-T: You're pitching this week in Arizona, which is a bit of a footnote in your career. How did the Diamondbacks wind up as a stop on your path back to a big league rotation?

Richard: That was after my thoracic outlet syndrome. I felt great. I wasn't "back" yet. I was trying to find my delivery, trying to find what a healthy me was going to be like again. I had had my AC procedure and came back from that and was not right. That's when I had the thoracic outlet performed in the beginning of 2014. I was rehabbing from that. There was a scout from my local area that watched me throw a few times that was with Arizona at the time — Pat Murtaugh. He recommended me to Kevin Towers and I talked with KT a few times and latched onto them for a few starts toward the end of the year.

U-T: It was only four starts — three at Double-A Mobile and one at Triple-A Reno. How significant was that stop for your career?

Richard: Pretty significant. It got me back on the mound competitively. It gave me a good platform for myself mentally and physically. It was nice to have professional games under my belt after the surgery going into spring training competing for a job.

U-T: Those three games in Mobile were for Andy Green. You pitched. Did you know you were going to play for a big league managerial candidate?

Richard: No I didn't — but they told me so. In talking to KT and player development director Mike Bell, they were very high on him. I wasn't there for very long, but you could see how his mind operated on a higher level than most baseball people.

Clayton Richard reminds the Padres that a rebuild can still be fun

- Dennis Lin, The Athletic / April 9, 2018

DENVER — Clayton Richard is a 34-year-old pitcher with more than 1,000 innings on his odometer. From afar, it is logical to wonder what he has left to offer. The Padres remain entrenched in a rebuild, a fact reinforced by a 3-8 start to this season. Youth pervades the big-league clubhouse and all levels of the farm system. Richard was born in Lafayette, Ind., where he still lives, when Ronald Reagan was President.

Yet his value extends beyond an ability to protect younger arms from wear-and-tear. Toil does not have to be synonymous with struggle, the veteran has often reminded his teammates. There can be enjoyment on the journey to respectability.

On Monday night, Richard unleashed a toothy grin after a rare trip around the bases. The visiting dugout at Coors Field smiled with him.

"You're ecstatic for him every time he goes out and performs, because of the impact he has on everybody in this clubhouse," Padres catcher A.J. Ellis said. "It's very arguable that he has the most impact of anybody. ... He's just a tremendous teammate, and he's that guy who everybody is genuinely pulling for."

Last August, Ellis was behind home plate at Marlins Park when Richard's bat collided with a fastball thrown by Dan Straily. A low liner cleared the right-field wall by a yard or two. The visiting dugout erupted in response to the pitcher's second career home run.

In the top of the fourth inning Monday, Ellis watched from the bench as Richard demolished a fastball thrown by Jon Gray. Richard, up after an intentional walk, dropped his bat as a majestic three-run drive soared out to right. His third career home run would prove essential in a 7-6 victory over a Colorado team that had pummeled him, especially at Coors Field.

"Yeah, it's given me enough," Richard said of the mile-high ballpark, where he carried an 8.82 ERA before his latest visit. "It's nice to take something away."

In the bottom of the sixth, Cory Spangenberg nearly took away a Rockies home run. The utility man leaped to intercept a ball at the left-field fence, only to see it pop out of his glove and into the stands. The Padres contended that Spangenberg was the victim of interference; a spectator had extended his hands atop the barrier, contacting Spangenberg's mitt and possibly more.

"I felt something in my glove," Spangenberg said, "and I don't think that was the ball."

When the call was upheld as a homer for Carlos González, the visitors' lead shrunk to a single run. Padres manager Andy Green stormed onto the field and earned himself a swift ejection.

“If you feel like [the fan] reached over the fence and he touched [Spangenberg’s] glove and touched the ball and that has no percentage chance of impacting the play, then they made the right call,” Green said. “But I obviously didn’t think that.”

Had the Padres suffered a loss, the game’s aftermath would have devolved into controversy. A combination of timely offense and shutdown relief ensured a different conclusion. Carlos Asuaje followed Richard’s blast with a solo shot, one of 13 hits for San Diego. Craig Stammen and Brad Hand combined on three spotless innings of relief.

“This is a tough place to hold the lead,” said Richard, who allowed four runs over five innings. “The bullpen really stepped up.”

San Diego’s advantage, of course, would have vanished without Richard’s fourth-inning swat. “I got lucky,” he said. “Let’s be real.” An informal poll, meanwhile, revealed little surprise that he had become the first Padres pitcher to go deep this season.

“I thought it might’ve been Clayton,” Spangenberg said, grinning. “He’s an all-or-nothing kind of guy.”

Richard, his teammates say, takes a much different approach to everything not related to the occasional plate appearance. At 34, he remains one of baseball’s more physically-imposing players, a testament to his between-starts routine. The Padres signed him to a two-year extension in September, believing he had more left to offer.

A few months later, Richard hosted pitching prospects Joey Lucchesi and Eric Lauer in Indiana for a series of exhausting workouts. Lucchesi will make his third major-league start Tuesday, following a mentor on the mound.

“It’s the consistency of who he is as a person,” Ellis said. “He comes to work every day with a smile and an energy and a leadership that’s pretty unique in baseball.”

Richard not surprised by ascension to OD starter

- AJ Cassavell, MLB.com / March 28, 2018

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- **Clayton Richard**'s final start before signing with the Padres in August 2016 came on a high school field in Lafayette, Ind. The opponent? A local youth team called the Monticello Tribe, featuring a roster of 15- and 16-year-olds.

Twenty months later, Richard will start on one of the sport's grandest stages for the first time. Named the Padres' Opening Day starter earlier this month, Richard is slated to face the Brewers at 1:10 p.m PT on Thursday.

He said he'd prepare as though it were any of his previous 173 starts. Then again, Richard has always thought of Opening Day like a holiday.

Few ballplayers are as well-spoken as Richard, the valedictorian of McCutcheon High in Lafayette. Yet he struggled a moment to find the right words to sum up Opening Day. He settled on: "It's so America."

So is Richard's story to get there.

Released by the Cubs in August 2016, Richard phoned a friend who coached a youth team in his hometown. He asked for some interim work to stay loose while he searched for a job.

"[Pitching Opening Day] was definitely out of my scope at the time," Richard said. "But I know it wouldn't have been a surprise. I've worked my whole career to be in this position. It hasn't taken me by surprise."

When manager Andy Green tabbed Richard, he conceded that Richard didn't fit the conventional mold. Few pitchers make their first Opening Day start at age 34, and Richard isn't a true ace.

That said, Richard *earned* the start in every sense. He returned from two surgeries on his throwing shoulder, then underwent an overhaul of his mechanics, dropping to a three-quarters arm slot and a throwing motion that loosely resembles a slingshot.

"Yeah, the arm angle is down, but he's the same guy as he was then," says pitching coach Darren Balsley. "He's a fantastic human being and teammate. He's earned the right to be one of the leaders in there, just through his work

ethic. ... He's learned how to prepare so well that once he takes the mound, he's done everything he can do. Now it's just about getting the hitter out. He leaves no stone unturned."

The title of "leader" isn't one Richard bestows upon himself. It's rooted in the subtler things he does. A year ago, Richard gave each of his teammates a copy of Dr. Seuss' "Oh the Places You'll Go" on Opening Day. This past offseason, Richard invited lefty pitching prospects Joey Lucchesi and **Eric Lauer** to his Indiana home to train with him. When he wasn't throwing, Richard spent hours at the Peoria bullpens watching every pitcher in camp, even when their sessions didn't align with his own.

"He leads by example because of how hard he works," said Balsley. "He's very approachable, and he lets the young guys know he's approachable by approaching them first. He can seem intimidating, because he's so well-spoken, he's such a big guy and he works so hard. So, he breaks the ice."

Of course, leadership qualities alone didn't earn Richard his Opening Day start. The Padres are convinced his 4.79 ERA from last season was deceiving, and should drop with some luck and an improved infield.

If there are adjustments to make, the Padres know Richard will make them. That's how he got here, after all, from a high school-level scrimmage just 20 months ago.

"I understood that if I put my head down every day and trusted the process, things will take care of themselves," Richard said. "I'm not looking at outside circumstances I can't control and thinking it's rough or I had bad luck. I know that if I put the work in, if nothing else, at the end of the day, I'll have no regrets."

Padres' opening-day starter Clayton Richard creates legacy as he plays to win

- Kevin Acee, San Diego Union-Tribune – March 27, 2018

Clayton Richard insists on remaining in Indiana with his young family during the winter.

"I value my time at home very highly," he said. "I want to be with my family and my friends. It grounds me, gets me back to a realistic view of the world outside of this world of professional baseball."

The work, however, doesn't stop. Anyone who has seen the 34-year-old with the 24-year-old's torso knows that to be true. That's why he built a massive gym on his property.

So he told the Padres he couldn't get to San Diego this past offseason but that they could send some prospects to him for some lessons.

The invitation from the old left-hander was accepted on behalf of two young left-handers.

Warnings were given.

Recalled Eric Lauer: "We were in San Diego and people said, 'Oh, you're going to work out with Clayton? Good luck. He's going to kill you.'"

Lauer, 22, and Joey Lucchesi, 24, arrived the week after Christmas. They stayed five days, all of them filled with some sort of torture.

"I'd done some of the workouts, but this was more intense," Lucchesi said. "He's in shape, man. I thought I was going to be all right. I was pretty tired after. I just wanted to go to bed."

Richard declines any credit for the development of the two prospects, who survived longer in major league camp than any of the organization's other highly touted minor leaguers and showed they will be making their big-league debuts before too long.

Certainly, Lauer and Lucchesi rose through the minors and got themselves in good standing before they met Richard. But it would be ignorant to believe their following him around as if he were a mama duck this spring had nothing to do with their recent ascension.

Said manager Andy Green: “That kind of thirst and hunger to get a competitive edge, if you can impact that in young guys and it can be modeled for them. ... He’s the type of person you want Joey Lucchesi and Eric Lauer to be around.”

And that is why, almost as much as anything, Richard will on Thursday afternoon at Petco Park make his first opening day start, the honor a fitting tribute to a career well spent and hard earned.

He will probably start another 30 games this season, because that’s what he does. No one who knows the man will bet against him doing the same thing again next year, in the second and final year of his contract, at age 35.

But whatever happens between this start against the Milwaukee Brewers and his final time taking the ball in 2019, the Padres believe they are better for him being around — start after start, day after day, willingly sharing his Clayton Richardness with any and all who come around him.

It almost seems insulting to talk too much about how much Richard helps off the field — as if he can’t still throw the gravity out of his sinker, didn’t induce 29 double play grounders (second in MLB) and pick off eight runners at first base (most in MLB) and make all 32 of his starts and throw a team-high 197 1/3 innings in 2017.

The Padres didn’t give him a two-year, \$6 million contract at the end of last season to be a teacher. He didn’t accept the contract to be a teacher.

“I want to be a part of San Diego winning,” said Richard, who was 8-15 with a 4.79 ERA last year. “I’ve been here on and off since 2009 (when he was acquired in the Jake Peavy trade). That’s always been my goal. I want to win in San Diego. There would be nothing more fulfilling than to have a winning team in San Diego.”

Still, both parties embraced that his imparting wisdom to younger pitchers came with the deal.

“If you’re not doing that, you’re cheating yourself and the team,” Richard said. “If you’re too selfish in that aspect, you’re going to miss an opportunity to grow.”

Fact is, he hardly even has to try to teach as he is so busy trying to win.

“He’s always doing something to get better,” Lauer said. “... He’s a good teacher as well as a good player. He leads by example, and he can tell you what to do. He knows the game so well. He’s taught me so much about the little intricacies that most people don’t think about, but as a pitcher at that level you have to understand and think about.”

Richard is so prepared for his starts, it changes the way catcher Austin Hedges goes about that day’s work.

“It’s different than any pitcher I’ve ever worked with,” Hedges said. ““If I even thought about going to the mound, he’d be like, ‘No.’ ... It’s nice to know what we’ve prepared for we’re going to stick to, and if we need make an adjustment we are going to make it together between innings. But when he’s on the mound, he’s in complete control. He helps me out a lot with his game plan for the day, making me do a little less work on the days he pitches.”

Richard fills notebooks with information like he did when he was a quarterback, backing up Chad Henne at the University of Michigan. He writes down at the end of bullpen sessions, workouts and games what felt good and what didn’t and what he wants to work on next time.

“Nolan Ryan was once quoted saying, ‘You never know what the game is going to ask of you,’ ” Richard said. “With that in mind, I want to be prepared for anything. To me, that means I’m not going to go into a game asking myself if I’m ready. I’m going to know I did everything in my power to be ready for that day.”

One day, Lauer and Lucchesi and the rest of the next generation of Padres pitchers will be quoting Clayton Richard.

Padres sign Richard to 2-year extension

- Nathan Ruiz, MLB.com / September 20th, 2017

SAN DIEGO -- For **Clayton Richard**, leadership by talking might as well be mute. The San Diego left-hander has earned his teammates' respect through his actions in the weight room, in the clubhouse and on the mound.

As the Padres build into a playoff contender, Richard is the type of player they want to mentor their young talent. The organization proved it Wednesday not with words, but with actions, signing Richard to a two-year, \$6 million extension that will keep the 34-year-old in San Diego through 2019.

"What I'm going to do in the next couple years is just what I've been doing: work as hard as I can to help get this team in position to win baseball games," Richard said. "That's all I'll be focusing on, and hopefully that'll be a good example for all the young guys that come up."

By completing discussions that had been ongoing since July, general manager A.J. Preller guaranteed his team a veteran presence for its 2018 rotation. The upcoming free-agent class is relatively thin in starting pitching, but San Diego has Richard for \$3 million in each of the next two seasons.

The Padres also have had conversations regarding extensions with their other pending free agents. Richard might be only the beginning.

"I think both parties pretty much shared a vision of what we're trying to do here in the next few years," Preller said. "Clayton's really excited to try to be part of a group that gets us back on winning ways."

Richard leads San Diego with 185 innings in 2017, his first full season as a starter since 2012. Shoulder surgery caused him to miss most of the next season and all of 2014.

He returned as a reliever for the Cubs in 2015, but after he struggled in 2016, Chicago released him. Richard rejoined San Diego and was shortly afterward inserted into the team's rotation. After posting a 6.43 ERA with Chicago, he had a 2.52 ERA with the Padres before re-signing for one year in the offseason.

"They gave me an opportunity here last year when there probably weren't a ton of teams that would have," Richard said. "I always wanted to be here. I always wanted to prove to them I could be an asset for them moving forward."

The 2016 success didn't translate to 2017. Richard's 4.82 ERA is partially the result of grounders sneaking through the Padres' infield. The sinkerballer is tied for the National League lead in ground-ball double plays.

"I feel as if I've made pitches consistently enough to be successful," Richard said. "... I know the numbers don't exactly line up with me saying I did well, but with what I can control, I think it went pretty well, and I think the Padres see that or else I don't think we'd be here today."

Preller said the only assurance given to Richard as part of the extension was beginning the 2018 season in the rotation. With well-regarded prospects approaching the Majors, Richard will face competition to remain a starter.

He's prepared for it, but he also said that reflects the growth of an organization he's seen develop in the past year. Over the course of the next two, Richard has a simple expectation: "winning."

"I really don't think I would've agreed to this had that not been the case," Richard said. "That's why we play, is to win baseball games and be in September and looking towards October. I don't think we're far away from that. I think if we consistently move the needle forward, this time next year we're going to be having a lot more fun."