

TOUR Championship

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

East Lake Golf Club

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome the 2023 FedExCup champion, Viktor Hovland, to the interview room here at the TOUR Championship at historic East Lake Golf Club.

An incredible season for you, wins at the Memorial, last week at the BMW Championship, and this week here in Atlanta. Maybe just some opening thoughts on the accomplishment.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's been a great year, just kind of -- I feel like I've taken a lot of steps this season, contending in more major championships, I finally won in the U.S., I won a big tournament, Jack's event, and honestly, after that I felt like I've gotten so much better and it was very pleasing to see.

And then obviously the last couple weeks have just superceded that. It's been pretty surreal. It seems like -- obviously you dream about it, but these things happen when you don't really expect them to, so it was -- yeah, it's just awesome to be sitting here.

THE MODERATOR: Let's take some questions.

Q. You talk about a plan going in of kind of fairways and greens with a six-shot lead. As well as you played for the last two weeks I'm curious how you feel about the way you responded to what Xander was throwing at you.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, the game plan kind of -- as I was talking to Joe, my instructor, the game plan was trying to play as boring as possible, just trying to play like Tiger back in the day when he would post the 69 or a 70 in a major championship and walk away with a victory.

Obviously it was sweet to make a birdie on the first hole and make a really clutch par save on No. 2. After that, I felt really in control of my game. But even being -- I think I was 4-under through 6, and even then Xander just kept pouring it on and suddenly after I missed those couple of short birdie putts on the back nine, early on the back nine,



suddenly the lead was at three, and if I miss that putt on 14, it's suddenly two.

So what he was doing today was very special. Certainly it made this day a lot more stressful than I felt like it should have been after that start.

Q. As you look back on the last few years, was there a point where you kind of realized, okay, I belong here and then maybe more recently a point where you feel like you can really be with the best, kind of what do you think you can be going forward?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it took me -- I would say even as an amateur, I was lucky enough to play a couple of PGA TOUR events as an amateur. I played a couple of majors as an amateur. That experience was really good for me because I'm very hard on myself and I felt like even though I had the game to compete, I never truly believed it. But after I had a couple of nice finishes in those professional events as an amateur, I started to believe a little bit more. I came out on TOUR, I got my card right away, and I kept on just putting up good finishes, and that's when I kind of believed that, man, I don't have to play my best game and still be up there and still be really competitive.

But at the time I didn't have all the tools. Ever since then I've just kind of improved all the time. I've just gotten better and better every single year, and with that comes the belief and I feel like the belief was the last missing piece.

Q. When did you think you really had this thing won today with Xander coming at you all day? Just talk about that huge putt on 14, please.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I would have liked to have made those couple putts last night. I was thinking about that. I had such a hard time falling asleep because I was like, man, if I make that putt on 17 and 18, I have an eight-shot lead. That's a lot different from a six-shot lead.

Even though I felt like I was playing great, I knew it was still possible with a six-shot lead. I can play fine and shoot 1- or 2-under or even just even par and play fine and still get beat by someone like Xander because he's such a good player. He obviously loves this golf course. He put up a 62 today. Even with that start I was 4-under through 6 and I still didn't feel like I had the tournament won because



there's so much that can happen on the back nine. If I missed the putt on 14, it could have been a different story. So, yeah, it was just a long day.

Q. What's been the significance of adding Joe Mayo to your team?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, he's been awesome. I've known him for a long time. We've been texting back and forth for a long time, but not really about the golf swing, just we've always had a great relationship. He's a very interesting guy. I like just picking people's brains, and he's an interesting brain to pick.

Ever since he's been on the team it's been great to have someone kind of look at my game from a completely different standpoint. He kind of came into -- he might be one of the only golf instructors that never watches golf. So when he came on board, he had no idea how I played, what I was doing, what it looked like. So he kind of had a fresh set of eyes.

Yeah, he's just brought a lot of math and physics to my golf game and we've just applied that, put a lot of hours in, and funny enough it works.

Q. How much do you think about money when you play and how much did you think about money this week, if at all?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Obviously it's a lot of cash you're playing for. I mean, it's in the back of your mind. But I live in Stillwater, Oklahoma. Money goes a long ways there. It's not like I'm spending money out the wazoo every week. I don't need a lot to be happy. I don't need a lot to live within my means.

So obviously it's nice for my family to have that protection and my, you know, eventual kids, that I'll have in the future. It's nice to have that, but it's not something that drives me, it's not something that gives me meaning. I find meaning in other places. But obviously with how society works, money is something you need.

Q. You said the belief comes last. When did the belief come that you could have a season like this and do this?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I can't point to a single -- or a specific moment, but it's just when I start to see the short game kind of come around and I believe I have all the shots. I just saw the shots that I was able to pull off in tournaments and in highly stressful situations. I coupled that with the course management stuff and just the attitude, just handling bad bounces, handling bogeys, handling bad

shots. Just those three aspects combined, when I started to see that, I wasn't stressed when I showed up to a golf tournament or a golf course. It was like, okay, whatever happens happens. I might play bad and that's okay.

But I didn't feel like -- even today it wasn't like, man, I hope the double cross with the driver doesn't show up today. I hope I don't 3-putt today. I hope I don't chunk the chips today. You know, that might happen, but it's okay. I think just as soon as I made that mindset change everything started to kind of come together.

Q. Where do you think that desire to try anything and everything that you think will make you better, where does that come?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Well, I will say I'm a pretty analytical person and I do like to try new things because it's fun. You never know what's going to be on the other side of that door. But it's not like I try new things willy-nilly and usually there's at least a somewhat reasonable hypothesis before you try something new. And I give it a couple chances. Okay, it didn't work out. We'll scrap that.

But if you see an improvement it's like, okay, hang on, we're on to something. Let's go down this rabbit hole and see where it leads. And I think that's -- I've been very beneficial having smart people around me that are able to at least guide me down the smart rabbit holes and not get lost in the perimeters.

Q. Any plans for tonight?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't know. I mean, it's already 8:30 here. I'm sure we're going to get some good dinner and have a couple drinks and just kind of enjoy. It's been a long week, and I sweated so much this week, so I'm kind of just getting ready to take it easy and just soak it all in.

Q. Having a 16-foot par putt after a two-hour break, was that stressful during that break?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: A little bit. I try not to think about it too much because obviously I had a nice start birdieing the first hole. Xander hit one -- he had birdied the first hole as well, and he had a nice opportunity on No. 2. So I was thinking, okay, yeah, I have a six-shot lead, but if I miss my putt and he makes his now it's suddenly four and it's a ball game.

So that was a huge putt to kind of come back from the break and make that immediately and maintain that six-shot lead. That was big.

Q. You also said on Thursday the tee shot on 15 was



kind of anxiety-inducing and you played it 2-under for the week. Do you think that anxiety in both of those scenarios maybe helped you or helped you play it smarter?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't know. That's a good question. I don't think it's -- I think it's hard to know for sure. Sometimes you definitely need a little bit of that stress to kind of focus a little bit better, pull off a better shot. I don't know. I think it was -- you know it certainly helped me in the situation today that the tees were up, because it was a pitching wedge, so I could just kind of hit it past the pin and 2-putt it. It's a hard one to birdie.

But if the pin is -- or if the tees are all the way back there to, for example, that pin, that becomes a little different challenge. But, no, certainly it's a hole that gets your attention every single time you step on there.

Q. Back to the money question. After back-to-back wins, is your Chipotle order going to be any different with maybe the little financial security?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I'm a man of routine, so I kind of stick to the same order. But I haven't had Chipotle in a little while. Maybe it's time to switch it up again.

Q. Jakob Ingebrigtsen won the 5000 earlier today. Were you aware of that as you were playing or do you have any relationship with that?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I got to meet him last year, actually, right before Christmas. I met him and all of his brothers. Their family is incredibly interesting. They work super, super hard. Just the way they go about their business is extremely professional and it's fun to see them do well. It's not just them, but it's -- there's so many good athletes coming up and performing well in summer sports that Norway traditionally hasn't been the best in. So I think that's really cool to see and really cool to see Jakob get that win. That's incredible.

Q. What do you think the response will be back home and are you bigger than Pettersen now?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: (Laughing.) She's the queen. She will always be. Women's golf and men's golf, we'll treat those separately. What she's done for the game in Norway is very special. I was lucky to meet her when I was a junior and I remember I was very intimidated just being around her. Not only is she a great golfer, but I knew she was a little bit different when I just got to be around her and talk to her. I have a lot of respect for her and, yeah, just very proud to be Norwegian.

Q. We saw you take a little break in the middle of the season, go home play, with some friends. I'm just wondering, you seem very refreshed coming back from that, obviously a lot of success. What did that do for you in the middle of the year?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, obviously the PGA TOUR is -- it's a lot of fun to play golf for a living. I have no complaints. But sometimes you play week-in, week-out, and maybe you don't perform as well as you would have liked, and it can get a little frustrating. It's almost like you live in a little bit of a bubble. You think about the putt you missed, short-siding yourself. Sometimes it's just good to get out of that bubble a little bit and just start over again.

That's what I feel like I get every time I go home. Even though I do play a decent amount of golf when I go home, but it's a totally different setting. Some of the golf courses at home are -- they're fun to play, but they're nowhere near East Lake, for example, or any course you'll find on the PGA TOUR. Just playing with my buddies that are -- either some of 'em are professional golfers and some of 'em are 20 handicappers. It's just fun to be out there and talk smack and just be yourself and have fun. So I think that those couple weeks that I had is very beneficial for me.

Q. Following on that, what is the golf season like in Norway? When you were coming up, was it a detriment trying to get good when obviously there was times of the year you probably couldn't play?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I wouldn't say it's conducive to playing the PGA TOUR. You're so far away. Just from everything, the quality of the golf courses, it's not quite the same. It's not as in great of a shape. The season is not very long. You add up all those things up, it's very hard to play golf for a living.

But I would say I used the time very well. The time that I had indoors I worked a lot on my golf swing. I just tried to find some ways to get better, even though my facilities were a little bit limited. I sought out people that I could learn from.

So, in a way, maybe it teaches you other things that maybe I wouldn't have learned if I lived in the United States and I grew up on some country club. You kind of take those things for granted. I think it maybe helped me when I got to Oklahoma State and we had a qualifying or just a normal day, just a regular day, playing with the guys on the team. I would take every single day very seriously because every day I had home in the summer I couldn't just waste away the day because in a couple months it's winter and I can't play outside. So every single day I tried to get its most out of, and I think that really helped me.

Q. As nice as you seem to be in person, what level would you give your killer instinct?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I don't think it's something that's been innate in me. I just seem to -- especially the last couple weeks, when I'm in contention and I failed a lot of times in that spot, I think I just learned from it and instead of when I make one mistake and I'm in contention, seeing kind of the snowball go the wrong way, and I'm like, man, is this going to happen again or, come on, why did you just do that, and those thoughts kind of come into your head, I think I was -- I don't know, I think just me slowing everything down and not showing a lot of emotion kind of helps me calm myself down and I can perform at a higher level.

That's the least how I can explain it. But I'm not just the guy, if I make a putt, go absolutely crazy. I might give it a little fist pump, but the less emotions I can kind of give away when I'm in that -- when I'm in contention, I think it's the better for me.

Q. Is your fire burning pretty good inside?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: What's that?

Q. Is your fire, is it burning pretty good inside as you're playing? Not showing it.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I would say so. I'm telling myself, you know, I'm not going to let this go. This putt is going in. I know this is the right read. I know I got the right stroke. Just focused on the pace. Almost just will the put in, if that makes sense. And when it goes in it's like, heck, yeah, I knew I was going to make that putt. And then let's go to the next hole and birdie that hole. You kind of have to be in that mindset.

Q. You're kind of getting excitable right now, by the way.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: (Laughing.)

Q. Last thing, 36-under the last two weeks. Did it feel easy to you, as hard as you worked?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: No, it never feels easy. But it's nice when you get into those rhythms and you just trust the shots that you hit and you see the pin, you hit the pin and you make the putt. Sometimes it just happens easily. But it never feels easy. I don't know how to explain it. But it's just, those two weeks, every single facet of my game has kind of come together. That doesn't mean that there aren't things to improve. I feel like I definitely left a few shots out

there both of the weeks. But it's fun when every single part of your game comes together for two weeks straight. I mean, that just doesn't happen all that often. But I think that's a testament to the great information that I've gotten and just all the hard work that I've put into it.

Q. Which of the majors, either this year or last that you had a great chance at winning stung the most?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Honestly, they didn't. I know I finished second at the PGA. Obviously that bunker shot on 16, that was a dagger. Obviously being in the final group with Rory at St. Andrews. Those were huge moments. I definitely felt like if I were to play those tournaments again or that last round again right now I feel like it would have been a slightly different result. But at the same time I try not to think of it as a disappointment and things that are going to hold me back and haunt me for the rest of my life. It's just, okay, I had an opportunity and it didn't work out. What can I take from that experience and come back and change that the next time I have that opportunity. Because, yeah, when you break it down, you don't have that many moments when you're in the final group of a major championship. You kind of have to seize those opportunities. But the more you think about that and think, man, I better not blow it again this time. That's not really conducive to your goal. You got to just be, all right, let's, what can we do, what can we learn from it and hopefully next time around you can win.

Q. What did you learn from those moments that got you to this point today?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It comes back to the belief. The small parts. Obviously the short game. The major championship golf courses are hard and you're going to miss greens. I believe now I can get the ball up and down when I miss the greens. Instead of feeling like, oh, man, I'm going toe-to-toe up against Brooks Koepka or Rory McIlroy or whoever it might be in those major championships, I have to fire at every single pin to beat them. It's like, no, I don't have to do that. I can play smart, middle of the green. If I make a couple putts, we're right there. But I'm not going to give this tournament away. That's kind of been the biggest lesson that I've gathered from those major championships in particular.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Viktor Hovland, our 2023 FedExCup champion. Congratulations.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Thank you.

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