

WM Phoenix Open

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TPC Scottsdale

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference



DOUG MILNE: We'd like to welcome World No. 3, Viktor Hovland. Thanks for joining us for a few minutes prior to the start of the 2022 WM Phoenix Open.

You started here once before, missed the cut. When you came back, were you able to pick up anything from 2020 when you were here last, or is it kind of a whole new learning experience?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, a little bit. I was pretty green when I showed up here two years ago, and especially with all the people that are out here, it was certainly a process trying to get comfortable.

But it feels like it's so long ago, it's kind of hard, and I feel like I was a different player back then too, so it's kind of showing up, trying to -- yeah, it almost feels like I'm playing the course for the first time again.

DOUG MILNE: As far as the season goes, you started late last year, just a great season, highlighted obviously by your win in Mayakoba for the second consecutive season, your third PGA TOUR title, and obviously the win in Dubai, significant, as well.

Just some comments on how you're feeling heading into the week, confidence level and what you feel is going right with the game.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: No, I feel great. It's been kind of -- it's been very much up and down for all those tournaments, because some of those tournaments I feel like I haven't played my best, but then not taking advantage of kind of the good rounds that I was able to, you know, get together and then I had some not-so-good rounds but it ended up being good enough, and then a crazy finish. Yeah, it's just been a lot of stuff going on.

I feel like I'm hitting the ball well, so if I can just kind of keep it in play and get the putter going, I like my chances this week.

Q. Congratulations on all your success recently. Do

you ever have moments where you sit back and think, this is crazy, the trajectory I'm on? And how am I World No. 3 already?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, a little bit (smiling). It's kind of crazy. It's hard to think that way when you're constantly traveling and playing tournaments. You don't really have a lot of time to just kind of sit down and think about that too much.

It's always, Okay, I've got to work on my chipping, I've got to work out, tee time, pro-am, it's just go, go, go, go all the time and you're looking forward to the next event.

But it was nice, after coming back from Dubai I had a week off, and we had a snowstorm in Stillwater, so I was locked in the house for three days and ran out of food. I was just in there just in a coma just kind of letting it all sink in.

It's nice to have kind of moments like that where you just kind of don't do anything and relax, but I try not to get too caught up in the moment either. It's always, you know, think about the processes, trying to get better, and, yeah, enjoy the process.

Q. Charles Howell was in here earlier, it's his 600th start this week. He thinks of you sometimes as a little brother. Did he tell you anything about playing on TOUR that was helpful or that got you prepared that otherwise maybe you wouldn't have known?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It was just kind of, because obviously I didn't really know Charles that well before kind of my -- I played Mayakoba, that was my first TOUR event, but I was still an amateur, and like it's a big change going from college golf to the PGA TOUR, and I didn't know him that well but he kind of welcomed me with open arms. Especially that first year when I was playing on exemptions, I didn't really know anyone.

I was still kind of getting to know Shay Knight, my caddy. We are good friends now, but everything is just brand new, and I really appreciate him and his family. I was basically their third child there for a good year. We were going to escape rooms and doing all fun stuff (smiling).



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So it was more, you know, just kind of being with people that are great and want to help you. Not so much, Okay, this is where you need to hit it. This is how you need to think.

It was just kind of I think a big part of the battle is just getting comfortable out here, and I think he really helped me with just kind of feeling not at home but just kind of, you know, making me believe in kind of my skillset and just kind of feeling comfortable.

Q. Something Tiger always talked about was learning how to win. Seems like in the last couple of times you have had an opportunity you have taken that opportunity. How would you compare your emotions in crunch time now to, like you said, two years ago?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I would say obviously I have gotten better at it because I have won more. But it's a unique feeling every single time, because, I mean, it's the same adrenaline, same pressure that you feel. You know, just going back 15 years ago, if I was playing a junior match against a buddy and we had 10 bucks on the line or whatever, just playing a random tournament, you still feel, it's the same pressure that you feel.

But I think just kind of the more times I have put myself in that position and I have seen myself do well under those circumstances, you kind of just -- you get a bit more comfortable every single time, but it's still pretty stressful every single time you're in there, because time slows down. Yeah, it's not like you can just hit one good shot and then win or lose. It's like you have to, you know, if you're coming down the stretch on the back 9, you have to hit good shots upon good shots upon good shots, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, so it's pretty nerve-racking.

Q. It seems like at least in the media the only thing people are talking about is the rival leagues and the money stuff. How much is that conversation happening between players?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I haven't talked too much about that stuff with other players. It's been some, but I think just right now there is so much unknown, and that's kind of -- you know, yeah, you can talk about it, but then if we don't know too much either, it's hard to talk about too much.

So, you know, we are kind of still trying to figure this stuff out. I certainly love playing on the PGA TOUR and it's good to be back here after a little trip over on the DP World Tour.

But, you know, I'm playing a bunch of PGA TOUR events

coming up, and we'll kind of see what happens after that. I don't really know what's going to happen. But I'm just focusing on this event and next week and after that.

Q. Could you talk about the conditions of the course that you saw today? When Brooks and Jon Rahm were in, they talked about how firm the greens were.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's a good test. You know, it's desert golf, not really a lot of wind. You'd think it would be pretty easy, but just with how the greens are so firm and fast, it's hard to get real close to the pins. Even if you hit a good shot and it rolls out to 40 feet, it's even hard just to two-putt it.

I think ball striking is going to be very important. If you can drive it well out here, you can really set up some birdie looks, but if not, you're going to be grinding all day. I think it will be a good test this week.

Q. Everyone here talks about 16 and the party atmosphere and all that. How have you seen other tournaments, other events try to recreate something similar? When you don't have 20,000 people, maybe 5,000, 4,000, how does that affect what you do every day?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, no, it's an event like no other. I wouldn't really say it's a good thing if everyone tries to create kind of what the 16th hole is here. I think it's better if -- I think they are already doing that with each event kind of making it their own, kind of putting some uniqueness to each event. I think that's a better recipe than just trying to, Okay, let's create 16th at Waste Management.

I think it is cool, you have places like 17th at Sawgrass. It's loud, it's a sick hole, frankly. But it's unique in its own way.

I think we need more of that, but at the same time it doesn't need to go overboard where, you know, if we get to a point where 16th out here gets boring, I don't think that's good either.

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