

AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am

Tuesday, January 31, 2023

Pebble Beach, California, USA

Pebble Beach Golf Links

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome Viktor Hovland to the interview room here at the AT&T Pebble Beach pro-am. Viktor, a very special place for you here at Pebble Beach. What's it like to be back?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's really fun. Played here every year in college and played a U.S. Amateur, U.S. Open, and then played the first year here as a pro.

Gotten to play Pebble a lot of times, but it's been three years since then, so it's really cool to come back and get a reminder of how special the place really is.

THE MODERATOR: Been looking at your stats. You made a start here at Pebble in 2020 and went on to win your next start. Anything special to adding this to your schedule?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Never thought of that, to be honest, but that's a cool thing. But would like to win this week, so we'll start with that.

THE MODERATOR: Just some comments on your form heading into the week.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, took some time off over the break and was very rusty in Hawai'i, so I've had three good weeks to practice and feel like I'm getting back into it. It's going to be a lot of golf going forward the next few weeks, so trying to get into a good rhythm and feel like the ball-striking is coming back.

Q. You're in the early stages of your fourth season on TOUR. When you look back to your rookie year, what is the most significant way you've grown, would you say?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it feels like a long time ago, but time has gone by very quickly. I would say when I first came out I had maybe not as high of a ceiling, but what I really thought I did a great job of was that I was very consistent.

Like I had one shot, and I would kind of hit that regardless of what the hole or where the wind was coming from. I would just find a way to fit that little cut in everywhere. Sometimes that bothered me a little bit because I felt like I capped myself, but at the same time, it's very valuable to have something or a ball flight that you know what it's going to do.

You might not hit it perfect, but you at least know where it's going to go. You can play smart. You can play away from trouble and stuff like that. I'm trying to kind of get more of that consistency back a little bit, but at the same time, I've got more speed, I can hit it higher, I can draw it. I'm a way better putter, and I feel like my short game is really starting to come around.

I'm a way better player than I was back then, but yeah, really appreciated the consistency I had in my ball flight back then.

Q. You've had success here not only at Pebble, but just at the U.S. Open, the USGA. What about this place really speaks to your game?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I mean, I really like that the greens are small, and you've got to drive it well. There are some tricky tee shots out here, but if you can put the ball in the fairway, it's a lot of short irons into these small greens, and I just really think it fits my game.

I remember especially U.S. Open, I don't think I missed a fairway on the front nine the whole tournament and only missed a handful of tournaments the whole week, and I was able to just kind of give myself a lot of birdie looks. You do that out here when the conditions get a little tougher, you're going to gain some shots.

Q. You've been good for a long time, but you were good coming out on TOUR, and it seems like there's a number of players who when they are good and they reach that next really big stage, they have to get better, and you spoke more of the consistency, which obviously would build into confidence with the start you had. Were you ever tempted to try and raise your game to the level that you are now playing at, if that

makes sense?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, no, I think that's -- it could be a trap, like a lot of guys when they first came out would come out, you're standing right next to Rory, a lot of guys that have done well for a long time, and you look, man, that looks really nice.

Not that I was doubting myself, but it's like, you always want to try to kind of elevate your game, and I think that is a good direction to try to go with your game, but you've got to be also careful what you're risking, as well, and just be cognizant that okay, how do we get better with the least amount of risk involved, and you don't want to change who you are as a player to get to that next step.

I think that's a struggle that we're always kind of battling because you want to get better without getting worse.

Q. What brings you here?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Well, I wanted to play last week, I just didn't quite feel like I was ready to.

Q. Last week in --

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Torrey. Just been too much traveling, so I wanted to stay in the States. But I wanted to play last week. I love Torrey. Just didn't quite feel like I was ready.

But I really got the itch to play and I just entered this week, and as I said, it's been three years since last time I was here, and just felt like it was time to come back.

Q. You like it here, though?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I love it.

Q. So that leads to my weird question. Do you watch a lot of women's golf?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I do not.

Q. Would you find yourself inclined to tune into the Women's Open this year, which is at Pebble for the first time?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I actually didn't know that. Yeah, sure.

Q. I'm not holding you to it. I'm just curious if the course is such that it would make you curious to see how it goes?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I always enjoy watching golf on TV if I've been to the course before because you're familiar with some of the shots, and I think it's very impressive to watch women's golf when you just -- always hitting fairways, and the greens out here are so small, and just don't seem to make mistakes.

I really appreciate watching that.

Q. Speaking of the homeland, did you pay much attention to Suzann Pettersen when you were a kid?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: A little bit, yeah, of course. I remember when she won at Evian, and she's been such a great player for a long time. I think a lot of people back home looked up to her.

Q. You mentioned short game is a focus for you and improvement. What exactly have you been working on? Where do you feel like you are in terms of that range of where you ultimately want to go with your short game?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, I think the number one thing is that a lot of what you do in the short game is usually just Anna abbreviation of what you do in the full swing, but what I do in the full swing does not necessarily lend itself for good short game technique. So I've just had to find ways to make my short game work without, as I said earlier, changing kind of my DNA, and for me, I've had to try to turn my -- I had to pivot a little bit more with my body and lower body instead of just using all my arms.

Number one thing is that my left arm kind of gets disconnected from my upper body and tends to lean the shaft, so I'm trying to use my upper body more to control the speed of the shot and almost feel like my head is raising up and getting out of the ground because you don't have speed or time as a luxury in the short game.

So you've got to find a way to shallow the club out without turning your body or bending the left arm.

For me, I've been, yeah, just focusing almost like standing up a little bit, and it's helped. You've got to find a way to shallow the club out without turning your body or bending the left arm. For me, I've been, yeah, just focusing on almost standing up a little bit, and it's helped.

Q. You posted a fun Instagram post yesterday, just creating a cool shot you added back in 2018. Can you tell us about that shot back in 2018 and how cool it was trying to recreate it yesterday?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I remember they put the tee up

in the match play, and I think I hit driver every time the tee was up there, and I hit great shots there, but that one time I sliced it a little bit and it just rolled down there in the ice plant, and I was expecting to just take a drop up there and try to make an up-and-down for a par because Devin had hit it in the left bunker, but then I go down there and I see I have a great lie, so I just figured, okay, I'll go down there and try to hit it.

Yeah, as I walked down there I couldn't really see the pin or anything, just opened up a sand wedge and hit it pretty hard, and walk up there and it's a tap-in for a birdie and I ended up winning the hole. That was a very special moment, and haven't been back there since then, so I figured, yeah, why not go down there and try it again.

Q. What's your favorite hole on the course?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: That's a good one. There's so many iconic shots. 7 is awesome. I really like the second shot on 6, second shot on 8. 18 is really cool. There's so many just spectacular shots. I've got to go with 18 even though it's probably a little bit cliché. But 18 is pretty cool.

Q. What's the most boring hole on the course?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: 10 maybe. Up the hill -- or is that 11? 11 is a bit boring. I'd say 15 is kind of -- not a nothing hole, but it doesn't quite fit the rest of the holes I would say.

Q. Have you ever seen the forward tee?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: On the right? Yeah, we played there in the U.S. Am two times, and it's a pretty cool hole because it's a really tough driving hole, and I hit driver a couple times, and you give yourself a wedge.

But it's a tough tee shot, and the further you go, and if you pull it, you bail out from the water. Well, now you're in the rough, and especially when they put those pins in the back left, you've got no angle. So it's a tricky shot. Either you just lay up and give yourself a longer club back, or you take on driver, but then you've really got to be aggressive.

I think it completely changes the hole.

Q. Are you still in Stillwater?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I am, yeah.

Q. What would be a daily routine in Stillwater, and have you ever considered moving?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: No, I love it there, but I am starting to kind of feel like it might be time for a change.

Q. Tulsa or --

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I don't know. I haven't figured that out yet, but I'm thinking about something. But especially this time of the year it gets pretty cold, so I'm not getting up in the morning early to go out and practice. I get up and get some breakfast and kind of sit around and chill, maybe go and work out, and then I usually go out to the course at lunchtime and will practice for a couple hours and maybe go play with the guys on the golf team.

Q. What do you do for fun in Stillwater?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I mean, I just take it easy. I mean, I'll go out to dinner with a couple of guys, but that's about it. Yeah, I just kind of enjoy being in Stillwater, just kind of doing the things that I'm supposed to be doing, trying to get better, and it's more -- I get to do more things when I'm out traveling, and it's usually pretty busy, so then when I'm home, I like to just kind of lay flat and yeah, take it easy.

Q. Do you play (indiscernible)?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Occasionally, yeah.

Q. If you don't, what's your go-to airport?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Stillwater Airport. It's five minutes away from my house and free parking, so that's nice. There's a couple flights a day to Dallas, so it's pretty easy. You get to Dallas, you can fly anywhere. Yeah, it's a nice thing to have there.

Q. In the past when we've asked you about why you still lived in Stillwater, kind of the response was you were just another guy there, you were with your friends that kept you grounded. When you look for this new place, how do you keep that mentality of staying a normal guy, not be caught up sometimes in the trappings of fame that come with being a PGA TOUR player?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's not really something that I think about all that much. I mean, it's just kind of a byproduct of being in Stillwater. I think that's a great thing.

But other priorities is who do I have to hang out there, is the golf course any good, do I get to do whatever I want, or is it really strict with a lot of rules, how's the weather. There's a lot of other things that kind of come before that, but well-being is important.

You don't want to be in a place where you don't feel like you belong or where you kind of have to tiptoe your way



around or you can't do the things that you want to do.

Obviously that plays a role.

Q. You're viewed especially by your peers as someone who is very grounded and humble. Is there anyone you take that direction from on TOUR?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, we've been lucky. Going to Oklahoma State, you get to meet a lot of the guys that played for us and that were out on TOUR. Just spending time with Rickie when we were in school was really cool to see. He really had a kind of superstar fame to him, but you wouldn't really know when you hang out with him and talk to him. He was just kind of a regular guy.

I'd say the same with hanging out with Charles Howell when I first came out on TOUR. And yeah, we're lucky we have a cool fraternity at Oklahoma State where most of the guys here are very grounded and they always want the best for you.

If you reach out and have any questions, they're there for you and want to help out, so yeah, that's really cool to see.

Q. Do you ever spend any time with Scott Verplank?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I do occasionally when I go down to Oak Tree because I'll play there a couple times a week, and every time I go down there he's always hanging out and working on his game and trying to get better.

Q. What are those conversations like?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, he's a cool guy and he's very smart and he's very opinionated, as well, so it's fun to kind of ask him some questions and hear what he has to say.

Yeah, it's just always a cool hang to go down there and see him and some of the other legends around there.

Q. The pro-am portion of the tournament, do you like it? Or is it more of a grind?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't mind it. But I'd prefer to play fast, and I'm here to obviously try to win the golf tournament, so it depends on the partner, as well, I think.

But obviously you want to have fun and play well, but I think if the weather is nice, you have a good partner and you're playing well, I think it almost accentuates the experience a little bit. But then at the same time, if the weather is bad and you don't get along with your partner and you're playing bad, that's the flipside of it.

But I do enjoy it. I think it's very unique to be able to play a PGA TOUR event with an amateur, and you get to kind of have a little bit of a different feel to it. It feels more relaxed.

Q. Could you imagine this tournament without a -- although did you play during the COVID here?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: No, I did not. Yeah, that would be a different -- is that what they did when they had the tournament here last time? Yeah, I feel like that would have been a little different dynamic. Just maybe feels a little bit empty.

It feels like it's more of a happening now when you get some celebrities, you get a lot more -- just feels like there's more going on. I think Pebble and this area deserves that.

Q. With Jordan Spieth's second at 8, what was your take on it, and what would you do if you had the same shot in that situation?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's actually crazy, because I remember at the U.S. Amateur here, my good buddy Zach Bauchou, he did the exact same thing. I think he hit a 3-wood off the tee there and he had two holes left, and I think he had to shoot even the last two holes or something like that, maybe 1-over to get into a playoff or something for the match play, and he was in the exact same spot.

There's a video on his Facebook or something where he hits the shot, but I think he was -- I can't quite remember Jordan's like follow-through, but it was almost like you were trying to follow through backwards to make sure you're not ending up down in there.

We played Pebble yesterday and we walked up there just to see, and it seems like they've grown up the rough there to try to prevent balls to kind of sit on the edge there. It's a pretty scary shot looking down there. It's probably a good 100 feet down there.

Q. Are you afraid of heights?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Not really, but I think if you're not afraid of that shot, that's not very rational.

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