

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Tuesday, March 2, 2021

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference



RACHEL NOBLE: We would like to welcome Viktor Hovland to the interview room here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Currently No. 2 in the FedExCup standings, highest position of any player in the field. Coming off a T-2 finish last week at The Concession. Just some comments on your momentum and the strength of your game heading into this week.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, the last few events I've been very good. I played, just played some very solid golf, kind of the last couple weeks I feel like my long game has been pretty good, been good off the tee, a little up-and-down with the iron game, but mostly tee to green has kind of made it possible for me to have these consistent finishes. It's just kind of a matter of making a couple more putts and getting a few more chips up-and-down. But I've just kind of improved all the different areas of my game and I feel like that's why I've been so consistent lately.

RACHEL NOBLE: And then you're making your third start at Arnold Palmer's event. How much have you learned here and during your time on TOUR about his legacy?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean honestly I didn't really know much, growing up in Norway, until first when I came and played the Palmer Cup as a freshman in college. I played it twice. The second time was over in France. And obviously I played as an amateur my first year here two years ago.

So it's been cool to just learn about how much he and the foundation, how much they have done to charity and kind of help other people that are less fortunate. And obviously just learning about all the tournaments that Arnold Palmer won and the manner that he did it as well. He had such a charismatic persona and, yeah, it's cool to look back at some of his clubs.

RACHEL NOBLE: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. How much more confident are you right now than when you, before you started this six top 6 finishes in your last seven starts?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I would say I was -- I was actually pretty confident going back to the Houston Open, I would say. I was hitting the ball -- that's kind of the first few tournaments where I started to gain some more speed, started hitting it a little bit harder with the driver. And my short game was getting a little bit better, that's kind of when I kind of saw the start of that. And that was the first week I took Aimpoint into play on the greens and I think I gained like two or three shots putting that week. So I feel like that was kind of the start of my good play.

Then I think Mexico was the next tournament that I played and I won that. And then I went home over the break and I came back to Hawaii and I was a little rusty after not playing for a couple weeks. So, but after that I've really kind of gotten into a rhythm of knowing what I need to do kind of each week to make sure my game is in the right spot.

Q. That just comes with the natural maturation of a young player learning things out here in professional golf?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Can you say that again?

Q. Is that just part of the process as a young player learning each and every week whether it's hotel rooms, restaurants and all that, is this just part of that natural process?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I think so. Obviously just a part of getting comfortable, but it's just, I honestly feel like it's more than that. I feel like I've really changed as a player now compared to let's say six months ago. Every single area of my game is, I would say, very, very different.

I'm hitting it further, I'm not curving it as much left-to-right as I used to off the tee. I can hit my irons higher. I'm swinging it a little faster so that helps out of the rough, etcetera. My short game's better, I'm using more bounce, I can hit more shots. And putting, I can actually read putts consistently. Before it was just a guess. So it's like it's really cool to look at, I feel like just every single part of my game has dramatically changed. Doesn't mean I'll be



playing well every single week, but at least I have a better potential to.

Q. I know it's been two days and I know we talked to you last week about this, does what happened on Friday pop into your head more or does what you contended, despite what happened on Friday pop into your head more?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's kind of a glass half full or half empty kind of way of looking at it. It would be a little different if that was one of my last few holes for the whole tournament and I ended up finishing second.

But I kind of, after two days, if I would have shot 1-under, 3-under, just kind of making some bogeys and some birdies here and there, and happen to play really well over the weekend, I would be pretty happy about it, I would be pretty excited about my performance.

So I kind of think of it more that way, that I was able to kind of make a disaster that have last hole the second day and still have a chance to win the tournament. That's kind of the overall takeaway.

Q. Do you know anybody who knew Arnold well and if so what was the most perspective thing you picked up about Arnold from that person?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I have not really talked to very many people that were really close to Arnold. I remember when I was actually here two years ago I got to talk to Arnold's old agent and got to know him a little bit and he kind of gave me a little tour of some of the history around the place and kind of what he used to do and all that stuff. So that was very interesting to learn something about. It's been two years now, so it's not all in my memory, but I remember that experience was pretty cool.

Q. Do you think that might have been a man named Doc Giffin, an older man, he would be close to 90, probably, if not a little older. Very formal, wearing a sports jacket probably?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yes, yes, that's a hundred percent on.

Q. We're in the Doc Giffin Press Tent, they call it the media center, but Doc would want to call it a press tent. On a related note, when you think of Tiger in this tournament what comes to mind for you?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's, he's won this tournament so many times and in a very similar fashion, it's like it's hard to separate which year he did what. Which one did

he throw his hat or which one did he fist pump like this, you know, yeah, he's got a lot of iconic memories out here and I've certainly watched some of them when I was growing up.

So, yeah, it's a very cool spot and especially with kind of how the holes are set up, a lot of water, some really tough holes. I mean it's either make or break on some of those holes, so it just kind of allows for a lot of cool kind of situations like that.

Q. When you see Collin win last week and you're chasing, you guys, maybe it's a rivalry made up by the media or something, but you he and Matthew seem to kind of be linked at least. Does that motivate you when you see him doing so well and how do you guys draw off each other?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I wouldn't say it's just Collin specifically, I would say any guy that wins, that's kind of motivating to see, because you want to be that guy the next week. But, no, Collin has obviously had an amazing start to his career and he's a guy I enjoy being around, he's easy to root for, so it was cool to see him win.

I'm a little disappointed I didn't give him a little better run for his money, but we can see if we can do a better job next time.

Q. Bay Hill, the course, just played brutally last year, I was looking just now, you closed with a 77, you weren't alone. What do you remember about that in terms of where it ranked against the other courses you played last year and what do you expect this week?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean it's -- I just remember even going a year back further when I played here my first time, I remember I played in the Monday pro-am and I mean the greens were soft -- golf course played long, but when the greens are soft it's pretty gettable -- and the greens were rolling about a nine. And that was one of my, the first PGA TOUR events that I played as an amateur, I think it was the third one, and I was like, is it going to be like this the whole week? You know, I wasn't sure.

And then you make the cut and you get to Saturday and I mean, it's just a way different golf course. Last year, obviously I think Tyrrell won at 4-under, I mean it was just, it was just a beast. I think I made the cut on the number and I shot even par the third day and just moved up a bunch of spots.

So especially with the pins, greens almost turned purple and the wind starts howling, I mean it's just a beast of a course, especially with so much water out there.



Q. You talk about all parts of your game improving since you turned pro. What part needed the most improvement and impresses you the most?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: That's a good question. It's hard to say because like I can answer it from a strokes-gained perspective and my ball striking was already good when I turned pro, so there wasn't a whole lot that I could really necessarily improve on, but the fact that I've gotten some more speed I think really helps just, not necessarily the weeks that I'm on and hitting it in the fairway, but even when I'm hitting poor shots and I'm in the rough, at least now I'm 15 or 20 yards further up in the rough and I can actually convert those misses into actually green hits on a golf course like this where -- we're talking Bay Hill -- where the rough is thick and length really does matter, because you're not going to hit every single fairway.

But it's really hard to, it's hard to say because like putting I'm a way better putter right now than I was when I first turned pro, even though I'm going to have some weeks probably where I'm losing strokes to the field for a given week, but at least I have a system now that I can kind of trust to putt well. Sometimes it doesn't work, but at least like I'm a lot closer to making the putts, even though I miss.

So, I don't know, I would say Aimpoint's really helped me and just kind of the added speed.

Q. When you look back at that kid that used to hit balls into the abandoned airplane hangar in Norway, how big were your dreams? I mean, you've done so much already so early, how big were you dreaming at the time?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: That's a good question. I mean I've always just kind of dreamt of just, I mean nothing really specific, just kind of I want to play golf for a living. I would love to just wake up and play golf every single day. I think that was kind of the dream. And I would have some older guys to look up to Kristoffer Ventura is one of them, he's a couple years older than me and he was really, really good when I was younger, obviously still is, but he was elite. And it was cool to kind of look at the success that he had in the states before I went to Oklahoma State with him. And Henrik Bjornstad is the only or the first PGA TOUR player to come out of Norway, just kind of watching him play.

So I wanted to kind of just be a part of that in the future, but to what capacity, I didn't really, yeah, I didn't really specify it.

Q. Quick question about next week and THE PLAYERS. If you go down the rankings at the moment

there are only two of the top-20, Rory and Webb, who have won THE PLAYERS Championship, which is obviously a pretty big tournament. Do you think that's just a fluke, do you think that that's going to start to change starting next week or next week and beyond?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: That's interesting. I mean it's, like it's such a stacked field that literally everyone or anyone can win in that tournament. And I don't know, that's a good question. Yeah, I don't know how to answer that. It could be just a fluke, but obviously there's some big holes coming down the stretch where if you are the better player or you are a little bit more used to being in the moment, I would think that certainly helps because, I mean, it's such a fine line between hitting a good shot and ending up in the water on either 16, 17 or 18.

So there's always some luck that comes into winning the golf tournament, so, I mean, I would say it is somewhat of a fluke, I would say the top 20 guys should have a pretty good chance to win the tournament.

Q. With Arnold Palmer and everything that's kind of been going on with COVID, how important is it for you to be playing in this tournament this weekend?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean I don't know to what capacity we're going to have fans out here, but I mean it's a great field and just a great place to come and play golf. This is my third time here and I haven't been a pro very long, so for me to come back to a place I've been before, that's kind of rare and I have some good memories here. And even though it doesn't have the greatest place in the schedule, you might argue, I just thought it would really be good for me to come back here and play.

Q. What are you looking forward to the most for this tournament this weekend?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I mean, that's a good question. I got to see a buddy of mine that I haven't seen in a little while, he's from Norway, he's been down here for a little bit, so just kind of being able to hang out with him a little bit and, yeah, I mean just, it's just another cool venue to play golf. I mean there's so much that can happen out here on these holes, so hopefully I can avoid the 8s and just kind of play some good golf and maybe have a shot to win it this week.

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