

Arnold Palmer Invitational

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and get started here. We'd like to welcome Viktor Hovland into the interview room at the 2022 Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard.

Viktor, if we could just get an opening comment from you ahead of your fourth start of the event.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: This is a cool place. I played here as an amateur, and I had a great experience making the cut. Just felt like this was kind of the moment where I felt like I belonged a little bit or I got confidence enough to at least believe that I could play the PGA TOUR because I had played a couple of PGA TOUR starts prior and I missed a cut in both of those events.

I feel like making the cut and I think finishing 40th without my best stuff, that really gave me a lot of confidence moving forward. Yeah, it's a cool place but also hope to finish better than 40th this week.

Q. Just in that short time, you've quickly risen through the ranks in golf up to No. 4 in the world right now, No. 11 in the FedExCup. Just a comment on the state of your game entering this week.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I feel good. Played good at Genesis a couple weeks ago, and I had a nice off-week last week. It was really cold and pretty icy, so I didn't really get to practice a whole lot, but I feel like these last couple days have been good, and I'm really starting to find my stride again.

Q. When you don't practice much in an off-week, do you ramp up your preparation Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't really have any set plans. Usually I do practice a lot in my off weeks. So I don't really have to -- not panic, but I don't have to spend too much time on the golf course, and I'm getting ready to a pretty busy stretch. So I try not to exhaust myself out here.

Obviously, preparing is important, and you want to keep as sharp as you can.

Q. Your thoughts on the course?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It's in great shape right now. The rough is probably the thickest it's been out of all the times that I've come here, and it's a little bit different now with the fairways being Bermuda. They're not overseeded. So I don't know how much of a difference that's going to play later in the week, how firm they're going to get. I don't really know.

But it's in great shape right now. Yeah, it should be a fun week.

Q. Viktor, the tee shot at No. 6 is one that invites you to bite off as much as you dare. What's your comfort zone there? Where do you aim? When you get on the tee on a particular day, what's the thought process to adjust that, if need be?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's an interesting tee shot. Obviously, hypothetically, you can take it right at the green, but it's not all of us that have that carry. Most of the time I feel like the prevailing wind is a little bit into the wind.

At least for me every day, I just try to hit a driver just left of the bunkers. There's some small trees just left of it, and just really try to hit it at those trees. I don't really find any advantage trying to cut off more distance going left because you're just taking more water into play. Especially if the fairways get firmer, you can hit a good shot, and you roll out in the rough. Then you just have to lay up.

In some other winds, I might even hit 3-wood just to hit the fairway. I know I'm going to have a decent enough club to hit it on the green. So it all depends on the wind.

Q. You mentioned playing on Bermuda grass. Do you feel like playing at Oklahoma State has given you a better understanding of that kind of turf versus when you came over here?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I would say so. We mostly



have bentgrass greens, but we do have Bermuda fairways.

So I would say, especially chipping off of it can be very tricky, especially when you're coming from Europe. We don't really have a lot of Bermuda.

But at the same time, I don't really find the fairways out here to be super grainy. So I think, even if you're in the fairway and you're chipping, you're not too worried about the grain. I don't really think that's going to be the biggest factor this week.

Q. A couple off topic, Viktor. I think you were born five months after Tiger won in 1997. Can you tell me when's the first time you became aware of Tiger? And from that point on, how much of an influence has he been on you?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't really remember the first moment, to be honest with you. The earliest memories I kind of have from remembering that he had an impact on me was just kind of sitting in class and we had school computers, and I would just watch his highlights all day. That's kind of how his influence has kind of affected me.

But like when it comes to moment, the first moment, I can't really tell you.

Q. How old were you when you started looking at the computers?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I was probably around like 12.

Q. At that time, did he have any influence on you? Did he make you go into the gym? Did he make you work harder? Did he make you do anything?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It was kind of just an overall motivator, just like seeing what he did on the course, and he had such charisma, the way he did it, the fist pumps, and obviously hitting the shots out of the rough and slicing around trees. It was just kind of the charisma that he had on the golf course and pulling off those shots. It just motivated me just to play golf and have fun essentially.

Q. And I know -- for next week, I know you've only played THE PLAYERS once. The general feeling is the 17th hole is the toughest tee shot. I talked to a bunch of players who say it's the 18th. How tough is the 18th, and why is it scary?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I agree with that sentiment. I think 18 is way harder. It's just so narrow, and obviously you know how penal the left side is. If you pull it, one thing is kind of hitting a decent shot and it rolls in the water, at least you kind of get to drop up there.

Yeah, if you pull it straight off the tee, it's a rehit. And obviously the right side is no good either. You just kind of have to step up and hit a good shot. So the 17, you have a wedge in and you can always just aim middle of the green. So I'll take a ball on the fairway on 18 every day.

Q. I remember early in the pandemic you were doing a lot of driving. I'm wondering if you still are, or if you're back on planes now.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I'm mostly back on planes again. I feel like I've seen most of the U.S. now, especially kind of in the Midwest and kind of over on this East Coast. I know it's not that exciting driving through Oklahoma and Texas anymore. Maybe I'll take it to the West Coast sometime.

But as of right now, I value the importance of kind of recovery and saving time than staying up all night driving and drinking Red Bulls is probably not the way to go.

Q. Are you flying some commercial? What has that experience been like if you are?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Flying commercial?

Q. Yeah.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It's kind of what I've always done. I do fly some private here and there, but it's just -- yeah, it is what it is. I used to take public transport when I was going to school in Norway, and you would fly commercial to events around Europe. It's what we've done with college here in the States, playing for Oklahoma State. Obviously done a lot as a professional as well. Yeah, it is what it is.

Q. Viktor, thanks for taking the time. I wanted to ask you about your practice overall. Obviously, AimPoint has been huge for your career, really getting to the second wind and whatnot. But the specific putting routine that you do around the hole, clockwise, give us an idea of the thought process there.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I kind of got that drill from Jeff Smith when I started working with him. Obviously, it's a simple drill. You kind of see a lot of guys use it. I've kind of mixed the distances. Sometimes I only do ten-footers. Sometimes it's more like four to six feet.

I feel like I'm a way better putter now that I started using AimPoint, but I've still missed a few too many putts inside kind of six feet. So that's kind of what that drill emphasizes. But also Jeff did a good job of teaching me how you can -- like if you know the straight line on a certain putt and if you have a putt on opposite side of that,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

knowing how it's going to break based off of where the straight line is.

So that kind of gives you an idea when you're out on the course and you feel a putt is kind of straight, and if you move slightly off of that to have a certain idea where the ball's going to break. Obviously, it serves kind of multiple purposes, just green reading aspect, but also hitting the short putts, which I need to get better at.

Q. Viktor, you were talking about just now about driving instead of flying. You were kind of making your debut on the TOUR in the midst of the pandemic. Did that pose more challenges to acclimating to the new setting out here?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I would say it made it easier just because playing in college, you don't really play in front of that many people. Obviously, when we first started out in the pandemic, there were no fans allowed. So you kind of had a similar feel. Whereas I think a lot of the bigger names, they might have felt a little deflated a little bit playing with no fans because they're kind of used to getting riled up and hearing noise. Whereas me, I was just kind of -- I was always competing within myself or keeping track of my score and just playing by myself essentially and my playing partners.

So for me, I think it made it a little bit easier whereas it can be tough if you play your first TOUR event and let's say it's this week. I played here as an amateur, my third PGA TOUR event, and coming down the 16th, 17th, 18th hole, I mean, there's a lot of people and there's water right next to it. I'm sure you're going to hear some comments if you hit it in the water or you miss a short putt. So I think that aspect of it is a little tougher to get used to.

Q. At the same time, though, there were more restrictions in terms of how much you could hang around with other people. So I mean, you're the new kid on the block, so to speak, and you can't just converse with anybody any time you want, right?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think people on the outside, that's definitely the case. TOUR players, we'd still kind of play practice rounds and stuff, but as you said, I was the new kid on the block, and there was definitely an adjustment process just kind of understanding what my routines were and how to talk to other guys on the TOUR and get familiar with a couple players.

I don't really mind being by myself. I like being social, but at the same time, I don't mind being by myself. So for me, that wasn't a big deal where I'm sure other guys would struggle more during that time.

Q. That kind of segues into my question. There's a photo of you from the PGA last year at the hotel, like walking up to your room with your bag on your shoulder. I don't know if you saw that.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I did.

Q. It's kind of a cool photo. It kind of speaks to the loneliness of golf. What's the key to kind of dealing with that for you?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't see it as a burden like that. I did see the picture. It was a cool picture. But it was more like I -- obviously, playing the PGA TOUR, you're making a lot of money. There's a lot of people watching you and cheering for you, and that's all great.

But what I take most pride in is just kind of waking up, going through my routines. Then at the end of the day, ask myself, have I kind of done what I needed to do to get better? If the answer is yes, then I feel good about myself, like I'm happy about the day.

Whether I'm walking down the lobby with my golf clubs on my back, that's not really -- like I don't see that as a problem. It's kind of like a pat on the back. Okay, I've kind of done the job, and hopefully I have another good day tomorrow.

Q. If I could add one more just real quick. Do you know where you finished in the PIP? Is that something that you thought or cared about?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: No idea.

Q. Do you have any -- after seeing the results, do you have any inkling to get a Twitter account?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Obviously, it would be nice to make the PIP, but at the same time, I'm not going to go out of my way to try to make that a goal. I spend too much time on my phone already just answering messages.

Yeah, I see it more as a distraction than what it's doing to help me. My main focus is just to play better golf, and that takes care of most things.

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