

Arnold Palmer Invitational

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Bay Hill, Florida, USA

Bay Hill Club and Lodge

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We would like to welcome Viktor Hovland to the interview room here at the Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard. Viktor, making your sixth start at Bay Hill this week. Played here in 2019 off your U.S. Amateur Championship victory. Tied for second in 2022. Just some opening comments from you on being back at this place.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I got some good memories here. Made my first cut in a PGA TOUR event as an amateur. That was really fun. Gave me a lot of confidence to believe in myself, and kind of feel like I can compete out here.

Last couple years have been good. I've been in contention, I've had good chances to win. A little disappointing that I didn't finish it off, but as I said, good memories here, so I'm glad to be back.

THE MODERATOR: First start here on TOUR in a couple of weeks since Riviera. Just overall state of your game coming into this week.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's been a little bit frustrating so far this year. Feel like my swing hasn't been quite as good as it has been in previous years, so it's been, felt like I've tried to prioritize just being home and practicing, putting a lot of work in. Don't really want to fight through something while playing, it's just not that fun, and I don't see the point of it. Just been prioritizing time at home and, yeah, just taking care of the fundamentals.

THE MODERATOR: Perfect. With that, we'll open it up for questions.

Q. Growing up in Norway, who are the professional golfers that you looked up to most when you were first started playing?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think every kid my age kind of looked up to Tiger, the people that got involved with the game. I just remember watching all the YouTube highlights, watching his fist pumps and all that stuff.

Certainly a few highlights from this event as well, just watching him make putts on 18. He was a big inspiration, of course.

Henrik Bjørnstad, the first male golfer from Norway to play on the PGA TOUR. Suzann Pettersen played the LPGA for awhile. They kind of showed that it was possible to play golf professionally coming from Norway. Just because we have bad weather doesn't mean we can't compete.

Q. To go with what you said about being frustrated, is it your actual swing or is it the results that you're frustrated with?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Just the mechanics. It's just the mechanics of the swing. Just haven't been able to hit the shots that I want to. Obviously, you want to have good results, but when you're seeing a shot and your swing is not producing those shots, it becomes very tough to compete, especially at this level. I think the results are just, obviously they're not the best, but it's like they reflect what you're doing when things aren't great. So it's, not confident with my game, and then you're just trying to make the most out of it. You're playing defensive golf instead of aggressive or confident. That's basically what I just got to get back to. If I can stand on the range or on a golf course, see a shot and execute that shot, that gives me confidence. Then, whether I finished 5th or 10th or 20th, whatever it might be, that's not the most important thing, the most important thing is that you see the shots that you're hitting and you have belief that you're going to do that repeatedly.

Q. Have you gone through something like this before? I know you're young, but...

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, no, it's kind of funny, I've spent a lot of hours just looking back at my golf swings from 2019 when I first turned pro, and kind of seeing the evolution of my swing. It's very interesting. I've had a lot of multiple different patterns, and I've been able to make a lot of different things work. I would say this pattern that I've got going on now is a little bit, it's different in a different way. So, it's been a little bit more challenging.



But I will say, credit to myself, I'm very good at making things work. I think I'm talented in that way, but it definitely helps when the swing is also in a good spot. So, we got a little bit of work to do, but that's kind of a challenge and it's fun.

Q. I know it's nowhere near this easy, but do you ever just say to yourself, why don't I just do what I was doing in August when I was on that great run? I mean, do you just try to get back to that, and is that just really hard to duplicate?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's going to sound a little dumb, but I actually prefer my golf swing better in 2021, kind of early 2021 I feel like my ball striking was the best. I think -- now don't get me wrong, I definitely swung it well last year, but it wasn't as good as I would have wanted. I was kind of playing more of a draw instead of playing the normal cut shot that I have been my whole career. I was kind of fighting that all throughout last year. I just told myself, Okay, I'm just going to play the draw and just stick to that. That obviously worked well.

The chipping change was what really helped me win those tournaments. Because even at Memorial I didn't really feel like my ball striking was that great. PGA was really good, even though I struggled a little bit off the tee. East Lake, obviously, and BMW, I put it all together. It was a combination of everything, it wasn't just superb ball striking, and it was just, I did everything pretty well.

Q. Also, you put yourself in the mix several times now in the majors. Does that give you any comfort at all or is the swing issues a bigger deal when it comes to that?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, obviously, the experience matters. I feel like next time I'm in that situation I'm going to be handling, I'm going to handle the situation better, just because I've been there, I've made some really nice putts in good moments. I think Ryder Cup was a great thing to be a part of. Just being in that environment and to handle that pressure as well as I did. At the end of the day, you can only get so far with experience and that stuff, you got to execute. The fairway's 25, 30 yards wide, you got to be able to start the ball left and cut it, in my case, to hit the fairway consistently. So, if you can't do that, then we've got some issues.

Q. So, back to the striking part. If you won Memorial largely with chipping and weren't at your best, is there still, you're still satisfied with winning?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, of course. I mean, at the end of the day, you want to win.

Q. Can you accept that when you're winning without your best stuff? Do you still feel just as good coming out of a tournament than finishing 5th and hitting it great?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, I guess that's kind of the insane part of my brain is that I just enjoy flushing a golf shot. Obviously, we're out here to compete and win tournaments, but I really just cherish being able to hit the shots exactly the way I want to. I think it's a better predictor of how you're going to play in the future.

Now, I think I got to do a good job of telling myself that, Hey, I just won a huge tournament without feeling very good about my ball striking. At the end of the day, we're golfers, we're not ball strikers. So, I think that's, I got to pat myself on the back and tell myself, Okay, even though my swing doesn't feel great right now, I can still compete. That's very important to remember, but at the same time you want to play well every week. The way you play well every week is with good ball striking. Sometimes you make some silly up-and-downs or you make a couple of chip shots or 50 foot putts, something like that, those are huge for momentum to win tournaments, but you're not going to do that consistently week in, week out. But if your swing and fundamentals are in a good spot, you can actually be in those situations every single week, if you're just hitting the ball on the nose.

Q. Then one other thing, by the way, are you still living in Stillwater or did you move finally?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Still have my house there, but I've been in Palm Beach the last couple months.

Q. Congratulations.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: (Laughing).

Q. Last year was a pretty dynamic tournament here. What is the difference between this year and last year as a signature event this year? Is it just the size of the field, is there more than that, or what?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Right now it just feels a little bit more quiet at the event. It's hard to kind of tell how it's going to be in the tournament. That's kind of the way that I gather from at least from Riviera and this week, it still feels like the same tournament, just a few less guys. So, it feels, I don't know, maybe a little bit more chilled before the tournament starts. You can kind of, it is way easier to prepare for the event. You can go out and play holes a lot quicker. Practice facilities are open. From that standpoint it's kind of nice. It feels nice and quiet.



Q. Would you like to be in Nick Dunlap's shoes and be a single to start a tournament or would that feel weird to you?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Can you repeat that?

Q. Nick Dunlap. Would you like to be in his shoes and go off as a single on Thursday morning the first day of a tournament?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Is that what he's doing?

Q. Yeah. I don't think that's his choice, I don't know.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I've never done that before. I think that feels a little bit weird, but yeah, but at the same time that's like going out and practicing for yourself. I don't know. Yeah, it would be weird.

Q. The made cut here back in 2019, how much did it change kind of your view of yourself?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, that was really cool, because when I played, I played Mayakoba as an amateur, I missed the cut there by a shot. Actually felt like I played pretty nicely, but didn't make any putts.

Then I took a break. I went back home to Norway. I came back out. I didn't, I barely had a week playing on grass before I played Torrey Pines. That's a tough field and a tough golf course. I missed the cut there by a couple shots without really playing all that great. Then I came out here, had my best buddy caddieing on the bag, we had a great time, finished 40th, somewhere around there. Again, I didn't really feel like I played all that great. So, that was a huge kind of turning moment that, man, I can compete with these guys out here, even though I'm not all that happy with my game, but I'm still, I can still make cuts and be competitive.

Q. Swing-wise, are you working with anyone right now, are you interviewing guys or just doing it yourself?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: What did you say?

Q. Swing coach-wise, are you working with anyone, are you interviewing guys looking around or doing it yourself?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I've been working with Grant Waite now for a couple months. So, we're putting in some good work.

Q. Why have you jumped around to so many different coaches in the last few years on your swing?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I'm very curious guy. I like to ask questions. Sometimes when you ask a question and you get some answers, that leads you down a different path and opens up some new questions and you pursue a different path. I just want to kind of see where it goes. I always like to improve and expand my knowledge, and it just happened to lead me down to Grant Waite.

Q. Is there anything specific that drew you to him?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Obviously his knowledge is very impressive, he knows what he's talking about. At the same time, he's had playing experiences himself. He's won on the PGA TOUR. He, yeah, one thing is kind of knowing the 3D data and whatever, what the data says, but then also equating that to feels, and we can kind of talk on that level as well. I find that very helpful. So, yeah, a mix of both worlds.

Q. Why did you decide to leave Stillwater and move to Florida?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: The weather is a big one. It's just, it's hard to beat it for golf, especially this time of year. This has kind of been a rough winter in Stillwater. Just not great for practicing. Even though I love Oklahoma. Summertime it's great, and I certainly miss the people there. I do find it easier, if I want to go back home to Norway, it's a direct flight from Miami. I can have family and friends come down and hang out. It's a little bit harder for them to come to Stillwater, and, yeah, there's not much to do there either, so at least in Florida there's a little bit more we can do.

Q. Curious, after the 2021 Ryder Cup you lost a couple of teammates to LIV, and then after a great Ryder Cup in Rome, Jon left and Tyrrell left. Just wondering how much you keep in touch with them, do you miss 'em out here, or were you just, at tournament time, do you just do your own thing and it wasn't as much conversation and mingling and so forth?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, I've got my own team and, obviously, when I'm out here I'm working pretty hard. So I'm kind of, I wouldn't say I'm like super social out here, I kind of show up and do my thing. But I certainly miss a lot of those guys that we had some great memories from Whistling Straits and in Rome, so certainly miss those guys, but wish them the best and hopefully I'll get to see them soon.

Q. The big question obviously the last day or so was the World Ranking question and LIV not going after

that accreditation any more. Just wonder where you landed on, does it really matter at this point with the OWGR, how important it is, how important it is to you, even if those guys are not included?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, rankings are rankings, they're not objective truth. They're, you know, created to try to rank people the best they can. Obviously, now when you have a huge chunk of really, really good players that are not getting any ranking points, it definitely devalues that ranking. So, at the end of the day, I don't show up out here to try to improve my World Ranking, I show up because I want to win this tournament and that's it.

Q. Back to your swing issues. Is it plane, is it, you know, going this way, that way?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't want to get too into it, but I'm just like -- basically, I'm just pressuring the ground a little bit differently and, yeah, just doing a couple things different off the ball that is causing a chain reaction. So, it's just a matter of trying to get the swing started the right way, and I should be able to find my groove from there.

Q. Also, there have been a lot of Norwegians who went to the Olympics, but winter Olympics mostly. It looks like you have a good chance of representing Norway in the Olympics. What kind of excitement would that create for you and your family?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I got to play in Japan a few years back, and that was a great experience, even though COVID kind of put a tamper on the event with no fans out there and felt like a weird tournament. What was really cool was staying in the Olympic Village, seeing all the other athletes, interacting with Team Norway and kind of just, even though we didn't get to go out and root for 'em in competitions, we would pay attention to see who won a medal and all that stuff. So, really just felt like you were a part of a team, you're representing your country. Obviously, Norway has a very proud Olympic culture and history. I grew up watching the cross country skiers and biathletes and ski jumpers win medals, so it's cool to kind of be an Olympic athlete and represent my country and be a part that have history.

THE MODERATOR: Awesome, Viktor. Thanks again for the time, best of luck this week.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Thank you.

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