

Hero Dubai Desert Classic

Wednesday, 21 January, 2026

Dubai, UAE

Majlis Course at Emirates Golf Club

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference



CLARE BODEL: Welcome back to the Hero Dubai Desert Classic, Viktor. Obviously a past winner here at Emirates Golf Club; four years ago you won. If you can start by giving us some of your memories of that one.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's good to be back. This tournament just seems to get bigger and bigger. I mean, the stands just keep growing, and it's a cool event, cool atmosphere.

And yeah, especially just finished playing the Pro-Am and just coming back and remembering the finish, particularly, that I had here in '22, birdieing 16, eagle 17, and then birdieing 18, as well, to get into a playoff. That was really cool.

So good memories here.

CLARE BODEL: Do you feel this is a course that particularly suits your game?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I would say traditionally, yes, you have to drive it really well off the tee. It's not the longest course, but you have a few par 4s that can give you some long irons into the greens, and some of the par 5s. It's beneficial to have some length off the tee.

But as long as you keep it in the fairways and you're a good iron play, you can shoot a nice score. That's what I've done here in the past. So hopefully I can do some of that this week.

Q. Where are you now in the cycle of your swing and game? Seems last year it was a work-in-progress. Where you are now?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I would say I managed things better towards the end of year. I had some better results and found a bit more consistency. But I still didn't feel like technically it was that much better.

I took a few weeks off at the end of the year, and been out here the past couple weeks just practicing and getting

ready. It was pretty rough, and weren't really happy with how things were looking, either.

But Grant came out here last week, and I think we really got down to, okay, how do I actually solve this problem, and as soon as I found the feel for it, it started looking almost like it did back in the day. And that was really nice to see. Because conceptually, I've understood what I was doing, but it was so difficult to recreate it for some reason.

I just couldn't understand what I needed to feel or what it needed to -- or how I accomplished it, and I would say on the Saturday, last week, really started to look a lot better and it's been a slow and steady progress every single day.

It might be a little bit too quick this week but I'm really happy with just how things are trending.

Yeah, it might be a little too soon this week, but I think this year is going to be a good one.

Q. How rough is rough for a player of your standard? What does that look like?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: When I just came back out? It's like topping iron shots and just chunking them halfway with a 7-iron. Like, it was pretty rough (laughs).

Q. Had just a follow-up to that. Are you in a better place than you were 12 months ago? Because when you came in this room 12 months ago, it was pretty --

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It was bad.

Q. It was bad.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It was.

Q. How much of a struggle is that for a player of your talent to be faced with that, an ongoing battle?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It's not fun. But I don't think it helps to put even more pressure on yourself and tell everyone, oh, it's really good, actually. You're just putting more pressure on yourself.



I know at the end of the day, I have to solve these problems, solve these issues. And if I happen to play well out there, then that's a bonus. So that's kind of how I frame that in my own head.

But at the end of the day, these are issues that I have to solve, and until I solve them, then it's going to be kind of a tough battle, and that's what it's been like kind of the last couple years.

But that's what's nice to see, some progress in practice and knowing that you are working on the right stuff and you actually believe in the process. So that's really cool.

Q. You talk a lot about belief and all the work that you've been putting in over the last 12 months, as well as actually working on the golf swing. How much is that the mental side of things, as well? Has there been any sort of improvements there? Do you tend to maybe overthink sometimes, or have you tried to come away from that at all?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think I've had a lot of people come up to me and say, No, you're just kind of overthinking it; just be natural; be instinctual. And that's all great if you're hitting the ball nice.

But if you're slicing the ball 70 yards offline, you know, "be positive," that goes out the window real quick. But I have conceded kind of that when you're struggling and you're in a rut, and you feel like you're in a hole, a bad attitude just amplifies that.

So I think it can really kill you with a bad attitude. But just having a good attitude is not going to get you out of the soup. You actually have to solve the problems and see progress in practice, and then you can start to believe. But just believing arbitrarily, that just puts you in La La Land. So I'd rather not do that.

Q. And you also put a nice run together towards the end of last year, when the year was winding down. How confident are you that now you can pick that up from where you left off?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I saw some nice consistent results at the end of last year, but it was still really stressful to play golf. I just kind of managed my game really well, and I started chipping and putting a little bit better. Because start of the year, I basically lived on range. So I completely neglected my short game, and that really suffered the results.

But towards the back end of the year, I started putting and

chipping it a little bit better, so I kind of massaged some of my ball-striking and was able to pick up some Top 10s and have a bit more consistency.

But I've got to get the ball-striking to where it's been most of my career, and then focus on the short game. I think, yeah, I think we can have a really good year.

Q. You're going to have Kristoffer (Reitan) coming to the PGA TOUR from the DP World Tour from the ranking, you're going to have Rasmus Neergaard that you know from Oklahoma a little bit. How good is it going to be to have those guys, and what are their chances of breaking through?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It's cool. It's amazing how many Scandinavian golfers we have now playing worldwide, and also another cowboy on the PGA TOUR. There's so many of us that are playing out there, and also Kris Ventura has status. He's going to play this week at the AMEX.

So it's nice to have a lot of familiar faces out there. It just seemed Rasmus's play the last couple of years have been very inspiring. He's had some tough moments, I'd say, at Oklahoma State. He was struggling with his game, and for him to play at the level that he's playing at now is very impressive.

Kris Reitan, obviously, had an amazing year last year. Played so consistent and just kind of seeing where he was a year and a half ago, two years ago, could hardly finish a round of golf, and now he's one of the best players in the world.

Yeah, it's really cool to see. It's fun.

CLARE BODEL: Thank you, Viktor. Good luck this week.

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