

THE PLAYERS Championship

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, USA

TPC Sawgrass

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference

DOUG MILNE: We'd like to welcome Viktor Hovland to the interview room here at the 2022 PLAYERS Championship. Thanks for joining us for a few minutes.

Looking back, you're kind of making your third start here at THE PLAYERS Championship. Obviously 2020 didn't quite pan out, and coming off a missed cut last year, so just some thoughts on being back here this week, initial thoughts on course setup and kind of what you're looking forward to.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it feels good to be back here. Obviously not the way I wanted to play last year, so I feel like motivated to come back and do a better job.

I would say the rough is way thicker than it was the last two years, and obviously with the forecast and everything, I think it's going to be a very good challenge.

I think ball-striking off the tee is going to be a premium, and the guy that can miss it in the right spots and get up-and-down. Yeah, it'll be exciting.

DOUG MILNE: You're in the midst of a great year; you won again in Mexico earlier, you're coming off back-to-back top-5 finishes in your last two starts on TOUR. You've got the Dubai win, Hero, so forth. Just how you're feeling about your own game coming into the week.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I feel good. Been doing a lot of good stuff, especially I feel like my ball-striking has been very consistent, but also I've been able to make some putts. I feel like that's kind of been the biggest change from last year.

Hitting a lot of greens and making putts, that's a good recipe to make some birdies and get some good results, and especially last week I felt like I had a very good chance to win the tournament without really my best stuff, so I took a lot of confidence from that.

Q. We have some weather coming in this weekend; what's the worst weather you've played golf in?



VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't really remember. I remember maybe back in Norway I played this junior tour and it started snowing in the first or second round of this tournament. Yeah, that was interesting.

I guess playing a couple of links tournaments as a junior, as well, when it starts blowing and raining sideways, that's always interesting, but I don't think it's going to be that bad this week.

Q. You've won twice in Mexico, once in Puerto Rico, so you kind of obviously like tropical-type locations. Did Oklahoma State ever play across the street when you were on the team?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: No, we never came either. They played the year before I came into school.

Q. Even given the missed cut last year, was there anything about that experience and then your practice leading up to this that makes you feel comfortable out here?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I feel like my game is in a better spot than it was last year. I had a very unnecessary two-stroke penalty, as well, last year that led to missing the cut, as well.

I'm not too worried about last year. I feel like I'm in a better spot. It's just all about doing what I normally do well and missing on the right sides and get some momentum, and it could be a really good week.

The tough test about this course is that you don't really have to be that far off for it to not go your way. It's all about staying patient and missing on the right sides.

Q. After the API you said, this one stings. You've had a couple of days to reflect since then. How do you reset for this week and THE PLAYERS?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, it's a new week. It hurt last week, but I felt like I learned from my mistakes, and it's just another good experience to be in a situation like that to have a chance to win a tournament. That's always a bonus.



This week it's THE PLAYERS Championship, and can't dwell on what happened last week for too long.

Q. A lot was made about your bunker play last week. How much is that outside noise and internally, is that something you're really putting on emphasis on this week and trying to improve?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, no, I definitely need to get better around the greens and in the bunkers. Had a tendency of maybe taking a little bit too much sand, trying to get a little closer to the ball. That's kind of the main focus.

But you can say what you want about the bunker play last week; if you end up plugged in the lip or on the downslope short-sided, it's just impossible. I don't care how good your bunker play is in some of those spots.

The stats can be a little deceiving in that way, but I feel like I'm making improvements in the technique and I'm not too worried about it this week.

Q. Did you enjoy last week, that brand of test?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I enjoyed the first two days. Yeah, the weekend when the wind starts blowing like that and the greens kind of lose its color, I feel like it gets -- the challenge is fun because it gets so hard that if you play a good round of golf or you shoot a good score, it's even maybe more satisfying.

But at the same time, I shot 5-over over the weekend and felt like I played pretty decent. So it kind of goes the other way where you can't really beat yourself up too hard if things don't go your way.

I guess the big difference is that when the greens are like that and the wind starts blowing, it just puts pressure on every single shot. You can hit a good shot in there to 15 feet, and then you have a downhill downwind, and the ball is just not going to stop.

Instead of being aggressive, everything just has to be so tentative, and I wouldn't say I enjoy that part of golf as much as maybe other challenges, but it's still a challenge regardless, and it's the same for everyone so you try to do the best you can.

Q. As much as you've won this early in your career, Europe and Puerto Rico, et cetera, I don't want to suggest that you would take winning for granted, but do you still have an appreciation for how difficult it is, and if you do, how do you get to that level of

appreciation when you keep winning?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I feel like the last couple wins I've had, I came from behind and I was riding momentum the whole day or Sunday to get it all the way in.

I felt like I was kind of in contention the whole tournament last week, and it's not like you can just kind of slap it around and get the win. You have to finish it off, and I just wasn't able to do that last week. Sometimes it comes easy, sometimes it doesn't. It was just one of those weeks I tried to learn from it, and hopefully next time I'm in that position, it comes a little easier.

Q. Having won six times in three years, do you expect that to continue? I say that in the context of J.T., as good as he is, he's gone a full year without winning, D.J., the same way. Understanding there could be droughts, but in your head are you thinking about that?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, six wins in just under three years, I still have to pinch myself about it, but I feel like I've gotten better every single year, and if I continue to get better every single year, I'm going to have more opportunities to win.

There might be some randomness in who wins at the end of the tournament, but I think -- I believe that I'm going to keep myself in contention on Sundays. Sometimes I might play well and lose, but sometimes I'm going to sneak one in there and get a win.

At the end of the day I feel like it evens out, but I don't know, there's still a lot of variance in golf. As long as I keep improving and play good golf, then that's kind of all I can do.

Q. I had a question regarding Ryan Brehm and winning Puerto Rico last week. I wonder if you had an appreciation for what he did and his circumstances and whatnot. I'm sure you probably followed it to some degree.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's a cool event, and obviously getting his first win and it was my first win, it's a big week, and it's going to be in your memories forever.

I remember just personally not playing the best leading into that week, but obviously going into the week you know it's an opposite-field event and if you play some good golf, you can really take advantage and get that two-year exemption and bounce up in the FedExCup and get into some other tournaments.

Yeah, it's really cool to -- obviously I'm assuming he was thinking the same things going into that week, and for him to pull it off, as well, it's really satisfying.

Q. With Tiger going into Hall of Fame tonight, what influence did he have on you when you were younger and maybe do you recall the first time you watched him on television?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, my memory is really bad when it comes to my childhood. I can't really put an exact date or what tournament it was, but I do remember just growing up and sitting in the classroom with my computer on just watching YouTube highlights of him making putts and winning tournaments.

Then as I started maybe getting a little bit older, I would watch Thursday through Sunday and watch him take down these tournaments.

He's played a big part in my game and my life essentially, so it's really cool to see that he's finally getting inducted.

Q. Do you happen to recall the biggest jump you made as a junior golfer when you were younger, and what exactly that looked like?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't remember much from like my junior golf, but I will say probably the biggest jump I made, I would say from my sophomore year in college after the first semester until the second semester. I had probably four or five weeks off, and I was really struggling, hitting just really low slices off the tee, and I couldn't really -- a 3-wood off the deck, I couldn't get it airborne, and it was so frustrating.

It went really straight because I played I think three college events that fall, and I think the worst -- I finished top 20 in all three of them, so I didn't play bad, but it was just such a frustrating way to play golf because I would watch my peers and they would just hit these high draws off of the ground onto the green on par-5s.

I went to my coach at the time over the break, Denny Lucas, in Jupiter, and we got to work, and I spent the four or five weeks just grinding on my swing. And then when I came back for the next semester that sophomore year, I was kind of starting to hit it higher, I could hit 4-irons way higher, stop it on the greens, 3-woods, draw it more. That was really exciting.

Q. Prior to that, to what extent was professional golf on your radar, and did that sort of crystallize that it could be part of it?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's something you dream

about, of course, with my peers when we were having chipping competitions, we were always thinking, oh, yeah, it would be nice to play the PGA TOUR. But growing up in Norway it's so farfetched.

It's maybe a little different if you were a Country Club kid in the United States, and you might see a PGA TOUR player at your home course, and you're not that far removed from talking to someone that's seen the highest level, whereas for us, I remember being a junior with the Federation, and Henrik Bjornstad after he retired, he started working for the Federation, I was able to talk to him some. But that's about the closest I got to hearing -- relating or getting close to the PGA TOUR.

I would say it wasn't until I got to college and won the U.S. Am and then got to play a couple tournaments as an amateur that it kind of started to become a reality.

Q. You're obviously a growing force on the TOUR. Looking ahead five, ten years from now, what would you consider a successful career? Would it be in terms of majors, rankings, Money List, or have you set those specific goals?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I don't think too much about that. I try to kind of stay in the present. I mean, I've already won six times worldwide. I would already say that's a success, so anything that I do kind of the rest of my life really is just an added bonus.

I'm just trying to have fun with it and trying to get better, and we'll see where that goes.

Q. Have you ever played this golf course in the video game, and if so, how good were you?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I remember I had the 2004 PGA TOUR game, Tiger Woods game, but I don't think I ever played TPC Sawgrass. I remember I was shooting some 57s and stuff on that game, so pretty solid.

Q. What course would you play?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Pebble Beach a decent amount I remember, and then again, I just don't remember any other courses really. Some 57s, that's for sure.

Q. You also recently were talking about money and golf, and you made the point that you used to struggle with getting the extra guac on a Chipotle order. How do you look at a \$20 million purse and a \$3.6 million payday on Sunday?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's a lot of money for sure.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Definitely a lot of guac and double meat. (Laughter.)

But regardless of how I finish this week, it's not really going to change my life, at least not right now. Obviously it's nice to have in the bank for the future and whatever, but I live in Oklahoma and I still have the same joggers that I had two years ago and probably should upgrade those. But yeah, I mean, I live a pretty easy lifestyle, but it's more about having the chance to lift the trophy and be a part of something special.

Q. What would be the one thing you might splurge on?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't know, maybe a nice party for the boys back home in Oklahoma, and when I get home to Norway we can go out and have some fun. That's about it.

DOUG MILNE: Viktor, we appreciate your time. Best of luck this week.

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