

FedEx St. Jude Championship

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Memphis, Tennessee, USA
TPC Southwind

Viktor Hovland

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We could like to welcome Viktor Hovland to the FedEx St. Jude Championship media center. You're entering the week at No. 57 in the FedExCup standings, making your fifth consecutive Playoffs appearance. Overall thoughts on this season as you head into this week?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, hasn't been my best year. Struggled for basically the whole year. It's been a little bit challenging.

But I feel like I'm headed in the right direction and just kind of pumped about that, just seeing some improvements in practice, and hopefully that will translate into this week because I do need a nice week this week and hopefully get some momentum for the next couple weeks.

Q. You've captured a couple top-25s here at TPC Southwind. Have you had a chance to play the course yet?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I played like six holes yesterday on the back nine. I did 10, 11, 12, 13, and then 17 and 18.

Yeah, it's my fifth time here and absolutely love the golf course. I think this is one of my favorite courses that we play all year. Still haven't played all that great here yet, but just got to keep working on my things and hopefully this will be a better week.

Q. You had a decent weekend in Paris the last two rounds. I wonder if that gives you any confidence or momentum at all, if you found a little something there that you've been able to work on in the short time since.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, not really. That was kind of just a weekend where I just made a few putts. I missed on the right sides and I was able to score well. The first couple rounds I about hit it the same, but that golf course is very penal off the tee, and into the greens it really



penalizes the bad shots. But if you're playing well, you can shoot low.

I just missed it in the wrong spots because I didn't have that much control over the ball flight. So the second round I was just at mercy of the randomness of where my ball was going. Then over the weekend I made a lot of putts and just was able to score well. That's always nice, but the quality of the shots were not there. I was still a little upset with that.

But I've been here in the States for a week and spent some good time with Joe, and I feel like we're on the right track. That's kind of where I feel like at least the optimism is coming from, just finally getting a good week to practice every day and get into a nice rhythm.

Q. I remember you talking even going back to API, talking about the quality of shots. Is that where you draw your confidence and really, I guess, a feeling that you're going to play well?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah. This game is tough, and obviously I think we can easily get into a habit of trying to be too perfect because you don't have to play perfect golf to play well. But if you're looking a certain way and the ball is not doing what you're visualizing, yes, you can make a birdie, you can hit the ball close, but that's not a great indicator that you're going to do that day in, day out.

When I'm in practice seeing that the ball flight is corresponding better with what I'm visualizing, that gives me more confidence, and yes, I might still go out here and shoot a bad score, but I'm not going to be that upset about it because I know that the processes or the shot making itself is getting closer to where I want it to, and then my likelihood of playing better goes up, as well.

Q. You're the defending champion of the FedExCup. Does this week feel like the start of that title defense, or what does it feel like?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, you could say that. Although I had a really nice weekend here last year, and if it wasn't for the 18th hole, I might have had a really good chance to win this one, as well, last year. That was cool. I love this



place, and I have some good memories here.

I try not to think about my FedEx rank or all that stuff so much this week. I've obviously been vocal about me not playing very well this year, so that's kind of what I'm focusing on, just trying to get the horse back on the track and work on the things that I need to work on to play good golf, and then all the other stuff, that will work out if I take care of that stuff.

Q. You mentioned the weekend here last year. I'll take you back to either it was today or tomorrow maybe here last year, you having a session on that range that looked like really intense, terrible even. You looked upset, frustrated. It was shocking. I told everybody then, I said, oh, no good, stay off Hov, and you had a bad first round, but from then on you went and blitzed the place. Was there anything from that you could recreate and do the same thing?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I've had so many of those range sessions the last year, it's hard to remember them.

But no, we all play bad golf sometimes, and we get frustrated. Hopefully you can keep it still something to learn from when you're there or else you're just wasting your time.

But I feel like we just kind of had to air everything out and really talk about, okay, why was that a bad shot, and sometimes you need to hit those moments to actually learn something and actually take action in a different direction.

Joe just gave me a really good feel, and then when I try to recreate that feel on the range, I saw some improvement, and that gave me the confidence that, okay, when I go out there tomorrow, I think I know where the ball is going, and I can control it, and then as soon as I just saw a couple of good shots, that gives you that belief, and you just run with it. Then I started chipping in, I started making putts, and that's the game of golf for you.

Q. Do you like being an underdog? Obviously this year you are an underdog, whereas last year you sort of were right up there, obviously.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't know. I feel like maybe I've been an underdog in some way my whole life, so I guess I'm kind of used to that position. But it's not something that I think about too much. I'm just trying to control the things that I can control. I know that I've slipped up a little bit this year. I haven't been playing as well as I would have liked. I'm just working on the things that I need to work on to get back to where I was last year. Then I believe I can do some great things again.

But we need to take care of that stuff.

Q. A little different topic. Andrew Green said that you two have gotten to know a little bit as he does Karsten Creek. What have you seen in how he goes about his process and what you appreciate about what he does?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I've always been super interested in course design, so to actually spend some time with a well-established course architect, it's really fun for me, and I think he values listening to good players like myself, and I know Rickie has been involved a little bit and the golf team at Oklahoma State, the coaches. There's so many people involved, and I've got to give him credit for that because when you're hired to do a job, it's easy to say, okay, I'm the expert here, so you guys just sit over there and I'll do my thing.

But he's building that golf course for the golf team, so it's been a very good relationship where there's a dialogue, and he's asking what do you guys want to see, what kind of shots do you guys want. Man, it's been a while since I've been to Karsten and seen it, but last time I was there, it looks completely different. It looks like -- it kind of has that major championship golf course vibe. It's a big golf course, big-time golf course. It's going to be really hard.

But I like the way he thinks, and I'm super excited to go and play it next time.

Q. Have you seen any photos of what he's done at East Lake, and what do you think of him getting his hand on that could make it look like?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I have not seen anything, and that's where -- I love East Lake, so I don't know how much you can do to that place to make it better. It's almost like there's a bigger chance to make it worse. I hope that's not the case. I know Andrew is a very smart guy, and I'm sure he's going to do a great job.

But there is a danger there when you've already got an elite golf course that's been around for many, many years, and every time we go, there's still a great golf course, like I believe this one is, as well. You don't have to trick it up any more. You don't have to make it longer. It's just a good golf course.

It'll be interesting to see. Hopefully I make it there in a couple weeks.

Q. You mentioned this being one of your favorite courses. What is it that you like most about here, and what is it you find most difficult about the layout?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's not just one thing that stands out, but I just like that it's a premium to hit the fairways. You've got a good variety of dogleg lefts, dogleg rights, and you have a lot of water. Water always makes things interesting because it forces the player to play a bit more conservative off the tee. But then when you bail out, there's rough or a fairway bunker that catches the ball, and now you have a very difficult shot going into greens, especially with this Bermuda -- really sticky Bermuda around the greens, so if you land it short of the green, it just sticks, or if you hit the green because the greens are firm and fast, it's going to roll over the greens, so it's really difficult to get it close.

But it's not super tricked up. Everything is right there in front of you. But yet you have certain angles, a lot of branches and trees that are just in the way to make everything more tricky, and I just think it's a genius golf course.

You don't need to have courses that are 8,000 yards long and wide open because I think just a perfect example is No. 13 at Augusta, for example. They made that hole way longer, and I believe the scoring average was lower than it was before they made the change.

It's like, just little subtleties, because I remember when that tee was all the way up, you had branches on the left that was overhanging the tee box, and now you have to hook something around, and if you try to do it, it's easy to clip a tree and you hit it in the water or you've got to re-tee off the tee. It's just little subtle things like that, and I think this course is a great example of that.

Q. I know it's not nearly this simple, but is there a simple explanation for can you give one, a non-technical explanation, as to what the difference is to a year ago? If you were just to try to sum it up in a paragraph, I'm not doing this or I'm not doing that.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think that's better maybe for another time because I don't want to get super technical with this, but basically my pattern got off. The things that I did in my swing that made me good, that made me able to predict a certain ball flight, I went home and tried to do a certain move, not necessarily because I had in mind that I wanted to change my pattern. I knew my pattern was really good. But I was upset that I wasn't cutting the ball as much as I would have liked. My ball flight started to become a little bit of a draw, which is fine. I was still hitting it good. But sometimes visually I would have liked to have seen the cut.

Then in the off-season I made a conscious effort to try to cut the ball more, and when I did that, I ruined a

relationship that happens in my swing that makes it really difficult for me to control the face coming down. So now it's just kind of me learning from that. I know exactly why it happened. I know exactly what happens because I've gotten myself measured, and now it's just kind of a process of getting back to where I was.

But at least I know I have all the data and the facts on the table to go about it.

Q. Is there a point in time this year where your frustration level peaked? Can you point to it?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I mean, it feels like it's been a lot of peaks and valleys. I mean, it's just not that fun to play golf when you don't know where the ball is going.

I do pride myself in trying to make the best out of it, but it gets to a point where you kind of lose that belief -- you just see a shot, and that's not good enough. I can try to grind my hardest. I can try to chip in from there. But you do that too often, too many times during the course of a round or a tournament, it's too much to overcome, and I feel like it's a waste of time for me to be playing golf if that's where I'm at. I'd rather be off the golf course and work on it, trying to figure out why I'm doing those things.

But hey, that's how it goes sometimes, and I feel like I've learned even more about my golf swing, which I didn't really think I could, so there's always stuff to learn, and I'm super pumped about kind of where I'm headed.

I'm not sure how long it's going to take for me to play my best golf. It might be this week. It might be next week. But at least now I'm on a path to progress. I'm on a path to improvement. Whereas before, one thing is playing bad, but you don't know why and you don't know how to fix it. That's very challenging mentally. But at least now we're -- I might play terrible this week, but at least I feel like I'm on a path to improvement, and that's all that kind of matters for me.

Q. Quite a little change of pace here. Xander and Scottie have both had historic years this year. If you could choose which one to have, which one would you choose and why, between Xander and Scottie's year?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I mean, two majors. That sounds pretty nice to me.

Q. Did you say that you played 18 yesterday?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I played six holes.

Q. But did you play No. 18?



VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yes, I did.

Q. How did it feel? You were talking about 18 being -- if not for 18 last year, you probably would have won this tournament, too.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Easy to say, but yes.

Q. That was the first time you had seen it since Sunday of last year. Have you come up with a game plan for how to attack it, and what makes it so tough or what made it so tough last year?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I'm obviously a very aggressive player and I like to hit driver. The thing with my distance off the tee is that I can try to hit the line that's a little bit more conservative, but if I do, most likely my ball with a driver is going to run into the last bunker, like the farthest bunker out there, which is obviously not an ideal spot.

So I'm going to have to take my line a little further left of that bunker, but now because I don't fly it 310 or 315, if I pull it slightly, it's not going to cover the water on the left, whereas maybe a Rory or guys that hit it slightly longer than me, they can pull it and be perfectly fine, and now you're actually making that fairway pretty wide, whereas for me the driver gets pretty narrow.

I remember the times when I hit it in the water last year, I just hit it off the toe, so the ball doesn't stay in the air long enough, and then they just go in the water. But it's also like -- I think one of the rounds, I hit a good shot, and then you have a lob wedge or a sand wedge in. It's kind of you have to balance that. I think this year I'll probably just hit a 3-wood over to the right so I'll have a little further in, but I believe I have the biggest margin of error there, just trying to avoid the water and give myself a 9 or an 8-iron, especially if I feel like my irons are coming together a little bit. I feel like I can still play that hole pretty well.

Q. Speaking of Xander and Scottie and the guys at the top, you've been near the top coming into these Playoffs as well as where you are this year. If you're at the top section, is it more important to conserve some of your energy for the back half, or is getting on a run like you did more important, the momentum, no matter where you are?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think when you're playing at their level right now, you know you're playing great. Obviously you want to win everything. That's what you want to do.

Scottie winning six times this year, he probably believes he can win the next three. So why wouldn't you try to do that?

And that goes for everyone, I think. We're all hungry.

I think as soon as you kind of say to yourself that I'm just going to take it a little bit easy, you're going to get run over immediately because there's so many guys that are going to play amazing. They're going to chip in, they're going to make putts, and they're just hungry to catch you. I don't think you can let anything up.

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