

VIKTOR HOVLAND

SHARON SHIN: I would like to welcome in Viktor Hovland into our press conference at the Rocket Mortgage Classic. Viktor is coming off a T-11 at the Travelers Championship from last week and you're one of seven players to make the cut since golf's return.

Viktor, can we just get some comments about your game and how you're currently feeling entering this week?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I feel like my game is definitely progressing in the right direction. I really wasn't hitting it all that great at Colonial the first week, but I actually kind of scrapped something together.

RBC Heritage, I felt like I started hitting the ball a little better and had a nice first round there, but couldn't really capitalize on the next few rounds.

And last week I felt like my -- just kind of all-around my game was getting a little better here and there, just a cool putter at the end of the week kind of hindered a really good finish, but I feel like my game is definitely going in the right direction.

SHARON SHIN: And you finished T-13 at this event last year. How does it feel to be back and how is the course looking.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's really fun to kind of come back to events that I played before. Obviously most of my events I play without having been there before, so it's nice -- you know, last week was the first week and this week, have some good memories from last year.

I really like the course. I'm a big fan of Donald Ross and just really old-school, lot of kind of trees that you don't really think about, you have to position yourself in the fairway. Greens are really cool, you know, traditional Donald Ross design. They're still a little soft, but if the rain kind of stays away, we might see them firm up a little bit and I think that could challenge, you know, yeah, challenge all the guys in the field.

SHARON SHIN: Sounds good. We'll take this time to take some questions from the media.

Q. Hey, Viktor, welcome back to Detroit. First I saw you with your badge on there. Do you still get checked for your ID out on Tour?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I do, yes. No exceptions.

Q. Last year you got a sponsor's exemption into here. It was your second pro event. How important from your perspective is getting that sponsor's exemption and how much loyalty do you kind of feel from a tournament like Detroit for bringing you in last year?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, obviously I was not in any PGA TOUR events last year based on my merit, so I was relying on sponsor's exemptions, as you stated, and I'm very thankful for that because without those I wouldn't be where I am today. definitely, you know, I feel like I should come back to a lot of these events and show some support and loyalty to the people that paid a dividend to get me where I am today.

It's a pleasure to come back to Detroit. yeah, hopefully keep going back to tournaments like these.

Q. And just you had a good finish here last year, how much of a springboard was Detroit into getting you off and running on your PGA TOUR career?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, so I remember last year, I believe I made the cut on the number at Travelers last year and I had a decent third day, but then kind of played poorly on Sunday and I learned a lot from that week, you know, just how much you can climb the leaderboard and fall on the leaderboard depending on how you do obviously on the weekend.

And I think I also made the cut on the number here last year, maybe win one or two and had an average day on the third day, but played really well on Sunday and climbed from, you know, 30-something to almost the top-10. I just felt like I really learned a lot, that you're playing four rounds of golf. If you just get it going within a little stretch of the whole tournament you can really make a good move and that was obviously the start for -- the start of my kind of, you know, good run last year.

Q. And just last question for me, the rough, is it as tough as they say right now, or as thick as they say out there?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: So, around the greens is definitely thick. You're going to have a hard time if you miss the greens because the rough is really thick there. It's still thick around the fairways as well. I've only been at the back nine, but it seems like most of the places, the rough is kind of laying down towards the green, so even if you're -- even if you're not in the fairway in a couple spots, you can still have a pretty decent lie to hit it on the green. If it was growing against you, that would be really hard to chip out.

Q. Viktor, thanks for doing this. Curious if you're still driving from one tournament to the next and what prompted you to do so?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I am still driving. I mean, there's really no rationale behind it. I just knew that the first tournament was going to be at Colonial in Dallas and I still live in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and that's only like a three and a half hour drive for me, four hours. So

I was like, hey, that would be sweet, I can take my car down there and can just have that for the week.

Then I just kept on thinking, well, what if I just take my car to all these tournaments. I looked up, it's 16 hours to Hilton Head, it's 13 hours to Connecticut and yadda yadda. I just said okay, I'm not going to think about, we're just going to do it. Yeah, been having a lot of fun so far.

Q. Do you do all the driving or how's that work?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: So my caddie, Shay, I stayed at his house in Charleston after Hilton Head and we drove up together to Hartford, but that's been the only leg that I've had another person with me other than that I've just been driving myself.

Q. Just one last one, just details, what kind of car is it if I can ask, and secondly, have you seen anything interesting, any funny stories, anything along the way that's been kind of quirky that way?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I'm driving a Lexus RCF. I haven't really seen a whole lot because I haven't been very smart. So after Dallas, or at Colonial, I finished on Sunday and I just wanted to get to Hilton Head right away, so I literally drove through the night, 16 hours. I didn't see a whole lot and I didn't feel very good, so that wasn't very smart.

But on the way from just Hartford to here, you know, kind of the first maybe three, four hours of the way, it's really nice just driving through New York and Pennsylvania, it's really hilly and a lot of cool views on the way.

Q. Any speeding tickets?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Not yet.

Q. Viktor, firstly, at Colonial you mentioned that you had literally lost it just a couple weeks before the return. How are you feeling about your game now compared to then and do you feel like you're getting back to where you want to be?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it was a weird stretch. During the quarantine I was playing really well, I was hitting some shots that I haven't really hit before. I was able to hit it a little higher off the ground, especially with the longer clubs, and moving it more right to left than my traditional left to right.

And then as I just got closer to Colonial, maybe the week before I just wasn't doing that anymore, and then particularly in the practice rounds leading up to the first round, I was kind of hitting it more like I was doing my freshman year in college. I wasn't putting any spin on the ball and consistent contact and I just didn't get the ball up in the air, which is not a very nice feeling when you've been used to standing over it and seeing it launch in a way

different window.

But I got a little better throughout that week at Colonial and I feel like it's getting very close to where I want it to be now.

Q. You broke into the top-50 in the world after this last week. What does that mean to you personally and how much does it mean, the perks that go along with it, to get to play all the majors and that stuff?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's really cool to kind of know that you can plan a schedule, although it's hard during these times, but in a perfect world you know what you are going to play in and what you're not getting into. So that's really cool to have achieved that already, being a pro for only a year. Yeah, hopefully we'll just keep on rising.

Q. And lastly, you admitted that the putting let you a bit down last week. Have you been working on something specific to get that better this week?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Not really, because I would say I was putting it pretty nice leading up to Colonial and I actually putted pretty nice at Colonial. Hilton Head, it was a little up and down, I had a couple good rounds putting and a couple bad rounds putting. Then last week wasn't that great, but I putted great the first day. It's just a little inconsistent. I just try to do a couple of easy checkpoints and try to spend some time out on the course and just try to read the greens because that's where I feel like it's at.

Q. Welcome to Detroit. Can you share your thoughts on having another player test positive for the Coronavirus and how comfortable you feel being out here and competing and just kind of how you weigh chasing your career and health and safety as well?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I don't know who this new person is that tested, but obviously people are -- more and more people are testing positive. I think that just reminds us of how easily this spreads, that we need to take precautions. But I feel like we're still doing a very good job of that, especially being out on the golf course, you are at a safe distance between each other in my opinion. As long as you don't venture out too much at night or you kind of stick to taking takeout and going back to your room, I think it's not that big of a deal.

Q. Chad Campbell is the player, FYI. What is it like to be out here without fans? Obviously Wednesday's kind of a quieter day anyway, but now that you've been through this a little bit, what is that dynamic like?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think it's really nice, just personally. It wasn't long ago since I played in college and used to having no fans and you're kind of just in your own little head when you're playing the tournament.

But it is also a shame, especially playing these past two weeks because I played these two

events last year and just witnessing how much or how many fans were out there last year and just how different the course looked with all the grandstands and all that. It is kind of a shame because the atmosphere is not quite the same.

But then again, it's so much less strenuous on your body. You can -- everything's more convenient because there's just less people out here. So it is nice on one hand, but then on the other hand there's nothing better than being in contention and having a chance to win with a bunch of people cheering you on. So that's a little disappointing.

Q. Viktor, so earlier you mentioned your familiarity with Donald Ross designs. how do you see or where do you see some of those characteristics laid out here at Detroit?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It's a lot of -- usually he has a lot of greens that are sloped back to front, which I'm a very big fan of, just very old-school. Personally I think it's very hard to make a good golf hole if the greens are firm and it's just sloped front to back. There has to be something quirky there that makes it work. I think Donald Ross courses, just traditional, tree lined, there are some good strategically placed bunkers here and there, but it's nothing fancy. It's just straight up good, well-made holes. You have to put the ball in play and you have to hit good shots. If you don't, you're going to get penalized and I think the Detroit Golf Club is a good example of that.

Q. Just a followup, I'm not sure if you addressed this, but you talked about the COVID. Is that why you're driving?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: No, not really, but it was like I was thinking I just want to drive because I like to drive, I like to be kind of in my own head, listen to music, listen to podcasts. I was thinking during this whole pandemic thing as well, having to get on the charters at specific times, even though I have to get in the car and drive 15 hours, it's still a lot more convenient because I can go whenever I want to go and I can also pack more stuff in the car. It's just like a little bit more freedom in that way.

Q. And what podcasts, what type of podcasts, what type of music? Do you drink a bunch of energy drinks to stay awake?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I probably drank like six Red Bulls through the night going to Hilton Head, but I usually just listen to Joe Rogan podcasts, and I listen to podcasts with a guy named Sam Harris called The Making Sense podcasts. Yeah, just listen to a bunch of metal music, that also keeps me awake.

Q. Along those lines, are you going to drive to San Francisco for the PGA or is that a little too far?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think -- so I'm taking 3M off, yeah, because I'm playing this week, playing next week and then playing Memorial as well, and then my trip goes home. yeah, I

think that's where it stops.

Q. Quickly, just on Donald Ross you mentioned before, you probably didn't see this, but Bryson yesterday noted that the bunkers there are right around that 290 or so mark, and basically just you're familiar with what he's doing, he essentially said just hit it over everything. I'm curious what your thoughts are on Bryson's approach and just that how that's working out?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, there's no secret that hitting the ball far is a huge advantage. Now, you've got to hit it straight as well to gain all that shots like he has been gaining to the field. I think, you know, you can look at him and say, oh, that's crazy, I would never do that, but the fact is that it works. He's playing awesome and he's hitting the ball 20 yards further than he did a couple months ago. I don't care what you say, that's super impressive and that's why he's playing pretty well as well.

Q. Did you ever drink six protein shakes in a day instead of six Red Bulls?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: (No audio.)

SHARON SHIN: I think we lost audio there.

Q. We missed that, Viktor.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't drink six, but during this quarantine period I started to make some protein shakes myself, but not six. That's getting after it.

SHARON SHIN: Viktor, thank you so much for your time and stay safe on the road driving.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Thank you.