

VIKTOR HOVLAND (-19)

Q. Kind of amazing what can happen when you don't hit a sprinkler head and make double.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah. I mean, I made eight birdies yesterday, so if that didn't happen, it would have been another really low round. There's not much you can do about those situations. I'm glad that I was able to keep kind of, yeah, started off where I left it yesterday.

Q. What is it about this course that brings out the best in your ball-striking especially?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I just think with it being a narrow course helps me because my bad shots tend to not go in the trees, so if I can always stay in between the tree lines, I can -- I can kind of hit a lot of approaches on the greens because they are soft, and if I hit good iron shots and they land on the pin, they're going to stop on the pin. Whenever I get into a flow where I've got my numbers dialed in and I'm swinging it good, it's just kind of point and shoot. With the speed of these greens and being not so undulated, and usually when there is break, it tends to go just one way, and so for me, it allows me to be pretty aggressive on the putts and kind of trust my reads.

Q. And with the shorter driver, is this something that you might potentially bring out again on another type course like this?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I've kind of been thinking about it now because obviously I'm losing a little bit of speed, but it's actually not that much, and because it's shorter, I tend to launch it a little bit lower, so I'm not getting as much out of my speed as I have been in the past.

But on this golf course it's perfect because I can get up on these tight holes and just kind of know that it's going to go pretty straight if I just hit down on it a little bit and just flight one down. It's been amazing.

Q. Anirban was just here and he thought that you could shoot 59 today. Do you think you could have shot 59 today?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It's tough to say. I mean, I got max out of my game essentially. I did hit some approaches that were 40 feet, 30 feet and even 50 feet and when that kind of happens, you're just expecting to two-putt and move on. Then when I did hit a nice approach shot, I took advantage of it.

So I felt like I got max out of my game, but obviously to shoot 59 you've got to chip in and you've got to hoop a 50-footer or some longer putts and I didn't quite do that today, but I'm not too disappointed.

Q. Going back to that driver, I know you just discussed it with George over here, can you just take us through your decision to take driver on 17?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I just thought it was a good number. With it being in and off the right, I felt like that gave me some leeway to kind of start it out towards the right, so away from the water on the left.

My kind of shot pattern with the driver, my misses tend to leak a little bit right, so with the wind being off the right that kind of gave me a little bit of a cushion. With the wind off the left, I probably would have laid up or I would have been a little bit more reluctant to pull driver and I just thought it was a good number. I've hit it great and I thought it was the play, so if it's the play, you pull out the big dog and you try to hit it.

Q. You and J.T. in the final group again tomorrow, I think that was the same as last year at Memorial. Talk about the challenge of competing with him and how much you're looking forward to (inaudible) he was 3 over through 9 on Thursday.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it was obviously impressive for him with that start to fight back and be in the spot that he's in coming in tomorrow.

He's a great player and I don't expect anything else from him but to play well tomorrow. I'm going to have to play some of my better golf to have a shot.

Q. Viktor, a lot of confidence today, my man. That's a career best on the PGA TOUR. Pretty good playing.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, that was fun today. Obviously got off to a nice start and it was nice to have one of those rounds where you can kind of keep it going throughout the day instead of maybe slowing down towards the end there where, frankly, there's some tough holes.

Q. Pretty sporty at 16 and 17, those shots coming in.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, chipped it nasty today, so that was fun. Been working hard on it.

And obviously not a great shot into 16, but happy to get that one up and down. Even I hit a great shot at 17 and still put myself in a spot where still got to be able to chip it, not only when you hit bad shots but sometimes when you hit good shots. It was fun that I was able to get that one up and down as well.

Q. It's obvious, 67-65-62, you're getting better, but do you obviously think the game has gotten better every day now?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I'd say today it was a step above the first two days, but it was still really, really good. I feel like still today I hit a couple bad iron shots, but I was able to get those up and down, and a couple of wedges that I didn't really hit as close as I should have.

But the great part is that I managed to par all those times where I didn't hit great approach shots and when I did hit one in there pretty close, I made the putts, so just scored really well.

Q. And nobody's ever gone back-to-back at Mayakoba. Obviously you know there's a long day ahead.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah. Just happy to be in the spot that I am with all the shenanigans that's been going on so far this week. But playing great and I'm just looking forward to playing tomorrow and see what happens.

Q. That is crazy. Lastly, your driver breaks, you hit a sprinkler head, goes over for a double bogey. That's amazing how everything's come together.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I played really, really well today, or the whole week. Yeah, it's what I'm most happy with, just the fact that all those things happened is that I didn't freak out or anything. Obviously it wasn't the ideal situation, but I was able 17.

Q. I don't think many players out here would handle that situation of breaking a driver shaft as well as you have. Where does that come from?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think I was just more lucky that I just want to thank James Hahn for giving me a good back-up driver. That thing's been amazing. Obviously not the ideal situation, but as soon as I just hit a few shots with it, and I actually went to a course not too far away from here and tested it on the golf course, as soon as I saw it just go pretty straight, it wasn't much of an issue or not.

Q. Any chance you would stick with this shaft, or are you going to have to give it back after the week's over?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't know, I might have to give it back, but I'm sure we can figure something out.

Q. I'm a big fan of your caddie, I think he does a great job. Take us through your conversation on 17 and deciding to go for that green.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I thought it was a pretty good number. I actually thought the wind was a hair more hurt than it was off the right, so I thought -- I didn't think a driver was going to go that far past the pin as it did. As accurate as I have been hitting that driver, you

know, doesn't matter if I was leading or behind, if it's the play, it's the play. So I didn't think it was an easy wedge shot, either. We just kind of looked at each other and he said, yeah, I think it's a driver.

Q. Nine-under 62, it looked easy for us watching. What was it like inside the ropes?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It was fun. Didn't miss a lot of shots today, so it did feel somewhat relaxed out there, but there's still some tough holes with this wind going on. And the few shots that I missed, I was really happy that I was able to get those up and down, so it felt pretty nice.

Q. Birdie on 17 to take the lead going into the final round. You take driver on 17. Most of those guys in the last three or four groups all hit iron off that tee. What went into that decision and pulling off the shot?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I just think with that driver, I've been driving it so straight and I thought the numbers matched up with the wind, I thought if I hit a really good one, I can end up close. I didn't expect it to go over the green on the right, which wasn't really an easy chip, but I've been driving it so good and I thought it was the play, so it didn't really matter if I was behind or leading, if it's the play, it's the play.

Q. A broken shaft earlier in the week that we touched on in the broadcast, Danny Lee was doing some speed training, you guys swapped it. You had James Hahn's shaft, it's an inch shorter. So how has that impacted you this week?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I think it's half an inch shorter, I haven't really measured it out.

But I think it actually helps that it's this week because it's tight, you don't really need that much length off the tee, and with it being a little shorter, I can hit it a little lower and it's just going so much straighter. Yeah, it's kind of been a blessing in disguise.

Q. As defending champ, what's it like now being in this spot?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's a pretty cool feeling because obviously, as you mentioned, there's been some stuff that hasn't really been indicative of being the leader after 54 holes. I'm really happy that I've kind of overcome the adversity the way that I have and just stuck to my game plan and been patient.