

VIKTOR HOVLAND

DOUG MILNE: We would like to welcome the two-time defending champion of the World Wide Technology Championship at Mayakoba, Viktor Hovland. That was quite a mouthful to get out, tournament title.

Viktor Hovland, thanks for joining us for a few minutes. Pretty unique to win the same tournament back-to-back years obviously, but you've achieved it. Just a few thoughts on being back here going for the three-peat this week.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's a special place. I loved it even before winning it two times. It was the first spot I played as a PGA TOUR -- or it was the first time I played a PGA TOUR event. To come back here as a two-time champion is very special. Yeah, see if I can add another one this week.

DOUG MILNE: And coming into the week, just kind of bring us up to speed on the state of your game, how you're feeling, what you're feeling good about as you're kind of heading into this part of the season.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it's been an up-and-down kind of season. Played a lot of good golf, but maybe not as consistent as I would have liked, especially in the ball-striking area. But I really do feel like coming back here and with how kind of narrow it is, it kind of, like it makes me kind of find the shots that I need to hit back again. So I really feel like I've turned a corner the last kind of couple months, I feel like my game is in a good spot, and then just coming back here I'm really seeing the shots that I need to hit well. Yeah, feeling good about this week.

Q. Viktor, what is it about this place that fits, that seems to work for your game, for your eye, mentally, physically? What is it about it?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, so in Oklahoma where I play every day, I play Carson Creek and it's kind of a bigger version than Mayakoba. It's a little longer, it's a little wider off the tee, but it's kind of the same premise, you have crap on both sides so you've got to keep the ball straight.

Although it doesn't blow as much as it does in Oklahoma, I feel like for me to hit it really straight and hit the fairways, I've got to hit that low ball and preferably a little bit left to right because that's when I know I'm just never going to miss it left. There's so many tee shots out here where, for example 18, I remember last year it was blowing kind of in and off the right every single time we played it and when I can -- instead of having to aim right over in the trees and trust that the wind is going to take it over there, which it's easy to do in the practice

round but when you get there under the gun, you know, I aim at that left bunker and just kind of carve it off and hit the fairway, that's when I'm playing my best golf. I think just coming back here, my eye just sees that a lot better and I can trust that feel.

Yeah, at the end of the day I think you've got to hit the ball straight, and with my iron play, I can give myself a lot of looks, and these greens are pretty flat and if I start the ball online, you can make a lot of putts. Yeah, just a great spot for me.

Q. When you see yourself on the advertisements maybe on the side of the highway, maybe on the hotel keys, I'm not 100 percent sure, but when you see all of that, do you mind being in that position? Do you mind being kind of the face of what everyone's seeing this week?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It's a little bit different, for sure, but I think it's cool. I definitely feel welcomed when I come back here. It's a place that means a lot to me. As I mentioned earlier, it's the place that I played my first PGA TOUR event, won twice here, have a chance to win it again. Yeah, it's just a really special place. So to be able to come back and kind of see that I have a place in history at this event is really cool.

Q. Viktor, as you know, the tour schedule's changing for the year after this. This part of the season won't be part of the FedExCup season. Do you see yourself being able to take four months off from golf or would you probably play in fall events even if they're not part of that season just to keep yourself sharp?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't know. I've never taken four months completely off of golf. I've always -- you know, growing up in Norway, as soon as the summer season kind of ended and the golf courses closed, I was the first one to kind of go into the indoor hitting bay and just pound balls for four months straight. That's just kind of how I work. Even though you're not getting in the best practice, I have to be doing something every day.

I certainly won't take that much time off. I'll probably find that as a good time to go over and play in Europe, or I don't know how my schedule's going to look like, but I'll definitely have to do something.

Q. Would you still want to come back here if the opportunity arose because of what this place has meant to you?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I would love to, yeah, certainly.

Q. Viktor, welcome. I want to know if it's a complication between the rain and the golf course, the implications of that.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: We certainly got hit by a lot of rain in the last couple hours and even last night. You know, when I first got here the course was in amazing condition, probably the best I've ever seen it. The ball was rolling in the fairway and the greens were firm and fast,



which is kind of hard to accomplish on these Paspalum greens, but it was in amazing shape.

Now it's going to be pretty soft, but at the same time I don't see it as a problem because the last two times I won here it has been pretty soft. If anything, it makes it more kind of comfortable for me. Obviously I think we all would like to see the course in the best possible condition, so from that side of things it's maybe a little disappointing, but I don't think it's going to affect my game at all.

Q. If it does affect your game, does your strategy change much or basically the same strategy?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Again, I think it plays more into my hands. It's more you don't have to calculate the bounces as much or, you know, when it gets firmer you can hit good shots that roll off the greens. With how the green areas work, balls can run off the greens whereas now it's more point and shoot.

I feel like if I'm playing well and swinging it the way I want to, I can kind of hit the ball at the pin and if it lands close to the pin, it's going to stop by the pin. I think it just plays into your hands a little bit more if you're on your game.

Q. If I'm not mistaken, you won with 20 below in your score two times. Do you expect the winner to have the same score or even lower or higher score with these conditions?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think if the -- if we would have played it how the course was a couple days ago when it was firmer and faster, I think the score would have been probably would have been close to 20. I would say the course was playing a little bit harder just because the ball was bouncing a little bit.

I noticed every single green is a little bit smaller than it has been. I guess they had some bermuda creeping in and I think they just kind of made the greens a little bit narrower. So you're going to miss more greens and the ball's going to roll a little bit more when you chip it on the green. So I think it would have played a little bit harder, but right now I think it's probably going to be similar to what it has been the last couple years.

Q. It's early in the season. What are your goals this year and how do they differ than maybe they have in the last couple years as you were establishing yourself?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I'm not a big goal setter in terms of results. It's more about process goals. I have ideas that I want to or I have goals in the sense that I want to be able to hit certain shots or I want to chip it better, putt it better and stuff like that.

But I just try to do the things that I can improve on and do that every single day and then whatever happens, happens. I think right now my goal is to just try to simplify things. I did a really good job the last one or two years to push the ceiling a little bit higher. I feel like I'm a



way more impressive player now than I was when I first came out, but I need to now kind of almost bring it back a little bit to get back to these shots that are a little bit more predictable. It doesn't have to be as flashy or you don't have to hit high draws just because it looks nice on certain holes, you need to know where the ball's going. I think that's kind of the main thing for me, because I really, I've become a way better putter than I was the first two years and I really feel like I've turned a corner around the greens as well. So I just need to get back to knowing where the ball's going and it should be fun.

Q. How do you balance the confidence of having success at a course versus the expectation now of having success at a course?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It certainly can go both ways. I kind of compare it a little bit to the NCAAs at Karsten Creek my sophomore year. We were really good that year, I think we won like seven times in that season. And obviously having the championship at home, people were kind of expecting us to win and we were certainly expecting to win as well. And being at home, it can work to your advantage, but at the same time it can also be an added pressure.

I think it comes back to if you're feeling really confident about your game, I think the heightened pressure can kind of help you because it just almost hyper-focuses you to perform that week, but if you don't have the skills to back it up for that week, it can also go the other way to where you're trying to force things instead of it kind of naturally happening. I think it all depends on where the state of your game is. I certainly don't see it as a disadvantage this week.

Q. Viktor, someone hasn't won the same event on the PGA TOUR three times in a row in about 10 years, Steve Stricker was the last to do it. If you were able to do it come Sunday night, what would it mean to you?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: It would be awesome. The PGA TOUR's been around for a while and that's not something that's happening all the time, although it does seem like more guys are defending their titles more and more now recently.

Yeah, to win three times in a row, that's certainly pretty special. I think it's only been three guys total I think that's been done before, so that's pretty elite company. Yeah, would love that.

DOUG MILNE: All right. Well, Viktor, we hope to see you right back here Sunday night. Thanks for your time.

