

U.S. Amateur Championship

Press Conference

Sunday August 19, 2018

Viktor Hovland



Q. We have the pleasure of welcoming the 2018 U.S. Amateur champion, Viktor Hovland, 6 & 5 winner over Devon Bling. The great golf continued today. You made some miraculous recoveries. You hit some great iron shots. You really earned your championship. Tell us about that.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Thank you. Yeah, obviously it wasn't as -- I didn't play as good as I did yesterday or against Cole Hammer, but I still continued to play pretty solid and made my opponent, or Devon, just earn it, if he had to or wanted to win the hole. I hit a couple bad shots, but on a few of them, I managed to make some great saves, and yeah, just keep it going.

Q. In addition to the trophy, you get some other great opportunities to play golf. What does that mean to be able to play in the U.S. Open here again at Pebble Beach and likely at the Masters and then Open Championship; that's pretty good stuff.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I've just grown up all the time just looking at all the guys playing in those tournaments, and that's going to be really special to just be a part of -- I got to play my first European Tour event this summer, and that was really cool. But yeah, I think playing Pebble Beach at the U.S. Open next year is going to be -- yeah, it's going to be even more special.

Q. You talked earlier in the week about how hard it is to win tournaments. What did you learn about how to win this tournament this week, and how do you think that'll help you in the coming years?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Just get the ball in the hole in the least amount of strokes. I mean, you just kind of -- momentum is a big thing, and if you don't make putts, you can't -- it's very hard to make or get momentum. I felt a couple places I made the right putts at the right time or I hit the right shots at the right time, especially I'd say against Cole Hammer yesterday when I made that putt on 14, that was kind of the thing that would have been a deciding putt, I'd say, because I could have missed that, he could have made his, and it could have kept going. If he didn't hit it in the bunker on the next hole, he might have won that hole. You just don't know what's going to happen.

So I'd just say this week I just -- when I had to make a

putt, I made the putt or the hit the shot that I needed to.

Q. Further to that, how big was the putt at 18 to stay 4-up? I think that seemed to be a real decisive moment.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, for sure. After birdieing 16, I felt pretty good. I thought I had a pretty good number on 17, and I hit a pretty good shot with an 8-iron, but it just came up short, and I did not manage to get that up-and-down. So I felt like I kind of gave that away, and I was looking at giving one away on 18, as well, and that would have been kind of a bad feeling going into lunch and going into the afternoon.

But yeah, making that putt, it almost felt like a win because I didn't really hit a single good shot on that hole. Yeah, that felt good and was big.

Q. Talk a little bit about hole No. 4 in the morning; what are the odds of pulling off that up-and-down and also hitting it that close, and was that kind of the point where you kind of figured, it could be my day?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I never really thought that, but when I saw the ball lying there, I checked with my range finder, and I saw the Swinging Pete logo on there, and I was like, okay, that's my ball, I'll head down there and see if I've got a shot. The slope was pretty steep, and since I kind of slid on the way down to there, I kind of messed up my footing on my right foot, so I kind of had to like turn it in like that and kind of make a little stance. So I wasn't sure if -- I didn't want to fall when I hit the shot. So I was just trying to, okay, just make contact and hit it just up there. I had a perfect lie, so the contact wasn't really the big issue. It was just getting the right line and obviously the right distance, and yeah, that was just a hit-and-hope moment, and yeah, it ended up pretty sweet.

Q. I just wondered, are your parents back in Norway?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah.

Q. So it's like 2:00 a.m. there, I think, right now?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, nine hours ahead. I don't know what time it is.

Q. Did you hear from them?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I haven't checked my phone right

now.

Q. Were they able to watch it?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I think they're showing it on TV in Norway on Viasat Golf, and if it you don't have that, I think you can stream it online. I'm not sure. I hope they managed to see it.

Q. For all the other players here in the U.S., they have a city and then a state they're from; for you it just says Norway. Tell me about your hometown, how you got into the golf course you grew up playing, how you got into the game and what you think your victory here will mean back home?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Well, my dad kind of got me into the game. He worked in the U.S., and he told me he had to drive on his way to work past a driving range, and then one day he kind of just decided to just start playing. And on the way back, when he moved back to Norway, he just brought a golf set, and that's kind of when I started playing. I was about three, four years old, and obviously I didn't play much then, but I at least got introduced to the game. We started just -- I started playing just a little bit here and there. But I was about 11 when I said to my dad, okay, I want to start practicing in the winters, as well, because in Norway you get a lot of snow. You have to hit balls inside for four, five months of the year. Before I was 11, kind of just took a hiatus from the game during that stretch, and I told him, hey, I kind of want to start playing a lot more.

Yeah, so with those weather conditions, it's harder to continue to improve your game as the conditions aren't as good as a lot of kids in the U.S. have it. But still, you can make it work.

I don't really know the implications or consequences this victory will mean for Norway. Yeah, I hope it does something good. Yeah, I don't really know.

Q. Do you remember when you first heard about the U.S. Amateur?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Not really, no. I don't remember it. But I think a long time ago. I can't really elaborate on that.

Q. Any stories about going out and practicing in the cold temperatures and harsh conditions? How did you do it?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Well, we don't really practice that much in the cold because they're very careful of not letting us -- the courses are very careful of not letting us play if it's cold because then you just mess up the course. But I do remember one tournament I played, kind of south in Norway. It was the first tournament of the year, and it started snowing. But we still played

through it. That was kind of fun to kind of just look back at it and think that we played in snow.

Yeah, and I mean, those first few tournaments of the year are usually -- you can get a lot of different stuff, almost like in Oklahoma when it's blowing 30 from the north and it's 35 degrees and you're still playing. Yeah, kind of like that.

Q. You usually don't require much practice time before you go out and play. I'm curious how you spent the 90-minute break.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I just kind of sat there at lunch and talked to my buddy. Yeah, just took it easy really. I looked at my phone a little bit. Yeah, the time flew, and then I went up there and hit some balls.

Q. What changed with your ball-striking at the beginning of the year? It seems like your ball flight was different, higher, more consistent.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, so -- are you talking about just this year compared to last year?

Q. This year.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, well, last year I really struggled with my ball-striking. I've always been a very straight hitter, like the ball just goes pretty straight. But I never really -- even though I managed to scrape by some sub-72 rounds and managed to get some top 20s and stuff like that, I just didn't play well at all. I couldn't hit the middle of the face. And when I did, it was just really low with no spin, so I couldn't hold any greens if the greens were firm. So Thanksgiving break I went to Jupiter and saw my coach, Denny Lucas, and we worked on just trying to get a little shallower angle of attack and get the loft up, and I was hitting really high, or higher for me, especially like -- for the life of me I couldn't hit a 3-wood off the deck. Like it was -- yeah, it was disgusting to look at. But after some work, I managed to kind of hit those high, piercing 3-woods and land them softly on greens. Yeah, that just gave me a lot of confidence with all the other clubs. Yeah, that really helped me play a lot better this year.

Q. In layman's terms, how did you do that? What was the fix?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Well, so -- I'm not trying to make it too complicated, but my kind of right elbow had been like really high in the backswing, which is fine. You see a lot of guys do that. But from -- to be able to hit it from there, it kind of has to move back down again. But I was just going straight up here and then out, as well, so the shaft was really laid off or really flat and really far out. So I just had to pull everything straight down and straight left. That doesn't really speak a high draw.

So I just worked on really simple, almost just put a

glove underneath my right arm, get a little flatter in the backswing with the arms and feel like they're dropping more with almost like the shaft steepening. I just came into the ball a little better.

Q. Earlier in the week you mentioned playing other sports when you were a young guy. When and why did you determine that golf was going to be the sport to focus on?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Well, I had played a little golf since I was four years old, and in first grade, I started doing taekwondo and soccer. And I did taekwondo and soccer for seven years, and in the seventh grade, I just decided I wanted to start playing golf instead.

Q. Does your father or somebody else in your family have the same smile that's omnipresent on your face?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I'd probably say my mom. I kind of look adopted if you look at my dad. (Laughter.) I'm half Russian, so my mom is Russian, so yeah, kind of how -- I look just every bit like her.

Q. You ended up tying the record for the fewest holes needed to win the U.S. Amateur; how would you sum up the entire week, how well you played?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I just played really solid. I didn't really do any big mistakes. It wasn't really anything flashy. It was just, okay, hit the fairway off the tee and try to get it somewhere close on the greens. And then for those three matches that I played, I putted well, as well. And that's why I made all those birdies and won by such big margins.

Yeah, I've had a lot of tournaments before where I've hit the ball really well, but then the few times I've missed a green or hit a bad shot, I haven't been able to scramble or I haven't been able to make the putts. And this week it kind of all came together, which is really cool.

Q. You've added to the roster of Oklahoma State players who have won a U.S. Amateur; that must feel pretty good to you, joining Peter Uihlein and Labron Harris?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I remember the first time I came there and just looked at all the pictures on the wall, all the names. You see Charles Howell III, Pablo Martín, Peter Uihlein, Rickie, all those guys, and you win one tournament or you finish second and you play pretty good, and then you get back there and you look at their records, and you're like, oh, yeah, I probably shouldn't be thinking I'm -- like it brings you more down to earth.

But hopefully after winning this tournament I can kind of start building on that resume, and yeah, get myself a

picture on that wall.

Q. When you looked at the trophy when it was handed to you, after you held it up, one of the first things you did was look at the names. What was the first name you saw?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I saw Billy Mayfair on there. I don't know, yeah, that was the first one I saw.

Q. Can you just describe your emotions? I don't think we've ever heard how special this feels to you to be able to do this.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I always thought I had a pretty good vocabulary, but yeah, I'm lost for words. It's really special. As I mentioned earlier, I've only won once before, and to win the U.S. Amateur as my second win is really cool. It's hard to top that. So yeah, I just hope it's the start of something great.

Q. What do you think Coach Holder is going to say to you when you get back to Stillwater?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: I don't know. "You should have won 7 & 6 (with southern drawl)." No, I don't know. He's gotten soft lately.

Q. Who would you say is the greatest golfer in Norway's history?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Well, it's got to be Henrik Bjørnstad. He's the only Norwegian to play the PGA TOUR, and I think he led -- I might be wrong, Memorial maybe, after -- he had nine holes to go, and just looking at that leaderboard, you had Tiger Woods, Sergio, K.J. Choi, just a bunch of major winners on that leaderboard. Yeah, I mean, I'd have to say Henrik.

Q. What's your relationship with him?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Well, he quit playing maybe seven years ago, and I was in like a development team for the federation, and he got hired right away to be kind of the responsible -- like the captain, I guess, for our group. So he kind of hung around us, played some golf with us, and we got to talk with him a little bit. I didn't really see him much after that, but recently he's announced a comeback, and he's started practicing again, started to play some tournaments, and he's a member at the club I practice at, at home. Yeah, so I've gotten to talk to him a little bit.

Q. Who would be the biggest influence on your golf?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: That's a good question. I feel like it's just an accumulation of a lot of different guys. I try to look at my game and compare it to whoever I think are good. So I got to play with, for example, just one name that pops up to my head, Rico Hoey last year at nationals, and we played together at the last stroke play round, and he hits those drivers off the deck. I'm

like, what is this guy doing. And it's off a downhill slope, and he hits like a high cut drive, just lands super soft, and just two-putts for birdie. No one was reaching that green in two. I'm like, damn, that's pretty impressive. Just looking at -- okay, how is he able to hit that type of shot, because I knew I had no chance. You could give me a thousand balls; I have no chance. So I just try to look at, okay, he does this really well, this is what I need to improve, which looking on TV, okay, Tiger Woods is playing sweet, okay, what is he doing; he's driving it really far and straight. Okay, that helps. Just everything I can kind of see that just works.

long tournament like this, you're not going to play your best golf throughout the week. Your bad better be pretty decent if you're going to make it all the way. That I was able to win those matches with not playing so good, yeah, that builds a lot of confidence.

Q. Can you hit that driver-off-the-deck shot now?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: No. Still can't. Better hit the range.

Q. Are you surprised at how easy this ended up being for you, 6 & 5, two 7 & 6's, you never saw the 18th hole until today? You mentioned it being only your second win, but you made it look and it looks on paper to be a really easy win.

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, it wasn't easy. But it definitely helps playing good golf and making putts. I know it's really annoying to play with guys that are making a lot of putts on you, but those first few matches were kind of a grind against Hayden, my teammate, and my second match, I didn't really play well at all. I made a lot of birdies but also hit some really bad shots, which gave him some momentum.

Yeah, after that -- when I've played so well, I mean, I'd be -- not shocked but I'd be very disappointed if I would have lost playing so good. Yeah, I just put a lot of pressure on whoever I faced.

Q. You've won the U.S. Amateur at Pebble Beach, and next year at U.S. Amateur is at Pinehurst, another iconic kind of golf course. How does that sound to have to go back and defend there?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Sounds pretty cool. Obviously that's a year from now. There's a lot of things that's going to happen in between that. But yeah, it would be obviously really cool to put my name on that trophy a second time. Yeah, that would be a good goal to have.

Q. You talked about how today you didn't really have your best stuff compared to what you had in the last few days. How much more does that build your confidence knowing that you can win something like this without striking it particularly great?

VIKTOR HOVLAND: Yeah, I mean, that's what it's all about. There's a lot of guys out there that can play really good golf when they're on their games, but it's about how bad is your bad sometimes and kind of how good your bad shots are. That's very important. In a