

Davis Love III

I first met Davis Love III at the 2002 Grand Slam Cup where I was fortunate enough to play with Davis in the Pro-Am. He seemed like a friendly guy, remembered everyone's name, and lined up our putts. I saw him again at Tiger's tournament outside Los Angeles two weeks later, watching from afar as he hit balls on the range. As Davis strolled to the first tee, he walked over to me and said, "I thought I saw you. How are you doing, Len?" I was pleased, yet shocked, that he remembered my name! I was even more pleased that he agreed to sit down for an interview later that afternoon.

As the sun disappeared, a brief ten minutes lasted considerably longer. We sat in the corner of the locker room and among other topics, Davis discussed the influence of his famous father, Michael Jordan, his relationship with Fred Couples, and he revealed insights into who Davis Love III really is. There is an aura of honesty, integrity and sincerity in his words, precise yet uncalculating in how they are delivered. His words flowed, never a pause to think about what to say, how to respond. What you get is the essence of Davis.

On the long drive back to San Diego, I continually thought to myself, "What a nice guy." I think you will find what Davis has to say informative, moving and insightful.

Leonard Finkel: *Davis, as I was waiting for you at the last hole, I watched David Toms and Jim Furyk come through. After leaving the course, both stopped and signed autographs for every single person there and took pictures with everyone that asked. Then you did the same thing. What is it about professional golfers, why are you guys so different from the other spoiled and arrogant athletes of so many other professional sports?*

Davis Love III: First of all, I think it's just golf. It's a little bit more of a "people sport" whereas it's not a stadium sport where a player comes out and plays and goes back. He's used to that. We grew up with people around in smaller environments where you could sign everyone's autograph. It's getting to the point now where we can't always do it. You can't sign everybody's, but you try to do as much as you can. And, secondly, I think because Jack (Nicklaus) and Arnie (Palmer) always did it. No matter where they walked, no matter where they went, they tried to sign autographs and talk to people, be friendly and take pictures. We just try to live up to the standard that they set. Plus we understand that our sport needs to be better than others to get

people to watch it, to get people interested and get people to follow it. Of course we have Tiger Woods and they'll watch whether he signs autographs or not. But even he understands that the reason our sport's so great and that there's so much money in it is because the fans appreciate the fact that they can get Tiger Woods' autograph. If they come out and watch for two or three days of a tournament they're almost guaranteed to get it. That's a pretty neat thing.

LF: *I'd like you to talk a little bit about your dad, a teacher of great renown. How did your upbringing affect where you are now?*

Love: Obviously, the way I play, instruction wise, I grew up with a great instructor. I grew up with a greater appreciation of the game from the way my dad taught, the way he played, the way he treated the game and the way he treated people in the game and the respect he had for them. I think a lot of the ways that I approach people, the way I approach the game is because of my dad, but obviously the biggest thing he gave me was great golf instruction. He taught me how to

play and not just how to play, but how to swing the club for every little shot and gave me a great foundation in the sport. He left us a little early but I could go on because I had great fundamentals.



Leonard Finkel (far right) and Davis Love III considering strategy.



Davis Love III at the Tiger's tournament outside Los Angeles.

LF: *You've been hampered by back and disc problems. How has that impacted your game, your practice, and your schedule?*

Love: I don't hit as many golf balls as I used to. I do more swinging in the mirror, more putting in the room when I can putt for a little while and then take a break. I do more of what you might call "shadow boxing" in my room. I don't pound as many golf balls. I don't play as many events as probably I would have fifteen years ago, ten years ago. But I still try to play a full schedule; I try to play at least 23, 24 events if I'm healthy and keep fresh. So I'm doing it more on the golf course than on the driving range, which is probably helping my game.

LF: *In your opinion, what can viewers, golf fans, learn from watching the pros on television and, more importantly, from going to a tournament and watching them in person?*

Love: I think the biggest thing they can learn is, we do have great equipment, we do have great swings, we work hard on our technique, but the thing that separates us from a scratch player or a plus handicap guy at your local club is our routines and mental approach. If you watch Tiger Woods, he's the longest driver out here but he doesn't hit many drivers. You watch Phil Mickleson, he's maybe the most aggressive player, but he's not reckless. Guys play with consistent strategies, they play smart, and they have great routines. They're more into a mental approach to the game than they are trying to just overpower the golf course with a great golf swing or a power-

ful golf swing. I think you can learn pre-shot routines, course management, and things like that, which aren't as much fun to think about, but that's the thing I think separates Tiger Woods from the rest of the field ... his mental approach, his physical approach to the way he attacks the golf course.

LF: *I'm assuming that the highlight of your career was winning the PGA Championship. What did that mean to you, particularly with your father's background with the PGA?*

Love: That was quite a PGA to win. Not only after Tiger won his first Major at the Masters earlier that year and blew the field away and everybody thought that he was going to blow them all away after he won one. But to not only win a PGA ... to win it over a great field that had some high expectations for some other players and also to win on a course that could have been US Open that was a classic old Major Championship course. People had a lot of respect for the course. It was a big win for all those reasons plus it was my first Major win and hopefully not my last. But it was an important step for me in my career, to get that best player to have never won a Major monkey off your back.

LF: *Do you have any regrets with your career on Tour? If you could change one thing, what would it be?*

Love: I wish I would have worked harder on taking care of my body, my fitness probably, at a younger age. All my younger friends say, "What do you think I ought to work on?" I say to work the fitness truck. Make sure you're in there and that you're doing everything you can to prevent injuries. I don't know that David Duvall and Tiger Woods or some of our stronger guys are better players because they're stronger. I think they're better players because they're not getting injured. Small injuries add up to big injuries and the wear and tear of thirty, forty weeks a year of golf, year after year after year adds up. People say that it doesn't look like you put the effort in. The effort that I should have put in was off the golf course, probably more fitness, which I'm going to have to do to last a little bit longer.

LF: *Most of us should be doing the same thing. On TV, they talk about your relationship with Fred Couples. You've played with him often in the World Championships. What is your relationship with Fred?*

Love: We were thrown together because we were both playing well in the early '90s, one and two in the money list one year, and we ended up playing a lot of World Cups and we got to be better friends because of that. We competed against each other and we were traveling together a lot. He's just a guy I
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The winning team at the Grand Slam Cup, Poipu Bay.

could get along with very easily. He's relaxed off the golf course. Everybody thinks he's relaxed on the golf course, but he's more tense on the golf course than anywhere. He's a relaxed guy, he's fun to be around and he's a wealth of entertainment. You wouldn't really think he is but he knows a lot about all kinds of subjects. He's a sports nut, but whether it's landscaping or antiques or all kinds of things, he's just a fun guy to be around. To me, he was an inspiration. I always wanted to play like him on the Tour. Fred Couples made it look easy and I wanted to play like Fred. So he was always the sort of a guy I looked up to, and that I got to be friends with at the same time. It's been a lot of fun.

LF: *Is it true that you introduced Michael Jordan to golf and, if so, how would you assess his game?*

Love: Unfortunately, I haven't played with him in a long time, but from the outside looking in, it looks like he's getting a lot out of a tall body. It's hard for a tall person to play really good golf. Once you get past maybe even my height at six-foot-three, or six-four, it's really hard to play good golf. We did get him started. He was a roommate of a good friend of mine at North Carolina, Buzz Petersen, on the national championship team in '82, and Buzz wanted to play more golf with the golf team. So he came out and Michael was his roommate, so he started coming out along with Brad Dougherty. I was just with Kenny Smith in Hawaii and Kenny said that, "I wish that I had gone out with you guys. You kept asking me to and I wouldn't do it. Now I can't play golf." We gave him (Jordan) his first clubs and some old shag balls and he started playing with us. It wasn't six months before coach (Dean) Smith was saying you need to send the basketball team back to the gym. They were all out on the golf course! It was fun to get to know him and

watch him grow. The best thing about golf for him was that it's given him something to do away from the crowd, away from his celebrity status. I think that's why he likes it so much. It's hard to do and it's a challenge, but it's also a release for him to get away from basketball.

LF: *Can you give us a little insight into Davis Love ... what makes you tick?*

Love: The number one thing is my family, my wife and my kids. My brother caddies for me some and we build golf courses together. My mom is a great player and can shoot her age. Golf is our life, but we also spend a lot of time together because of golf. Other than that, I'm more of a private person. I'm in the public eye all the time, but when I'm away from golf, I like to get completely away. I like to hunt, I like to fish, I like to be in the outdoors. I'm very lucky. I have a great life out here on Tour and have a lot of friends like Fred Couples and Jeff Sluman, Billy Andrade and on down the list, a million friends out here like Mike Hulbert. But when I leave the Tour, I also have a big group of friends at home that aren't famous people, business guys and friends I hunt and fish with. So I'm very fortunate to have almost two separate lives to live and I enjoy both of them. I can see when I'm not playing and I'm not the number ten golfer in the world or not the number fifty golfer in the world, I'll still have somewhere I'll enjoy going and just maybe building golf courses rather than playing golf and getting out of the public eye.

LF: *Davis, thank you.*

Love: It was my pleasure. □