

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW:
April 21, 2016

DAVIS LOVE III
SCOTT VERPLANK



Q. Talk a little bit about playing, you've known Scott for a long time. Where did you guys first meet up?

DAVIS LOVE III: His memory's probably better than mine. Junior World in San Diego.

SCOTT VERPLANK: I was thinking Horseshoe Bend in Atlanta, the AJGA event. We were like 14 or 15.

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, definitely before either one of us had a driver's license.

DAVE SENKO: How much have you played together in team competition previously like in Ryder Cups or anything?

DAVIS LOVE III: Walker Cup was first, right?

SCOTT VERPLANK: Um-hmm.

DAVIS LOVE III: I didn't make any World Amateur or any of that.

SCOTT VERPLANK: We've been on teams together but we've never been partners like in a match in a Ryder Cup or a Presidents Cup or anything, or even Walker Cup. But we've been on, I don't know how many, four or five teams together.

DAVE SENKO: I know last year you had your foot surgery.

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, we were planning on playing last year and then I withdrew on him. I had a pretty big surgery the first of April last year and so I told him to give me another shot.

DAVE SENKO: How's your foot now?

DAVIS LOVE III: It's great. I made a lot of progress in a year. Well, San Antonio tournament last year I couldn't walk, so from there to, this is my fourth week in a row and I'm having no problems. I'm feeling really good about it.

Q. What was the foot problem, what was the surgery?

DAVIS LOVE III: Simply put, I had worn out the joints in my second and third toe and my foot was kind of falling apart. They said it would be an hour and a half surgery; it took over two and a half hours. They said it was the biggest mess they had seen. I had seven different things done to two toes basically, so just kind of rebuild it.

Q. Screws and that kind of stuff?

DAVIS LOVE III: Screws, fused two toes, a bunch of bad stuff. I had a Morton's neuroma, which is just a nerve thing. That was an add-on surgery, a bonus surgery at the end. I was to the point where it was affecting my balance, my swing and I couldn't hardly walk and I was miserable at the end of the day. I was looking for that cart out here on the Champions Tour, I was getting that bad. I was ready to ride. I had great surgeon, great success and it took me close to three months to get back to playing, but foot surgery's always kind of a questionable one for us because it's just hard to bounce back from it. But it's worked out real well and I feel like I can do about anything now. I'm back to actually side skipping, running a little bit on the treadmill and kind of gradually getting back to they say 100 percent. I don't think at 52 I'll ever be 100 percent again, but I'm getting better.

Q. How cool is it to be in a team thing like this with a friend? Is that more important than say having games that are complementary?

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, it's fun, first of all, to play with a friend. It makes me want to come here and play because I have a good partner.

Q. How about you, Scott?

DAVIS LOVE III: As long he plays well, we'll be friends.

SCOTT VERPLANK: Hey, I'm the same way. Any team event is great, I think. I always enjoy being with the team deal. I was kind of hoping if Davis plays great, I'll carry him across the finish line. I'll do whatever it takes, so hopefully we'll both play well.

DAVIS LOVE III: I heard so much about this tournament, how much fun it is and obviously what a great place it is, so it's an event we've been looking forward to.

Q. Around here, Payne Stewart's hometown is about a half hour up the road so whenever this tournament comes up his name comes up. Did you guys have relationships with him and were you close with him at all?

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, I was. I actually played some matches with him and a big part of a lot of our teams. I really enjoyed -- I got my courtesy car heading here, I was on Payne Stewart Highway. We've got a lot of talk about Payne this year, Ryder Cup, Hazeltine where he won. Paintings, pictures of him in the clubhouse up there. He was a big part of our winning team there with Crenshaw. Great memories of him always.

Q. What about you, Scott?

SCOTT VERPLANK: Same way. He was, I guess he was probably 10 years older than us, wasn't he?

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, at least.

SCOTT VERPLANK: Approximately? So when he first came on tour we were both young and Payne, he wasn't quite winning majors yet but he was getting close and he was always -- I mean, I enjoyed being around him. I got to play with him quite a few times. Then he kept getting better and better when we were kind of early in our career so I enjoyed him and I thought he was a lot of fun.

Q. Never too big for the young guys on tour?

SCOTT VERPLANK: He wasn't to me. He was always nice and included you. They always liked to have little putting games and little \$5, \$10 putting games in the afternoon. If you were willing to play, he was willing to include you.

Q. He was willing to take your money?

DAVIS LOVE III: He was always the guy that was the fun-loving guy in the locker room or on the putting green or on the range or in the team room playing, blasting Born in the USA on whatever we had back then, boombox.

SCOTT VERPLANK: Eight track.

DAVIS LOVE III: Not on our iPods. Even iPods are gone now, right? But he was always our, you know, entertainment, for sure. And late in life he had a lot of -- he was kind of the fun-loving partier guy, and then late in life became a strong Christian and kind of grew up a little bit right there at the end. Then he became more of a fatherly figure. You've seen that a lot obviously with Phil, there was a bunch of that in the U.S. Open and things like that. But he really became a friend and a leader to us. I remember him poking me in the chest in a match at the Ryder Cup. He said, That's the kind of passion you need to have every day on the golf course. He was great. In fact, when I finished my match on Sunday in '99, I went straight to watch Payne Stewart because we had played a couple matches.

Q. It was he and Montgomerie in that final match?

DAVIS LOVE III: I think so. I said, I'm going to watch Payne. It was my immediate first reaction. So I get out there and I sit down in, I don't know, 12 fairway and I'm watching him. One of the assistant captains rode up and said, Crenshaw wants you to go watch Justin Leonard, he's having a bad day. I was like. Justin's getting beat, I want to watch Payne because Payne's match is going to be important.

That's when I learned that you listen to your captain. Watched Justin play seven holes and he won his match. But Ben was saying, Payne's a big boy, he'll take care of himself. Justin's your friend, go get him going.

And then afterwards, to sit around and talk to Payne about that match and the match I

played with him, I think we ended up winning or halving right at the end, he said, You never know how big that half a point's going to be. And he said, We all had half a point in here that gave us a chance to win on Sunday. And he said, If you get in the middle of a match and you don't have that passion, that determination, you're going to cost your team. I've always remembered that. Then obviously right after that he was gone.

Q. He's still missed on tour and Ryder Cup and all that?

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, I think so.

SCOTT VERPLANK: Like Davis said, he was turning into kind of become the next 40-year-old leader. But even on the tour somewhat, not just only on the Ryder Cup or Presidents Cup. He made a great career and he was a passionate. Obviously he's flamboyant. He was Rickie Fowler before Rickie Fowler was Rickie Fowler.

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, he was the recognizable guy all the time.

SCOTT VERPLANK: He was a big influence, I think, on the PGA TOUR and obviously on the Ryder Cup.

DAVIS LOVE III: We miss him because there's a hole in our captains. I probably got to be captain twice because there's a hole in our lineup because Payne was obviously going to be a captain. So yeah, you know, I'm hoping that Hazeltine will have the ghost of Payne Stewart somewhere because we've had, you know, Ben Crenshaw's Miracle at Brookline and then Jose Maria, Seve Ballesteros' connection at Medinah, they call it on him. So we're going to need Payne badly over in Minnesota, I think.

Q. Talking about your Ryder Cup captain's duties, how much of your time these days is you golfing and how much is working on Ryder Cup stuff?

DAVIS LOVE III: Well, most of it's golf but I had sent Scott and three or four other guys emails before I left the cottage this morning at 7:00 or 6:30. It's always something because it's so big and because we're a little more involved as a group this time. I don't just make a decision. Like Scott helped me a lot in '12 and the months leading up to it when we were picking players or making pairings, but Tiger, Phil, all these guys, we started a year and a half ago.

So it's not like I can -- we're getting advice on one decision right now from Corey this week. I love coming out here because I can get Scott, Corey, Tom Lehman, Tom Kite, I talked to Tom Kite and Corey this morning at breakfast. I'm supposed to be going over to the other course and I'm like, they're sitting together, I'm going to sit with them. So I got good advice from them this morning.

I'm taking every opportunity to make sure, and as a group of former captains and players, we're really all working together more this time so it does take up more time. You run into

Dave Stockton at the Masters. Well, I'm on my way to practice my putting, Captain Stockton wants to talk to me. Tom Watson grabbed me in the locker room yesterday. It slows my day down. Jack Nicklaus came over to talk to me yesterday. We had dinner at his house in March.

It keeps me busy, but what a fun year and a half it's been. It's different this time around because our franchise has been losing games, our value's going down. The management has said we've got to get a new system going here, so it's been a lot of fun but it does keep me busy.

Q. Is it a tough time to be a captain? Seems like there's a lot of changing of the guard and some Ryder Cup veterans getting older and injuries and all that stuff.

DAVIS LOVE III: Well, I think we've all been players and then moved on, and it's going to continue to happen. As a Tour board member, we look at it like, well, believe it or not, Greg Norman's not going to be here forever and we're not going to have his flashy style to sell. We're not going to have Tiger Woods to sell forever. We realize that as players and you move on. Do I want Phil on the team this year? Yeah. I mean, he played great last year. But eventually Phil won't make a team and we'll have to move on to that and then he'll be a captain probably.

But I think the great thing about our youth, and Scott clued me in on Rickie Fowler years ago, they're not only great players, they're good young guys that are good role models. And even Jason Day and Rory McIlroy on the other side, they're great kids and they're great players and they're great role models. We're in a great time in our game, so I think the transition is in good hands. But yes, I'm having to get to know Patrick Reed and Jordan Spieth and Jimmy Walker. It's just a different group now.

Q. So you wouldn't hesitate to call on any of those young guys?

DAVIS LOVE III: No. Well, Patrick Reed. Scott and I were talking last night, we need more Patrick Reeds. That guy was in my face in the Presidents Cup, I mean like fired up, and he just played the Ryder Cup where he was a star over there. He was really passionate about it and that's what we need.

Our players play with a lot of pride, but sometimes they don't maybe play with enough intensity and passion. The nerves kind of subdue them sometimes. You need Rickie and Patrick and Jordan, and to bring along somebody like maybe me who's a little bit shy and didn't know how to handle that big a stage.

Jimmy Walker is partners or friends with Rickie Fowler. They seem like complete opposites, but Rickie and Jimmy competitively together are great. It's fun to see. It's great for me to be on the regular tour and be able to get to know those guys better. Yeah, it's not the '99 team anymore with David Duval and Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson and Davis Love and Tom Lehman. It's a new team.

Q. How much pressure do you feel? You said the franchise has not been winning.

DAVIS LOVE III: Well, when we had all this stuff, they said whoever's going to be the captain next time is going to have a lot of pressure on them and deal with a lot of media and have a lot of scrutiny and have to answer a lot of questions. They go, Let's get Davis to do it. I'm like, Okay, I'm going to need some help.

I only agreed to it because all those guys said we're going to do like we've seen the Europeans do, we're going to have a system, we're going to move guys in and out of it, we're going to have some continuity and we're all going to pitch in together.

I think it's the same job for me really, I just need to get better at it. The players are the ones who are going to have, those 12 players, we've lost three in a row. America wants a win, you know? So they're going to have a lot of pressure on them. So we're working really hard on preparing them for Olympics, Playoffs, Ryder Cup. Let's be ready for the whole end of the season. Just be ready to play all those events to the best of our ability. If you just say we have to win the Ryder Cup, it puts too much pressure on them. Like a basketball team getting ready for the NCAAs. We have to play one game at a time. It's going to be a long road through the conference and at NCAAs. Let's run our game plan and be ready and rested so when we get to the playoffs, and our playoffs are going to be really long this year for four or five guys. PGA, Olympics, Playoffs, Ryder Cup. It's going to be a long couple months, but I think we're going to be prepared. Jack told us over and over and over again, got to be prepared, so we're going to be prepared this time.

Q. Back to this event, did you have to recruit him at all to come to this?

SCOTT VERPLANK: You know, last year we talked about it and we were going to play last year and then he had the surgery, so we didn't. And then I think I sent him a text at the end of maybe around Christmas or something and said are we going to play in that deal and he got back to me and said sure. Now that we've gotten here --

DAVIS LOVE III: I'm in for next year, too.

SCOTT VERPLANK: It's pretty cool. I had never been here either. Davis is obviously a big outdoorsman, hunter, fisherman.

DAVIS LOVE III: We've already agreed we're going to be more prepared for this tournament next year. Fly rods, waders, shotgun.

SCOTT VERPLANK: Might even come a day early.

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, I told my wife last night, I said next year we'll bring the grandbaby and it will be Monday to Monday.

SCOTT VERPLANK: Yeah, this is going to be a much longer event now that we've been here and seen it.

DAVIS LOVE III: You can see why the field grows every year and what Johnny's doing is just incredible.

Q. Does it exceed your expectations for what it would be?

SCOTT VERPLANK: It has mine. I only live four and a half hours from here and I know about Table Rock Lake and I've heard of Big Cedar Lodge, but it's all the stuff together is amazing actually.

DAVIS LOVE III: Yeah, I heard the stories from last year but I just still, until you see it, until you play a hole and there's a buffalo, there's actually a buffalo, until you actually see it. I took a picture of it and sent it to my family today. My wife who's in Minnesota, she goes, What is that? Obviously it's a buffalo. Why is there a buffalo on the golf course? Because it's Johnny's course.

Q. Because that's what happens here.

DAVIS LOVE III: That's what happens around here, there's buffalo on the golf course. It's neat and fun and you can see why everybody loves it so much.

Q. And then Crenshaw's building the other course over there, too, it could be five years or whatever, this could be a pretty big golf resort.

SCOTT VERPLANK: Johnny does a great job so I'm sure it will be good.

DAVIS LOVE III: When is that supposed to be done?

Q. They're saying 2017. Last I talked to Johnny, he said end of this year.

DAVIS LOVE III: I was talking to some of those construction guys on the course today. I could tell they were his guys standing there waiting for Ben to come behind me and they said they have to truck topsoil in for nine months.

Q. It's all clay.

DAVIS LOVE III: We're building a course in South Carolina, we're building the whole course in nine months.

Q. It's solid rock and clay.

DAVIS LOVE III: That's what they said. They're going to put the dirt two feet up and then dig the core of the green so they don't have to dig down into the rock where they want some

of the greens. That's going to be a walking course, too. Best views.

SCOTT VERPLANK: The clubhouse and everything up there is obviously really high. Looks pretty cool.

Q. Yep, Johnny Morris has the resources to get that done.

SCOTT VERPLANK: He's got a lot of vision, it appears to me. It's impressive.