

PRE-TOURNAMENT INTERVIEW
November 16, 2022

DAVIS LOVE III
ZACH JOHNSON



JOHN BUSH: We would like to welcome Davis Love III and Zach Johnson into our press conference here at the RSM Classic.

Davis, we'll start with you as the tournament host. If we can get some comments on this week's tournament, how things are going with the Birdies Fore Love and also with your foundation, all the great things taking place.

DAVIS LOVE III: That's it, there's a lot of great things taking place.

Thanks to Zach, he introduced us to RSM 14 years ago maybe and just, I say this all the time, they're probably -- Zach's very lucky to be associated with another great PGA TOUR sponsor, John Deere, that really get involved with the tournament, the community, raising money every chance they get, giving back every chance they get.

In fact, we're getting ready to go to the putting contest that all the RSM executives asked for an early pro-am tee time today so they can go to the putting contest with The First Tee and the Special Olympics kids this afternoon. They're just an incredible sponsor, so it's great to have them back in town.

They're going to announce another big donation in the Birdies Fore Love program that they do all year long at their offices, and Brian Becker, the new CEO-managing partner, has said a couple times this week we had 100 percent participation from every partner this year. He said we can't get them to agree on anything 100 percent and every year they just get bigger and better in that program in everything they do.

So just happy to have all of them in town and all our other sponsors and friends, and then of course Tour players. Like I just sat in the locker room for 30 minutes and caught up with a bunch of my buddies that are in town for a great tournament. Thankfully the weather was last week and not this week, so we're ready to go.

JOHN BUSH: Zach, it may not be the pope that you're sitting next to, but can you comment a little bit about what Davis means to all of you guys from this island and then also what this tournament means to you?

ZACH JOHNSON: Davis, have you ever had a comparison to the pope?

DAVIS LOVE III: No.

ZACH JOHNSON: No. Me, neither.

DAVIS LOVE III: But we're probably about the same age.

ZACH JOHNSON: Thanks, John.

This tournament means a great deal to me. This is my home, the place where we certainly are digging roots. This is our community and it is still kind of, I don't know what the word is, but I remember when Davis and I were talking about it, he's like, hey, we're going to host a tournament here in the Golden Isles in south Georgia, I think we're going to have it at Seaside. And I'm like, holy cow, yeah, it would be amazing.

This is the 13th year now, right? 2010 I believe was the first and it gets better by the year. The community rallies behind it every year. Everybody's just excited for RSM week and as an RSM ambassador, I love it because the people behind it, their intentions, their heart, their passions I would say are parallel to how I kind of operate and certainly how he's modeled that, Davis and his foundation. It's a perfect synergy between the Tour, Sea Island, RSM and stewardship. That's what the Tour's all about.

JOHN BUSH: Before questions, Zach, you mentioned 13 times you've played all of those, three top-10s in your last five starts here. Talk a little bit about the state of your game and also your expectations for the week and then we'll open it up for questions.

ZACH JOHNSON: That's a fun stat. That might have been the last top-10.

I love the golf courses. We get the question all the time, right, from friends, sponsors, whomever, like hey, what are your favorite tournaments? Well, I like the courses that certainly fit my eye and the ones I play well at. This has all of that and it just so happens I can still sleep in my own bed, so it's a perfect storm right there, a perfect way to go about working.

But yeah, I'm excited for the week. I have had some momentum here. I mean, the other thing we hear, I don't know if Davis has heard it much, but what is there, 13 to 15 of us that live here and none of us have ever won? So at some point that's probably got to happen. There's a lot of great youth on this island, a lot of great youth. There's even a lot of great youth that don't have Tour status yet. I'm sure that will happen at some point.

I love how my peers, our peers say, man, I can't believe you live here. I mean, that kind of puts things in perspective. I don't want to take this place for granted, certainly don't want to take the people for granted because that's why we moved here is the community. It's a highlight every year for the Johnson household.

Q. Wonder if both of you could address this. This is the last tournament of the fall schedule. We've got a six-week break. Do you have any hopes or thoughts that during the six-week break?

(Audio interruption.)

ZACH JOHNSON: If it wasn't for those guys before me, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you.

DAVIS LOVE III: And there's a lot of good golf tournaments coming up that get really high ratings, so golf's not going dark. I'm watching Father-Son, I don't know about y'all.

ZACH JOHNSON: Like the RSM Classic and the John Deere Classic.

DAVIS LOVE III: He said the next six weeks.

ZACH JOHNSON: Oh. Well, I'm extending that.

Q. Davis, kind of along those same lines, I know I asked you this morning, you had not heard Rory's comments about Greg, but any universe where there is no lawsuit, does it make it better if Greg steps away and maybe someone else is involved and you can have a face to face?

DAVIS LOVE III: I don't know the answer to that. Again, if they say, hey, maybe we made a mistake and maybe we should drop a lawsuit and maybe we should quit stealing your players, then we might want to talk to them, but I don't think that's their model.

They're recruiting college players, they're recruiting PGA TOUR players, they're recruiting DP World Tour players. So as long as they're actively trying to, you know, hostile takeover, take our players away, get them to break the rules and go somewhere else, I don't think it matters who's running it. If they're -- you know, it's a year or two at least we're looking at a lawsuit that we're having to defend and they're actively trying to get more of our players and college players to play on their tour, so we have to defend. I don't think we sit down with anybody unless they say, hey, we give, you know.

Q. And kind of change gears, given sort of the uncertainty of the fall going forward, what do you imagine this event's going to be like two years from now? Not next year, two years from now.

DAVIS LOVE III: Well, with the support of our guys, we should get better and better. RSM has always pushed us as a foundation to get better and better, to do more things, and they'll do the same with the Tour. It's a partnership, you know, it's not just my tournament. It's our foundation, it's RSM, it's Sea Island and the PGA TOUR. We're all working towards the same goal is playing opportunities and putting on a great show and giving guys a chance to play.

Unfortunately, because of the things we were just talking about, we don't really know what's going to happen a year from now, two years from now. So my take on it is -- again, I just

played with Jay. Jay and I are very good friends, I've been on the board of the Tour five times, I know the way the Tour works. I'm like Zach, I'm optimistic that this is all going to work out. We know our dates for '23, we think we know them for '24, so we're happy and RSM's happy. As long as we have this event at The Cloister with Tour pros, everybody's going to be pretty happy around here.

ZACH JOHNSON: Especially the wives.

Q. For both of you guys, on a similar topic, defending the Tour against the other, against LIV, there have been some changes made, elevating tournaments, and it seems like a Tour that was always kind of run for the rank and file the way Beman started it, now it's had to gear really to the top-10 or top-20 players. Do you think that's good and do you think the tournaments that aren't elevated, do you think how's this going to affect them in the near term?

DAVIS LOVE III: Again, I think we don't really know. Like if you said two years ago what's the Tour going to look like, you wouldn't -- nobody would have come up with this, what is proposed for the next few years. I think it's all a work in progress.

But the important thing is the players got together and decided this is the direction we want to go. The players will certainly have suggestions at PAC meetings and at board meetings. I think now the players really, really do understand what Zach and I, guys who have been on the board understand is it is run by and for the players and that if we all decide that we want to wear shorts in the hot weather, they can't stop us if we all get together and say we want to wear shorts in the tournament, not in the practice rounds. Things like that, the shorts Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, came from the players. The medical, major medical program came from the players. There was some stat about how many rules changes during Finchem's era were made by the players and it was about 90 percent of the rules changes were made because of a player suggestion.

We understand the game and we understand access and we understand -- a little bit we understand marketing. And we have to do what Tiger and Rory and the big guns want to do to sell to FedEx and RSM, but we also have to -- our mission here is playing opportunities.

Charley Hoffman brought up something in a board meeting years ago. He said, I don't understand why this tournament, they have two courses right near each other, why couldn't we play 156? And I went, excuse me, we have two courses, why don't we play 156? And because Charley Hoffman put his foot down about another tournament, it motivated me to come back and talk to my team and the Tour and say, why can't we play? A lot more players get to play. Now we get all the Korn Ferry guys in I think almost every year.

So that won't ever stop. So going forward I'm asking Jay the rules today on the Heritage next year and the year after, selfishly. Who knows where it's going to go, but it will be for the benefit of every player. That's why the fall is so important. That's why RSM and, you know, whatever tournaments end up being in the fall, Sanderson Farms and right on down the list,

whatever ones in the fall are going to be important tournaments for this Tour. There's playing opportunities. A guy comes off Korn Ferry, he ought to have an opportunity to play 20 times, not six or eight.

So I don't know what it's all going to look like, I just know that we're in a good place with RSM, we're in a good place with the Tour and Sea Island, and as long as we can keep doing what we're doing here, there's a lot of happy guys over there in that locker room and on that driving range and in the RSM hospitality that they really like the way it's going and don't want it to change much.

Q. Zach?

ZACH JOHNSON: I don't have anything else to add to that.

DAVIS LOVE III: Do you want to talk about Ryder Cup?

ZACH JOHNSON: That's a lot easier topic.

Q. Can you just sort of assume John Deere will be elevated --

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't want to -- right, I don't want to assume anything. I mean, things are pretty fluid right now. Davis said it, we don't know what's going to happen. I fully appreciate and understand the intention behind the changes. I personally love that the Tour has -- I feel like there's many missions.

I think No. 1, going to the markets we go to and giving back, that is without -- that's No. 1, you know. And we're a 501(c)(6) and we're able to do that, it's pretty unique. Millions of dollars, that's No. 1 to give away. Great stewardship.

No. 2 is playing opportunities for the congregation of the Tour and however that looks. I do know that 2022-23 season will have the most starts collectively, cumulatively than any year ever. Granted, you've got three more months. Even take next September, October, November out, so they're fulfilling that mission. What's going to happen in '24, I really don't know, but after serving on the board, after being in a PAC numerous times, I didn't serve -- what did you serve, five times? Holy moly.

Again, I fully appreciate how this organization goes about its work. The individuals that are a lot smarter than us dorks that hit a golf ball want to hear from us, fully ingest what we say and then try to find a resolution that's great for everybody. And along the way, oh, we created a FedExCup. That wasn't a player decision, right? A lot of things he just said, those were player decisions, but these guys, Tim Finchem started the FedExCup and Jay Haas has taken it to new heights.

If we can completely appease our title sponsors and specifically television along the way and make that better, which we seem to do every time anyway, my confidence is ultrahigh. And

knowing the people behind it, I mean, I don't lose a second of sleep over that. I'm 46, so just keep the Champions Tour for about, you know, another 13 years, we'll be good.

Given the climate, my confidence is still very, very, very high and why we do what we do, how we do it and who's behind it, that's the best way I can answer that question.

Q. This is kind of a nuts and bolts question. Every year you sign something that gives the Tour permission to utilize your likeness in tournaments (inaudible) every week.

DAVIS LOVE III: Every year.

Q. It's a one thing, it's a blanket thing covers every tournament, every PGA TOUR event that you play in?

DAVIS LOVE III: We pay dues to the member organization and sign up every year if we play well enough to get invited back.

Q. I understand, but there are a lot of people who don't understand that that happens --

ZACH JOHNSON: That's true.

Q. -- when people are screaming about media rights, and a couple people have been screaming about it for more than a year now. And I've done some business with the Tour in the past and I understand how it works and I understand that you have to do that because otherwise, every week the Tour would have to go and get releases for 156 or whatever it is players.

DAVIS LOVE III: You sign up for the year. You pay your dues and join. A player gave an example that they had a Monday made-for-TV event and they had to pay the Tour a million dollars to make 14 and they wanted to make \$15 million.

Yeah, the Tour controls the media rights so that another player doesn't have the same Monday, you have it exclusively to put it on TV. Tiger and Davis and Zach and a bunch of other people don't have an event opposite your event and you can make \$14 million. That's the whole point. It's a platform that works for everybody.

Yeah, you can get three or four releases and go play around the world as long as you play your 15. The system works. That's what I keep saying about Rory McIlroy and Billy Horschel. Rory McIlroy wins the FedExCup and plays by the rules on two different tours. Billy Horschel wins the FedExCup, lives in the United States, plays by the rules on two different tours. The system works.

Nobody's getting restricted from doing what they want to do. It's just the only way the DP

World Tour and the PGA TOUR can market to FedEx and CBS and NBC and the Golf Channel is if they can say we have this and we can sell it to you legally. So we have to sign up every year to give them the right to be able to do that.

And the front office does control the biggest part of the sales, but the bus is not an old school bus, it's a really, really nice Prevost bus that we're on. And if you're in the back, it's really good, so you ought to thank the guys at the front when you get on and come to the back and try to work your way up to the front.

We need the tournaments that play, you know, 156 and maybe don't have the top 50 in the world because those guys -- how long ago was it that Scottie Scheffler won the most birdies in the fall for the Birdies Fore Love thing, or second place, and made a bunch of money for charity? Three years ago. Now he's the No. 1 player in the world.

These kind of tournaments make stars just like the Korn Ferry just gave us a bunch of new stars, that I need to go introduce myself to on the range, that are coming.

The whole bus works if we just keep it going down the road. And that's to the questions earlier, somebody's trying to knock our bus offtrack and we have to defend that.

ZACH JOHNSON: That's well said. Write that down.

Q. Zach, how have you dealt with the fact that you haven't won in several years?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah. I mean, as a competitor -- God, that's a great question -- it completely and utterly eats at me. But I'm also, I know how hard this game is and typically, you know, when I've had valleys, if you will, the motivation to go work and try to get out of that valley has never been an issue.

I've had some physical issues that probably have helped matters. Then you compound that with, just being practical, I'm not getting younger, I understand what I'm up against. But yeah, I'm at the point now mentally that I feel like some of my best golf can still be in front of me if I work efficiently. I may not be able to work as much or high quantity, but my quality of work can be really good. So every time my quality of work is good, every time my emphasis on the aspects of the game are efficient -- gym, mental, technical, physical, all that -- the best part of Zach's golf shows up. So I'm still confident that's coming. Go ahead, sorry.

Q. Did you take into consideration the Ryder Cup captaincy and all that that entails, how that can affect your personal performance?

ZACH JOHNSON: Yeah, I'm going to try to make the team. That may be kind of smart alec-like, but it's a Ryder Cup year, that's always been one of my goals, right? The best things I've been associated with in this game have been those teams. Is that realistic? I have no idea.

DAVIS LOVE III: Playing captain sounds nice.

ZACH JOHNSON: Playing captain sounds pretty good. I'm also again very practical and very realistic, I think. You know, I'm kind of in that bridge between some of the youth and then some of the non-youth of the game. I'm in a good position. I think it's a smart thing to have somebody in my age group to lead the team at some point. Just so happens this is my year, right?

So no, I've completely embraced my role and I know how much time that's going to -- well, I shouldn't say. I assume I know how much time that's going to take. Is it going to take time away? It already has. There were two tournaments I would like to have played this fall that I couldn't play, and that's OK. I can -- that's -- if that's a problem, that's a great problem. So it just means again I have to be really efficient in my practice.

Q. Have you figured out what didn't work in the 2018 game plan and have you been revising like how the team's going to go about prepping for Italy, a course they don't know?

ZACH JOHNSON: Sure. I mean, I learned a lot. That was my first -- that was my first vice captaincy, I think. I had to think about it, but yeah, it was.

I mean, bottom line is this, and he can probably -- Davis can probably tell you better than I can, he's obviously led multiple teams and played on a ton as well. Sometimes you just get beat, that's the bottom line, right? That team, the European team was playing great at the time. You had a FedExCup champion on that team and you had a lot of really high quality ball-strikers on a course that demanded really good ball-striking.

I don't know if anything was, you know, could have been different on our end. I mean, Jim at the time made the decisions that he thought was best for the team. You can't second guess that. We're all pros, right? I think he could probably second guess some of his vice leadership, but other than that, I don't -- I think we just got beat and that's unfortunate. But it's hard to win over there.

I learned a lot, yes. Things I could get really specific about that I'm not going to tell you right now, and I'm going to learn more as I go. Every team I've been associated with I've learned playing in and just being on the side.

Rome's going to be a completely different team with completely different players with completely different leadership. Maybe not completely.

DAVIS LOVE III: Maybe not.

ZACH JOHNSON: But there's -- it's a great opportunity. I'm jacked up.

DAVIS LOVE III: I'll answer for him. He's already ahead of the game.

JOHN BUSH: Davis, what are Zach's strengths as a captain?

DAVIS LOVE III: Well, as he's been describing, he's really good at time management, he's really good at using his team to set up a game plan. He hadn't hardly been named captain and I got two phone calls from other people that he already talked to about helping him with food and travel and things like that. So he's on it.

But yeah, we did learn a lot. One, if you have three of your top players not play well, it's hard to win. But yeah, the practice round thing, he's already thinking about that, how to get guys more used to the golf course. He's on it.

But as a group we've learned a lot since 2015. Every year we learn a lot. We learned a lot this year at Presidents Cup. I think we, Zach and I, had a not-so-much-fun Saturday making pairings. I was just talking to Mack Horton over in the lunch room, like we have to do a debriefing before we forget all these details, we have to sit down and talk about all this. But we all jump back into the Tour and getting ready for the RSM. Zach and I have been talking about things for Rome back and forth while he's trying to play, where I'm trying to get ready for RSM and we finally said, all right, Monday after RSM we'll settle some of this stuff.

But no, he's on it. As I said, now we have somebody smart and organized that's a captain so we can move forward.

ZACH JOHNSON: I'll say the beauty of what's been established and he kind of alluded to it back in '15 is that we have a system. I don't know, whatever you want to call it, maybe a template, right, where there were some decisions back then and I frankly don't know them all, but the system for Team USA is really, really good right now. It doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to win, that's not what I'm alluding to, but it's good and it can take on the personality year in and year out of that leader so you can stay on the same road and just have a different bus driver, going back to his cliche.

And I appreciate that. Knowing that my peers want me to do this is everything to me. They say it's your turn, that's amazing. I'm a guy that I can't stand drama, so it's going to be my goal to avoid that. It's not always easy, it's not always practical, it's not always going to happen. That's No. 1.

No. 2 would be I just want to give the guys the ability to enter the most uncomfortable week in a very comfortable manner. The system's already in place, I'm going to follow it, I'm going to nuance it to Zach and Kim Johnson and represent that team as best I can.

Q. Can you tell us about meeting the pope?

DAVIS LOVE III: Yes.

Q. How cool was that?

ZACH JOHNSON: It was amazing. Yeah, it was amazing. I don't know, maybe I shouldn't assume but I've got to assume it was one of the shortest visits to the Vatican without seeing anything in the Vatican except for the pope. But that was awesome, that is where he resides.

It was very surreal would be the right operative word there.

Q. What's the protocol?

ZACH JOHNSON: Well, you do dress up, you've got to wear a dark suit. The women have to wear clothing to the knee or below I believe and cover their shoulders. I think there's like shawl stores all around the Vatican if I'm not mistaken, for obvious reasons.

It felt like 30 to 40 minutes, it was probably all of about seven or eight around him. His health's not great. He's great upstairs. He's got some physical ailments, knee or hip or both, I can't recall. He kind of cracked a couple jokes, which was kind of cool.

One of the priests there, I'm assuming he was a cardinal, that would be my guess, one of his handymen of some sort cracked a couple jokes, which is pretty cool. He was like, yeah, the pope got up at 4:00 today instead of 3:30, he felt he didn't need 30 more minutes to do nothing, something like that. He gets up really early, I guess he prays for all the morning and then kind of does his due diligence, but very cool.

I got a nice little gift. We gifted him with a Ryder Cup replica and a book. It was really cool. Hats off to the Italian Golf Federation and certainly I believe the Italian Olympic Committee or Division had something to do with it as well. A lot of entities over there in golf, in sport. A little different than it is over here, but very cool, too. Amazing people. It was very surreal.

Q. Did it feel bigger than you?

ZACH JOHNSON: I love those moments, those are some of my fondest moments that I've had where I feel the size of about like that. yeah, that's one of them, sure.

Depending upon your faith background, he's a man that is certainly revered. I want to say they called him the highest priest or the holy priest, the holy priest or whatever. Clearly he has a lot of responsibility and, I mean, I don't know many other people that would be more well known than him around the world.

Yes, to take a little bit of time out of his day to share with us was very humbling.

JOHN BUSH: Davis, Zach, thank you for your time.