



# The Second Coming

**Justin Leonard and Tripp Davis moving forward with New Course at The Tribute project**

By Robert Rodriguez

Photography by Eric Dorsey

**I**t's hard to make a sequel – just ask any movie director. Especially those who created “National Lampoon’s European Vacation,” “The Godfather III,” “Staying Alive” and “Caddyshack II.”

It seems that if they produce a blockbuster, they need to cash in on its success and make another one. While a second helping of success sounds like a good idea at the time, more often than not the sequel turns out to be an ill-conceived and aggressively inept bomb.

Unless, of course, that sequel turns into an “Empire Strikes Back,” “Rocky II,” “Bride of Frankenstein” or “The Godfather II” – one that is as good as the original.

The folks at The Tribute Golf Club in The Colony are hoping their sequel to the existing Tribute course – the New Course at The Tribute – will be just as good, if not better, than the first one. And that’s a lofty goal considering *Golf Digest* ranked The Old Course at the Tribute (the existing layout’s new name) one of the Top 100 public courses in the United States.

“Our goal with the New Course is to have it become a top-100 golf course like the Old Course,” said Tripp Davis, the architect behind both Tribute courses. “I think we have a golf course now, with the way it’s worked out, that will be better than that.”

Whereas the Old Course at The Tribute paid homage to the famous Scottish courses, the New Course at Tribute will model the designs of early American course architecture such as Shinnecock Hills, National Golf Links, The Maidstone Club, Chicago Golf Club and Prairie Dunes. Large bunkers with native grasses dancing in the wind will dominate this layout, with Lake Lewisville visible on most of the holes. In fact, golfers will be on the lakeshore on eight of the holes.

“What separates the modern golf course design and those from the ‘Golden Age of Golf Course Design’ (1900-1920) was that they didn’t move a lot of dirt,” Davis said. “The golf course had more of a layered-land feel. The golf courses were purely about strategy; they were laying out golf courses out to create an interesting game.

“[On the New Course] you can see the lake from about 15 holes, and you’re right on the lake on several of those. The lake is a really cool sight, especially when it constantly bombards you while playing the course.”

Davis is one of the many cast members from the Old Course at The Tribute production returning for the sequel. Jack Matthews,

president of Matthews Southwest and the visionary behind The Tribute, is back for more, as is Wynne/Jackson, a Dallas-based real estate firm that is heavily involved in this project.

Yet, there is a new face on the New Course project that already has given this course some prominence. And he knows a little bit about links-style layouts and the Dallas golf scene. Justin Leonard joins forces with Davis on the New Course as a co-designer, offering insight on ways to make the golf course challenging for better players like him. And he’s helping find ways to make the New Course fun for higher handicappers.

Good thing they’ve learned to put their Longhorn-Sooner differences aside (Leonard played at the University of Texas; Davis played golf at the University of Oklahoma).

## Justin Leonard, course designer?

The New Course at The Tribute isn’t the only golf course collaboration for Leonard and Tripp Davis. They are also working on a golf course project in Colorado.

So does that mean Leonard will join Tiger Woods, Davis Love III, Sergio Garcia and his other playing peers and start designing golf courses?

“This has definitely peaked my interest in course design,” Leonard said of The New Course at The Tribute. “Yet, I have a full-time job playing golf. But this is something I enjoy doing. I think a lot of that has to do with the people that I work with on a project. I do look forward to getting involved with other projects and courses, but much like this project, it has to be the right project with the right people at the right time.

“I’m not looking to become a designer full time. This is something that I enjoy doing; Tripp and I’s relationship throughout all this has been great and I look forward to working with him more.”



## Whereas the Old Course at The Tribute paid homage to the famous Scottish courses, the New Course at Tribute will model the designs of early American course architecture.

"It's such an interesting process, working with Tripp," Leonard said. "Before I came into this project two years ago, I never really thought about why I liked certain golf courses or why I liked certain holes. I never really analyzed that. With Tripp, I've been able to verbalize the things I like and why I like them. It's such a great challenge to put those ideas on paper first and then go out and produce what you think on the golf course."

"I play in about 20-25 pro-ams a year, so I've played with some good golfers and I've played with some who only get out twice a year. By seeing that, I have to try and get any foursome around the golf course. And that's been very challenging. But it's something Tripp knows how to do very well."

Davis made it clear that he didn't want Leonard to sporadically show up at his convenience; rather, he wanted someone who wasn't afraid to get dirty.

"I've done some golf courses with touring pros before, and one of the things I talked with Justin about before we got involved here was that I didn't want somebody who just wanted their name on it," Davis said. "I wanted someone who was going to

be actively involved in the design process and understands some of the things that we do. And Justin has done that."

The New Course at The Tribute will be a strategic layout that will give golfers plenty of options throughout – areas where golfers can take a more aggressive line or take a subtle approach; a lot of options around the green when it comes to chipping, bumping the ball up or putting the ball onto the green. From the tips, the New Course at The Tribute will play just a shade under 7,100 yards. The middle tees will hover around 6,700 yards, with the up tees at 6,200 and the forward tees at 5,100 yards.

The tees, fairways and first cut will feature Premier Bermuda grass, a new and improved version of 419 Bermuda, while Mini-Verde grass will carpet the greens. Prairie Buffalo grass and other native grasses will dominate the outer rough and bunker areas for that wispy, links look, while Palisades Zoysia grass will create those fat lips that are found at the older American courses.

"There's not a lot of blind shots on this golf course," Leonard said. "Bringing those elements (native grasses, rough-edged bunkers) in and seeing them incorporated into this design first-

hand has been a lot of fun.

"I want to build golf courses that people will play once and want to come back. It's not going to beat them up, yet it will challenge a professional or top amateur and still allow them to enjoy it."

As seen in recent years, the area around The Tribute continues to flourish, with homesites popping up almost daily. That will continue if everything goes according to the plan set by Matthews Southwest and Wynne/Jackson. Their plan: to make both Tribute golf courses part of a lakefront golf resort community at Lake Lewisville.

"It will have two golf courses, a future marina, lots of walking trails and 100 acres of natural area," Matthews said. "It'll really have something for everyone."



Tripp Davis (left) and Justin Leonard

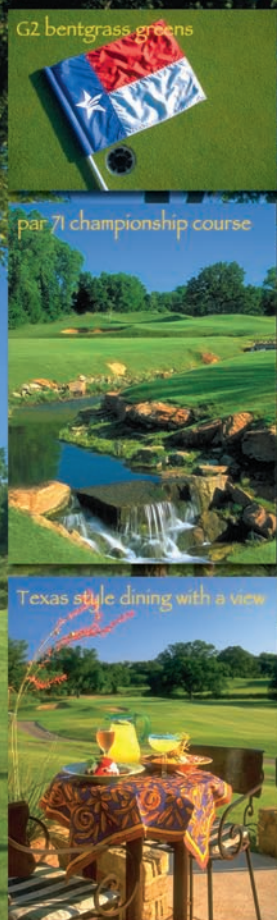
"Five to 10 years down the road, this should be an incredibly special place. I think it's a special place already that just keeps getting better and better with each passing day."

Those driving down Lebanon Road and heading over to the Old Course at The Tribute already can see the holes taking form. A late spring 2009 opening date is still the goal, and the New Course will have its own clubhouse behind the 18<sup>th</sup> green and a separate driving range.

And from hearing the main stars of this sequel, it sounds like the New Course at The Tribute will be more like "Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers" than "Batman & Robin."

"What we're trying to do is put a golf course on the ground that is really unique in nature and works with this property," Davis said. "This has turned out to be something more than I thought it was going to be. Obviously we knew we had a great piece of property and we had the Old Course concept to play off of. I've really enjoyed the process and we're still in it. Things have been going pretty well, so we're excited about the New Course."

"It's been a great process and a huge learning experience for me," Leonard added. "Just being able to consult on a project like this that is so close to home, I want to make a good impression. I feel like we're on our way to doing that." **AG**



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