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Davis, Leonard show off second Tribute 18

Former Sooner, Longhorn an ideal design team

By ART STRICKLIN

THE COLONY, Texas – With his first English course in the planning stages and a design partnership with a Texas PGA Tour superstar resulting in a new Dallas-area American golf tribute, Oklahoma architect Tripp Davis is riding a new career high.

Davis, 40, recently showed off his work on the second golf course at The Tribute, a public resort course just north of Dallas, which he designed with former British Open champion and Dallas native Justin Leonard.

While Davis designed the first 18 holes as a tribute to famous holes in Scotland,

the second 18, which will open for play in the summer of 2009, is a tribute to the great American courses of the early 1900s.

"Most courses today are meant to look good, not play good," Davis said. "Justin has been very involved in this to make sure people come to play once, and then want to come back again. I'm very much a traditionalist and so is Justin."

Davis, a former amateur golf star who was an All-American at Oklahoma, and Leonard, who has more than a dozen Tour titles to his credit, first worked on a course together in Colorado. This is their first collaboration in North Texas.

"This is such an interesting process work-



Justin Leonard, left, and Tripp Davis discuss the new 18 at The Tribute.

ing with Tripp," Leonard said in a brief break before leaving for Valhalla Golf Club and the 2008 Ryder Cup. "He's challenged me to think about why I like certain holes, and then to be able to take that from paper to the field and see it come to life has been great.

"It's just much more than moving this bunker here or moving that tree there. There is



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NEW COURSES AND RENOVATIONS

a lot more than I realized going into it."

Norman resident Davis, who played golf for the Sooners from 1985-89 and returned for a Master's degree in landscape design in 1995, said the second Tribute layout was another career milestone for him.

"I just like to do interesting stuff. My wife would be the first to tell you I don't treat this enough like a business, but this is very interesting to me," Davis said.

While the first Tribute course showcased famous Scottish holes like the 17th and 18th at St. Andrews Old Course and the par-3 Postage Stamp from Royal Troon, the second Tribute, known as The New Course, honors individual courses like Maidstone, Shinnecock and National Golf Links, all on Long Island, N.Y., along with Chicago Golf Club and Prairie Dunes in Hutchinson, Kan.

While Davis has traveled extensively in the United Kingdom when planning his replica courses, he has recently received his first chance to design his only English links courses in Devon, England, on the shores of the English Channel.

"I've always thought that if I continued to work hard and keep my head down good opportunities would come my way. That's what happened in Devon on a great piece of

property 40 feet above the coast.

"I'm very proud to be only the third American to design a new course in England," he added.

Davis said he's currently in the design phase of the still-unnamed course in Devon, and will likely begin construction in the spring.

"It was actually somebody over here who knew about the project and the owners and I was able to get the job. It's exciting."

While Davis remains excited about his continued rise in his chosen golf-related profession, his work with Leonard on the new course at The Tribute has convinced him he made the right career choice after leaving OU.

As part of the research for the new joint project, the pair traveled to the East Coast to play several of the famous courses and played together for three days in a row.

"In three days I shot 71 twice and 77 once," Davis recalled. "Justin never missed the fairway once in three days, not once, and never three-putted. He never shot higher than 70. I have no chance. I think I have beaten him once for 18 holes and once for nine."

"I told Justin, I just didn't want him to put his name on this, I wanted him to be hands-

on. But I still wanted him to play well and qualify for the Ryder Cup."

While Leonard said he enjoyed learning more golf-design insight from Davis and would be open to future projects with the OU architect, he's hoping to use his newfound appreciation of course design to help in his real job.

"I have a day job and that's something I want to keep doing. This was the right project at the right place and the right time with the right person," Leonard added.

But it didn't take him long to use Davis' wisdom to aid his own golfing skills in the 2008 FedEx Cup.

In the first playoff event this fall, Leonard bogeyed the par-5 13th hole at Ridgewood Country Club in the first round. Later that night, he was talking with Davis about the round and told him what an awful par-5 it was.

"I told him to figure out a way to play the hole and make birdie," Davis said. "That's exactly what he did for the next three days."

Headed to the end of a very successful 2008 for both golfers, it's clear both should continue to make plenty of birdies in their chosen golfing fields for years to come.

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