

An Open Letter to David Duval

By: Nathan Crace Date: January 26, 2005

Dear Mr. Duval:

Those of us who enjoy watching the game of golf played by the best players in the world have banded together to collectively ask one simple question: "What gives?" To say you have been conspicuously absent from the PGA Tour on the weekends in recent memory would be an understatement at best. Last year, we only saw you in the Majors—a decidedly masochistic way to work yourself back into tournament shape. This year, we've seen you earlier, but are still waiting to see you on weekends. It wasn't that long ago that finding your name on the first page of the leader board was as easy as finding someone with a liberal arts degree serving up a double mocha cappuccino at Starbucks. So again we ask, "What gives?"

I understand that a number of pundits have been quick to explain the demise of your game over the last three years. Tumbling from the number one player in the world to a guy who would have lost his Tour card if not for the exemption that is part and parcel of your 2001 British Open victory. Some say it's your love life—none of my business I say. I don't know why they think it's any of theirs. Still others say you suffer from a lack of commitment or ailments such as vertigo. Some even say that you need to decide between snowboarding and golf—a strange decision to have to make. But for those of us who enjoyed watching the seemingly difficult to understand player behind the wraparound shades play the game, we just want to see you back in action.

We breathed a collective sigh of relief following your second round 62 during the FBR Capital Open in 2003, hoping it was the beginning of the end of the slump. Your one-under-par finish was good enough for a tie for 28th place come Sunday afternoon (your best of the year) and seemed to have you poised for a strong finish at the US Open. I guess I don't have to tell you that +10 didn't make the cut at Olympia Fields that year. In 2004, I followed your group for eight holes at the Southern Farm Bureau Classic in Madison, Mississippi and your crowd was one of the largest roaming the course. The fans are still there. We just want you to break through again.

So it comes to this: what can you do to regain the magic that we remember you best for? To be honest, we miss you. You were the man who dethroned Tiger. The player who would give him a run for his money each week. This generation's Arnie versus Jack. We understand that a bad back can be more than just an aggravation and make an action as unnatural as a golf swing about as comfortable as bamboo shoots under your fingernails. So taking a closer look at your statistics, here is my humble opinion. Recently, you ranked in the top 115 in only one major statistical category: putting average (where you were as high as 29th at one time). Don't worry about putting—you have many, many more important areas to work on. Namely, driving the ball. You have been ranking in the lower 100's in driving accuracy lately—the same for greens in regulation. So the driver needs tuning, the irons are off, yet the putter is working well. Why is this?

So David—can we call you David? Do your fans a favor and yourself an even bigger favor. Pick up the pieces, drop in for some serious time on the range, and stop listening to the talking heads who now pontificate your fate and the reason for it because their games are washed up and they have nothing better to do with their time. The last thing I want to see is the complete disappearance of David Duval from the game, only to re-surface twenty years from now as a television commentator/Champions Tour comeback player after your professional snowboarding career has come and gone. We'll be watching. And waiting. A few more rounds where everything clicks and some play on the weekend and maybe we'll see you on the leader board (if not the winner's circle) by, say, The International this year? Keep up the comeback, forget the pundits and most importantly, buy a new driver and get the ball in the hole.

The above letter was revised from an open letter written by the author in 2003. Nathan Crace is a golf course architect whose freelance "Lipouts" column is based, at times, on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed or wish to read past columns from the archives, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know. Copyright 2005.