



Cindy Davis, Nike Golf

## Newsmaker Interview: Cindy Davis, Nike Golf

By Art Stricklin

**I**n her relatively brief golf career, Cindy Davis has managed to touch just about every corner of the golf industry, and is now positioned as one of the most powerful executives of the remarkably fast growing Nike Golf Company.

As U.S. General Manager, she is responsible for overseeing the massive domestic golf business for Nike Golf. With its corporate headquarters in Beaverton, Oregon and its club design facility in Fort Worth, Texas, Davis has more than enough to do with the company which didn't even own a golf division just a decade ago.

She is responsible for sales, operation, marketing and sports marketing, maybe even making her top endorser Tiger Woods' boss, even though you'll never find that on her business card.

Before coming to Nike in early 2005, she served as Senior Vice President of The Golf Channel in Orlando, continuing a longtime association with network founder Arnold Palmer. Davis first began as Executive Vice President and later promoted to President and CEO of the Arnold Palmer Golf Company from 1997-2000.

Davis also spent three years as an executive at the LPGA where she served as the director of licensing, marketing and communication along with overseeing the 1,000 member Teaching and Club Pro Division.

Her various positions in the world of golf has given her a unique and varied look at the golf industry as it heads into 2008, and where it is positioned to close the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Nike will have a presence at this year's PGA Show in Orlando, promoting its new clubs in the club demo area on the floor of the Orange Country Convention Center along with its apparel business.

Davis is able to anticipate where Nike and the golf industry as a whole is headed in terms of innovation, expectation and participation.

More importantly, as one of the few top female women executives anywhere in the golf business, she is able to see where the growing female golf business is headed.

In the last four months, Davis has also made two business trips to Asia, further showcasing another area where she has gained golf experience now and for the future.

A native of suburban Washington, D.C., Davis played college golf at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina. While being named a first team All-America golfer, she looked at the talented landscape of women's college and professional golf and quickly decided her career did not lie with playing golf for a living. "I didn't want to starve," she says.

Davis got a degree in economics from Furman and received an MBA in marketing and finance from the University of Maryland.

Just before the PGA Show in Orlando and as the 2008 golf season officially cranks up, golf's woman for all seasons, Cindy Davis, talked with Golf Range Magazine Senior Writer Art Stricklin about where she sees Nike and golf headed now and in the future.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** January is always a busy month in the golf industry, with the annual PGA Show in Orlando and the start of a new selling season, so is it a busy one for you?

**CINDY DAVIS:** It's always a busy one for us here at Nike. We're involved in the equipment demo at the show and the apparel line, but not as much club sales because of the way the sales cycles have changed over the years.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** What do you mean by changes?

**CINDY DAVIS:** From the equipment side, people make their decision a lot earlier for the year than they used to. By the time the show gets here, people have already planned their club sales for the year and we're working with the R&D to build out clubs for the next 3-5 years.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** I guess one thing that hasn't changed is everybody always has the latest and greatest model coming to the market.

**CINDY DAVIS:** Well, speaking from the marketing and sales sides, we certainly wish the product launch cycles were longer than they are, but you can't come to the market with the same product every year.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** I guess that means the days of the Tommy Armour 845s or the Ping i2s being around forever are over?

**CINDY DAVIS:** What you are seeing today are familiar clubs with new technology. We launched the Sasquatch driver three years ago, and this is already the second generation with new technology. We're still building on the technology with the same commitment to the product.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** You've certainly been involved in many phases of the golf industry, but where do you see the golf business as it heads into 2008?

**CINDY DAVIS:** I think when looking at the health of the industry, there aren't many indicators which don't show it won't be like last year which was basically flat. While we

have more interest in the game because of an athlete like Tiger Woods who is challenging history, we are challenged to increase number of players.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Why is that?

**CINDY DAVIS:** I'm not totally sure on the number of golf participants, but as an industry we're challenged in cracking the code on increasing the number of people playing. I think the growth is more in Asia; it's more of a battle here in the U.S.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** What's different about the markets?

**CINDY DAVIS:** The manufacturers in the US may be more sophisticated with a longer tenure, but we remain bullish on the future of Nike Golf. It's certainly a competitive positive to be a "head to toe" (golf) company with a lot of different options for consumers.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Even though you haven't been here for the entire period, is it still amazing to see where Nike has come in just over a decade as a major player in the golf industry?

**CINDY DAVIS:** It's been very exciting to see what Nike has done in a short period of time. In 1996 we signed Tiger Woods and in 1998 we became a separate golf company within Nike, so it's been a very exciting journey. We've become a major player in all areas of the golf market, but I think we've only scratched the surface in what's possible.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** You had a chance early in your career to interact a great deal with Arnold Palmer when you were working with his golf company, now you've spent a good deal of time with Tiger Woods. Are there some similarities in those two golf legends?

**CINDY DAVIS:** That's a very good question. I was around Arnold a lot and consider him a friend. Since coming to Nike, I've been around Tiger and say they both love the game greatly and they understand they have larger responsibilities. They both have surrounded themselves with the right people and they both are made of the right stuff.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** What about their charisma?

**CINDY DAVIS:** I think they express it in

different ways, but one thing they are very similar in is being a fierce competitor. Every time Arnold is on the golf course he always thinks he can get better and Tiger is the same way. I think we should feel very fortunate to see great golfers like Arnold, Tiger, and I would add Nancy Lopez as the face of the sport.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** You already made one trip to Asia last fall and you're going back this winter, does that indicate the importance of that market to Nike and to golf in general?

**CINDY DAVIS:** I think there is a growing middle class in China and as that grows golf will grow as well. It's no longer a game for the super wealthy, but a game for the middle class.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Is there other golf growth there as well?

**CINDY DAVIS:** You look at the golf courses and the golf ranges, there's certainly a lot of growth there. We are positioned to aid the growth in the country and are working hard to help them.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** What about the large number of knockoff clubs which have come from Asia; is that still a problem?

**CINDY DAVIS:** Well, the knockoffs still exist, but we've worked hard with a number of other companies to combat that. I would say some progress is being made, but it's still a problem.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** What will exhibitors and the general public see that is new from Nike this year?

**CINDY DAVIS:** They will see our new 360 fitting system which will allow us to fit the entire bag from driver to pitching wedge using technology from all angles. I think you will also see some new technology in our golf balls and some other new technology later on in 2008.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Anything else?

**CINDY DAVIS:** We're certainly going to continue our work on the European Tour and our inroads into the Asian market.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** What does a general manager for the U.S. do at Nike?

**CINDY DAVIS:** I basically oversee the whole U.S. business operations from sales and marketing and operations and clubs.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Does that make you Tiger Woods' U.S. boss?

**CINDY DAVIS:** No. I would never say that.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** While you've performed a lot of different jobs in the golf industry, you've become one of the highest-ranking females in the industry, anywhere; have you ever felt a resistance as one of the few female executives in the golf world?

**CINDY DAVIS:** I've never felt a resistance, but it's certainly not unusual to be the only women in the room. I do feel a responsibility as one of the few female golf executives, but I think the leadership of the game should look like society and that's one of my missions here with this company. I think you need diverse viewpoints which can give you good decisions.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Did you play golf in college?

**CINDY DAVIS:** I played at Furman University in Greenville, S. C., which has had some great players like Betsy King and Beth Daniel, but I knew my career path didn't lie on playing for a living.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Do you still enjoy playing with all the new Nike equipment?

**CINDY DAVIS:** We're certainly busy people here, but that's one of the most fun parts of the job there. I do get to play about 25 times a year.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Have you ever played with Tiger?

**CINDY DAVIS:** Not yet, but I played once with Arnold Palmer and that was a magical experience.

**GOLF RANGE MAGAZINE:** Thanks for your time during a busy part of the year for you.

**CINDY DAVIS:** You're welcome. I feel like it's going to be another good year for Nike. ●