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Pressure cooker

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Furmanathletics

Pressure cooker

Just five months after graduating from Furman in June of 2004, Matt Davidson found himself standing on the 17th tee of the PGA West Stadium Golf Course in La Quinta, Calif. He was playing his sixth and final round of the PGA Tour Qualifying Tournament, and he knew he could achieve a lifelong dream of obtaining a PGA Tour card by simply avoiding disaster during the next two holes.

Not too many people would have expected the 23-year-old Davidson to be in such a prime position, including Davidson himself. But the former Paladin golfer handled some of the most intense pressure golfers can face and played his last two holes 1-under par to join Tiger Woods, Vijay Singh and a host of other millionaires who play the world's top golf tour for a living.

"It was a great feeling that I was able to get my card on my first try," Davidson says. "It gave me a lot of confidence to be able to finish like that."

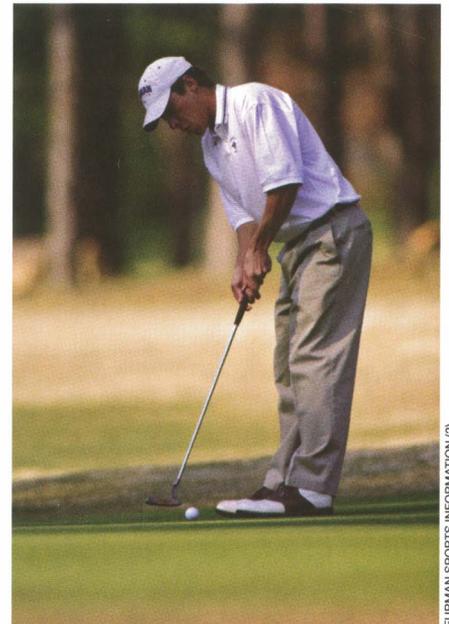
Davidson came into the Q-school well beneath the radar, considering that his competition included a dozen former tour winners, a former U.S. Open Champion, two members of past European Ryder Cup teams and the 2004 College Player of the Year, Wake Forest's Bill Haas. A total of 164 golfers made it to the final stage of Q-school — Davidson had survived elimination rounds in Florence, S.C., and St. Augustine, Fla. — and only the top 26 and ties earned PGA Tour cards.

"I was glad when it was over," Davidson said. "It wasn't much fun, and I think everybody out there would tell you it's not supposed to be fun."

Davidson finished 10-under par for the tournament and tied for 11th place with rounds of 73, 71, 65, 70, 72 and 71. His 65 at the Jack Nicklaus Tournament Course was one shot better than any tournament round he posted during his career at Furman.

He might have caught the golfing world by surprise, but the people who

Davidson emerges from Q-school with PGA Tour card



FURMAN SPORTS INFORMATION (2)

A West Windsor, N.J., native who won his home state's amateur championship in 2003, Matt Davidson earned a degree in political science from Furman.

know Davidson best weren't surprised by his performance. He had a strong college career, winning three tournaments, including the 2004 Southern Conference championship, and finished with the second best career stroke average (73.46) in school history, behind current PGA player Brad Faxon '83.

"Matt had always been a consistent player, and he just got better every year," says Todd Satterfield, his coach at Furman. "I thought he could be the kind of golfer he's proving to be right now."

David Moore '03, a close friend who caddied for Davidson at the Q-school finals, says Davidson turned up his game a few notches at the tournament. "I had played a lot of golf with Matt, and I knew how good he could be," Moore says. "But it was amazing how well he played in California. He was so focused, and even if he got nervous at times, it didn't show in how he played."

Davidson joined the tour in January, and his first tournament — the Sony Open in Hawaii — proved to be quite

an experience; he was paired with teen-age sensation Michelle Wie for the first two rounds. He plans to play every tournament he can get into throughout the year, and he has until December to prove he belongs. He will have to finish among the top 125 money winners to retain his playing privileges.

In the meantime, Davidson is maintaining his many Furman connections. His home base is Greenville, where he lives with two Furman alumni and a current student about a mile from the Furman Golf Course. He also dates Natalie The '03, a former Lady Paladin tennis player who attends law school at Emory University in Atlanta.

"The better he handles the outside things like travel, sponsors and Monday pro-ams, the better he'll play on tour," Satterfield says. "There's no question he has the game to stay out there."

— Vince Moore