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ORAL HISTORY

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DATE X August 23 1988

X Sharon K Davis
(Signature - Interviewee)

1520 S. County Rd 254
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Tipp City, Ohio 45271

DATE X 7-23-88

X J. E. Marshall II
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#190

#21 - Sharon Davis - Yeager Scholar, Ashland Class

March 24, 1988

Ms. Davis was born in Troy, Ohio on June 9, 1969. She discusses growing up in a small town in Ohio, her elementary years, and the early spirit of competition. She explains her involvement with school athletics in high school and her goals for the future.

Shank: This is one in a series of taped interviews on the history of the Society of Yeager Scholars. My name is Michele Shank and with me today is Sharon Davis, one of the first Yeager Scholars. Okay, Sharon, I think we're ready. First of all, tell me when and where you were born.

Davis: I was born in Troy, Ohio, June 9th, 1969.

Shank: And how close is Troy to the biggest city in Ohio, that I would know the name of?

Davis: Uh, Dayton, Ohio.

Shank: Okay.

Davis: It's about 20 minutes north.

Shank: Okay. And tell me a little bit about your family. Do you have brothers and sisters?

Davis: I have one sister and she's thirteen months younger than I am.

Shank: Okay.

Davis: And my mom and dad are still married and they still live together, and all that good stuff.

Shank: All that good stuff, okay. What does your father do for an occupation?

Davis: He is the corporate executive. He owns a company and is the president of it, of _____ Correctional Equipment and they make and construct prison and jail equipment; security locks, and things like that.

Shank: Okay. Tell me about your hometown of Troy. Have you always lived in Troy?

Davis: I lived in Tipp City.

Shank: Oh, you lived in Tipp City?

Davis: Right. And I moved there when I was in fifth grade. Before that, I lived in Gettysburg, Ohio, which is right next to Troy, Ohio. It's all in the same general vicinity. But Tipp City is just like a small town and it's probably...people will probably consider it suburban of Dayton. A lot of people that want to get away from the action of the city life come up to Tipp City to live. It's more of a community center type of thing, than industrial. But it's growing. It's gotten more industry. The people are all really friendly. And if you walk down the street you get the feeling of a small town in, you know, mid-western America.

Shank: Do you know the population, roughly?

Davis: I think it's between 6 and 10 thousand, I'm not sure.

Shank: That's a small town.

Davis: Yea, but see, the thing is, the town itself has limits and stuff, but then most of the people live out in the cul-de-sacs and you know.

Shank: Okay. So, you attended grade school in Gettysburg?

Davis: Gettysburg, right.

Shank: And what was grade school like?

Davis: Mmm, grade school.

Shank: Do you remember grade school?

Davis: Yeah, I do remember. Um, I can remember there was this other girl and I was in competition with her all the time for like the highest grades 'cause she was in the next reading class up and it was always like it was her and I. I mean, it was like nothing _____ I was going like, I want to be like Tracy is. So, it was always her and I.

Shank: So, you did feel competition in grade school?

Davis: Uh-huh. Well, like...I always wanted to be right there. I wanted to do as good as she did and be in the next reading class and get to see all the older people and stuff like that. I don't know what started, but I remember always doing that.

Shank: Was she your friend?

Davis: Uh-huh, she was my friend, but that was probably another reason. She got to do things I didn't get to do. But then in third grade they started a program, TAG, the talented and gifted. And four of the people out of my class were chosen. And I was one of those and so was Tracy. We were the two girls and then there were two guys, too. And that was another thing. We went to a special school on Thursdays, we got to do that. So that was another incentive to do that.

Shank: What extra activities did the program include that the other students didn't receive?

Davis: We did a lot. Basically, worked two and three grade levels ahead of what we were. And reading, like we had to read so many books. And we went on excursions. Like we went to museums and the air force base. We did research like I can remember, doing research on dinosaurs. I had to do an in-depth research about the cranium, this was like in fourth grade. And I went to a dentist's office and got stuff. I didn't really understand a lot

of it, but my mom helped me with it. I can remember having to draw it out.

Shank: Did you feel any pressure from that program, or did you handle it well?

Davis: I loved it. It was fun. Just...I don't know...just...it was more things to do. Uh, the pressure...the only thing I could feel like pressure was that they made you. I mean, you like, you had to do good. (mmm-hmm) You know, they were always pushing you to do your best, and you couldn't slack off. But really, I didn't feel like, "oh, no, I can't do this."

Shank: Mmm-hmm. So you felt comfortable with that. Okay, then, high school. Tell me about high school.

Davis: Let's see, high school...uh, (what was the name of your high school?) Tippycahoe High School. (okay) And high school...when I got to high school, I had...like it was set in my brain that I was gonna get a four point and I was gonna be valedictorian. I didn't care what it was gonna take; I was gonna do it. And so, that was probably one thing because my eighth grade principal he had said, "watch out for this girl", like at the awards assembly. I got some award and he said, "watch this girl; she'll be the valedictorian of your class." And so I mean, right then it was like oh, my gosh, I have to do this now.

Shank: Or else.

Davis: Right. And that was always set in my mind. A drive that I always had in school. That was always the main goal that I had. But I also wanted to get involved in things, so I played volleyball and I played softball.

Shank: You didn't go out for cheerleader?

Davis: No, my girlfriends were all cheerleaders and I just let them do it. I wanted to go into the athletes. I wanted to go student center but I didn't get elected to it. But my sophomore year I was elected sophomore class president and then my senior year I was student body vice president. So, that was one thing I wanted. And during my junior year, I saw a lot of things wrong with my school. The clubs weren't actually involved like, they weren't doing anything for our school. Why do we have them if there's no activity?? So, my junior year I decided you know, I was going to get involved in a lot of the clubs and I was going to do something. You know, make 'em do things.

Shank: Productive.

Davis: Right. That was one thing why I got a lot of things involved in my senior year. But it just sort of grew out. Like my freshman year I established the fact that I'm going to do good. My sophomore year was when I established I was gonna do good in athletics, on the varsity team in both softball and volleyball.

And my junior year I was looking for other things. Like here are these groups, I want to do something for these groups, and it went like that.

Shank: Did you know what you wanted to be when you grew early, and did you know which direction you wanted to go in? And have you decided that now?

Davis: When I was little I wanted to be a nurse just like mom.

Shank: Sure.

Davis: And also whenever we played like the kids out wandering around in the woods whenever someone got hurt I was always the one who was calm, cool and collected and I would take care of them. And dad's like, no go for the bigger bucks. So I was going to be a doctor. And that was just like, that was set. Then during that TAG program we went to get our blood tested one time and I was the third person back. And just watching the first two people go to get their finger pricked, I passed out. And I decided I'm not going to be a doctor anymore, and I started looking for other things. And it went from everything from a chemist to a computer programmer to different things I was interested in at this time. But now I think I want to go into business and international relations.

Shank: That sounds great! What is your major here at the university?

Davis: I'm working on a double major in finance and international studies.

Shank: When you were in high school, did you have any trouble studying? Any peer pressure from people who wanted to go out and drive the car out to the ball games? Did you handle that or was there any of that? Did you have time for everything?

Davis: I made time for everything. Like studying wasn't an overriding problem because in most of my classes I didn't have to study that much. As I got into higher levels they weren't that much of a challenge. I could understand everything as it was presented in class. All I had to do was like look over my notes right before a test and stuff like that. But I was heavily involved in things my senior year and sometimes I did feel like I was overwhelmed but I just decided what has to be done right now and what can be put off till next. So eventually everything got done.

Shank: When did you start thinking about college?

Davis: I started thinking about it my junior year because the counselors would say something about it. But seriously I was going that's far off and I don't have to worry about it. And I got some information in the mail starting in the summer between just here and there. And I'd look at it, you know, that is a

really neat college. And I told myself I was gonna get all these applications in early. It ended up all my applications were turned in the day of or the weekend right before they had to be due. So I was putting it off as far as possible. I didn't seriously think about it until probably Thanksgiving of my senior year when due dates started coming. I was going, "ooh, I better do something about this!" I just applied to a lot of schools because I didn't know what I wanted. I just applied to a bunch of them. I figured I'll see where I get accepted and go from there.

Shank: Did your parents influence you any on education? Did they stress it in the family home? I mean, was it expected that you and your sister would have a college education?

Davis: Yeah. It was just like it was always known that we were gonna go to college. I don't think anyone ever told us, but it was just like you can start your life after college. You've got four years after high school that you're going to go to college, and after that is when you can plan to get married, plan to have your career.

Shank: Uh-huh. Was there any special teacher in junior high school or high school or even grade school that you think inspired you or influenced you in any way?

Davis: Um, one teacher in high school, Mr. Tom Rogers, he was my reserve volleyball coach and also my freshman biology teacher and so I knew him on a teacher level and also a coal and a personal level. He was one, he knew that I could do well. Like, he pushed me both athletically and academically to do well, and he wouldn't let me slack off. He was always there behind me saying, "come on, Sharon, you can do better." And if he passed back a test and I would, you know, get a lower grade than he expected, he would just go, "you can do better than that." But it was like the way he was always so organized and he was so knowledgeable about things, it was an example for me.

Shank: When did you first hear about the Yeager's Scholars program and how did you hear about it?

Davis: I got a flyer in the mail with a lot of other junk mail. I mean, it was like mail was being flooded in. I would look at everything and if it sounded semi-sort of interesting, I would send it back in; well, really I sent everything back. The reply mail things that they gave. And that was a reply mail thing. I filled it out and I laid it there on my dresser and it sat there for the longest time, because I kept looking at it. I'd forget to go mail it or something like that. And every once in a while I'd look at it and I'd see that Chuck Yeager, and only the best and that was in the back of my mind working on me. So I sent it off and they gave me back the information.

Shank: What made you decide to apply for the Yeager program over, let's say, another program? Or to accept it after you were accepted?

Davis: Well, the one factor was the way they presented it. It sounded like something I really wanted to get involved with. Um, I didn't want to get locked in a college where there's just a number of people. I wanted something where, the mentorship, that was one thing, where I'd have someone I could talk to and this is what I want to do. How do I go about doing this? More personal attention. And I needed, not needed, but I wanted a program that would push me, to not like let me slack. But also, when I came down for finals weekend, the one thing that was really the clincher on the whole idea was how organized everything seemed. You know, Denman is always like, "okay, we've gotta do this, we gotta do that." And it just seemed like everyone knew what they were doing and it was just overwhelming.

Shank: Great. So we made a good impression on you.

Davis: Yes, definitely.

Shank: Okay. What other schools were you considering at that time, Sharon?

Davis: Well, the University of Pennsylvania was one, Miami of Ohio was a heavy strong; that was just right there. If I didn't get the Yeager scholarship, then that was the one I was going to take. 'Cause I got a partial scholarship from there, with the Ohio Board of Regents, but uh, before I got....there was another program that was similar to this but it wasn't quite the standard, was at Eureka College with uh, the Ronald Reagan scholarships that they have.

Shank: Mmm, and where is that?

Davis: That's in Eureka, Illinois.

Shank: Okay.

Davis: But once I visited that school I was like, no, I don't want that. But that was just sort of a comparison of their program to this program and that's why this program seems so awesome was that their program was so weak (mmm-hmm), it just...in comparison, but it was...it was like two weeks before too, so I knew what I was looking for and I didn't find it in Eureka and I found it here, so.

Shank: Has the Yeager program met all your educational expectations so far? Is it what you expected it to be?

Davis: So far it is. Um, the part that I thought we would get like a personal mentor as soon as we got here, to discuss our...our um....classes and stuff like that, what classes we were gonna take. And that...I haven't, you know, I didn't understand that that was gonna be something set up later (mmm-hmm), but that's one thing uh, ...\

Shank: If you had a suggestion, it would be that the mentor be there ready for you?

Davis: Mmm-hmm. Just so you could have someone to talk to as you come in as a freshman, because that's when you need someone that you can sort of talk to and just go, "I'm really lost here; I don't know....I mean, this is just....college is really overwhelming me, and how do you register for classes, what sort of classes should I take?" Because I...I've heard of things where people.... I mean, they've liked talked to their...the what is it? Advisors (mmm-hmm) and like, they've scheduled classes and they've ended up not having to take those classes. I mean, it's like worthless. So, I don't....just to be able to get some sense of security that this person's gonna be with me for four years (for four years, mmm-hmm), and they know what I want to do and they know the college system, so, they can sort of implement what I want with the college.

Shank: Do you have your mentor now? Do you have your...your Yeager professor now? (no) You do not. Okay. What about your dorm living? How do you like that?

Davis: I like it. I didn't think I was gonna like it at all, like when you go to camps and stuff, you're....I don't know; I wasn't into dorm life when I went to volleyball camps (mmm-hmm), but I like it a lot. I think the one part that makes it the best is my roommate, uh, Becky Gatehouse, she's another Yeager (mmm-hmm); I don't know...it's just....I think if I didn't like my roommate, I wouldn't like it. (mmnm-hmm) It's just that combination of it. But we get along really well.

Shank: Give me an example of a day in the life of a Yeager student.

Davis: Ooh! (laughter) Well...

Shank: What's one of your tough days, when you....what's your schedule like?

Davis: Tough day....well, let's see. Well, I get up...lately I've been gettin' up about 6 o'clock just so I can study in the morning and get ready and I do study in the mornings just because I can think better that way. Uh, I go to classes...I have uh, probably I'll tell you Tuesday-Thursday, (okay), at 9:30 I have a biology...well, at 9 I go to breakfast (mmm-hmm) and then at 9:30 I have a biology class. And I go from there to 11:00 on to history; I come at 12, I eat lunch, and then at 1 I sort of try to figure out...I do, like...get ready for the Yeager Seminar. I finish up things with that that I have to do. The Yeager seminar is from 2-4:30, and it's just like a day from hell (laughing) sometimes it's so long; you're just sittin' there going...but, and then after that...

Shank: Tell me a little bit about the Yeager Seminar; what's it like? What do you do in there?

Davis: The one we have right now is on uh, humanities, text and values. And what we do is we come in and we sit down and the professors will try to...okay, you're expected to have read the material that's needed for that day, and to have done the journal articles, I mean, the journal entries (mmm-hmm) and answer the questions. So, from there you supposed to have like a basis of where your thinking's coming from. Well, the professors like depends on what day it is, which professor's gonna lead the discussion that day. And they'll start...they'll like throw out...they'll either go, "do you have any comments about the reading?" or they'll throw out a starting question. So, they'll start to get you thinking and they'll lead you through, like try to...try to um, focus your thoughts to one point that they're trying to make in it, but they don't lecture. It's...it's like they ask you questions and you have to...you have to think through it yourself. But, and then we have...we go until about 3 or 3:15; we get a break and then we come back and we have speeches now, and usually they do two speeches uh, it's on the journal questions that they had, like one student will choose one question and another student choose another. And from there, that'll stimulate the discussion usually for the rest of the class. Do you have any reactions to what he just said, or do you (mmm-hmm) want to add to what she just said? So, that usually finishes it out. Uh, I don't know, sometimes the class is really interesting but sometimes it just gets long and drawn out. It's like sometimes the teacher's feel that they have to fill up the two and a half hours (mmm-hmm) so they just say things over and over and over, where you could tell it to me, just tell it to me straight here, you know, and then we can...

Shank: Let me make a comment and forget it! (laughter)

Davis: Right.

Shank: Okay, Sharon, let's get back to this, I ...I had another question about...well, finish your day out for me, okay? After the Yeager uh, seminar is over, then what do you do?

Davis: Um, well, usually by 4:30 I'm so brain-dead I can't do any more homework (mmh), so, I try to do some kind of recreational activity until dinner. So, then we have dinner like 5 or 5:30, and I come back and ...I try to get some more homework done, but usually I get diverted and end up doing uh, other activities. I'm not sure what I do. I mean, it's just a combination...

Shank: Are you into sports at all here? Do you do any volleyball or do anything like that here?

Davis: I do a lot of things with the intramural office of our floor, so usually intramurals are sometimes between 4:30 and 6, so that ...that falls in there. Also, I have a lot of things I do with the sorority. And so those things usually fall into the later evening, you know, around suppertime.

Shank: Which sorority do you belong to?

Davis: Sigma, Sigma, Sigma.

Shank: Okay. And you have no trouble working that into your busy schedule?

Davis: No.

Shank: That's great. I know that when we had the first Yeager symposium last October, the...the class was very involved in that. Uh, bringing in the different personalities for the speeches and so forth, uh, what personality did you meet during that time uh, that you enjoyed?

Davis: (pause) Probably Joe Engle. That was the one who most impressed me. He was just such a real person, a relaxed, easy going, but yet he had ..he had such a life experience and he was just awesome, the amount of things he's done and different places he's been and just to hear him talk about, just like, just like sitting here, when he would just say something, I...it just amazed me. And plus, from listening to the two men that took him around, just the things he....I mean, he was just such a pers....such aI don't know, such a known person but yet a real person. (easy to talk to). Yeah.

Shank: I found him that way, too. Uh, he was an astronaut so did he discuss any of that with, when he spoke to the Yeager symposium, what was his speech about? Do you remember?

Davis: I don't know that I went to his speech. I think I was ...I think that was the day Chuck Yeager was here (mmm-hmm) and I was...yeah, so I missed his actual speech. But just from hearing different people say things.

Shank: When did you first meet Chuck Yeager? General Yeager.

Davis: Let's see, I met him at the banquet. I think that that was the first time I actually met, and (laughter)...(what was your first impression?) (laughter) Just like on the AC Delco commercial, because we were standing there to get our picture taken, like all the Yeager's, with Chuck Yeager, and the camera wouldn't go off, or the light wouldn't go off, and he goes, "You should have used AC Delco." (batteries...) (laughter) And somebody goes, my roommate goes, "That's just like," you know, "what he is on t.v." (mmm-hmm) But he's a rough...he has a rough personality. That was my first impression.

Shank: A rough exterior. (mmm-hmm) Mmm-hmm. Okay, how about Mr. Denman, who is your director, uh, I know there's a lot of interaction between him. What does he do for you as a student? How does he help you?

Davis: Uh, he sort of acts like the mentor that we don't have right now. Uh, if we need an in-between, he...he'll pull, you know, he'll do that for us. I try not to do that, because I mean, I mean, I know I can...I know that if I really wanted it, I could

do....it could be worked out, but sometimes I just want to do it by myself. (mmmh) But you always know that if you can't do it, Denman can. Or he'll find someone that can. (mmm-hmm) Uh, he just acts like, I don't want to say father figure...but just someone that sort of looks out for us. You know, make sure we're doing what we're supposed to be doing and that we're not doing what we're not supposed to be doing. You know, if something happens, Denman's gonna find out about it. Everyone knows that; it's just that sort of thing. (mother and father) Yeah.
(laughs)

Shank: How about Mr. Hunnicutt? Joe Hunnicutt. Do you remember meeting him? What was that like?

Davis: Mmm-hmm. Uh, he was...I...he was just so funny. I remember the first time I really got to know him was probably when we went down the river on the rafting. (mmm-hmm) And he was just like, one of the guys, I mean, he was out there in his shorts and shirt and his hat, and he was paddling along. He's funny. I mean, he would crack jokes every once in a while, and tell stories about him and Denman, you know, when they were planning this whole thing. He...I just...I have a lot of respect for him, that he was able to get this thing off the ground, I mean, that he took an idea of his and he went to the people that he needed to get...to get it started. Uh, and...and it actually just came to be. I mean, it must have been...I can...I can imagine like if I had a dream like that, and it actually just came to be true, I'd just be ecstatic.

Shank: What about Dr. Nitzschke? Your interaction with Dr. Nitzschke; do you have any comments about that?

Davis: I've had limited interaction with Dr. Nitzschke. Uh, people have a lot of respect for him, and ...they...they seem to think he's an excellent administrator. I don't know, I mean, I haven't really known him as an administrator or anything like that. Personally, I...have not been very impressed with him. I mean, that's just in all honesty, but I say that hesitantly because I haven't really got to know him. I mean, I'm sure if I got to know him, maybe he would be what other people that know him better say he is. (mmm-hmm) But it just seems like every time I've met him, he's just like uh, oh, yeah, you know, or one time...I don't know, one time it was just like I was standing there and he totally ignored me. I mean, he was like talking to these two guys on my side, and totally just disregarded that I was there. You know, I just went...uh, but it's not that, it's just different things along the line, and I don't know.

Shank: Do you feel like the students should have more of an opportunity to get to know the school president on a better level?

Davis: Well, I understand that he has a responsibility as a president, and he doesn't have a lot of extra time; maybe if he did have time that it...if the students got to know him better,

that they'd try to understand some, you know, appreciate what he has to go through. (as an administrator) As an administrator, mmm-hmm.

Shank: What about the fact that you are the Ashland class, and you are the first class of Yeager Scholars, what responsibilities, if any, do you feel as being the first class?

Davis: You have to set the role-model in the eyes of the other students to begin with. Uh, you have to set the status-quo of the following classes uh, really when people find out you're a Yeager scholar, they're like, "well, that's what it's all about." You know, either, if you're a jerk, they're gonna think, "that's how all Yeager scholars are." A jerk. And they're gonna think forever that's how you know, Yeager scholars are gonna be. Uh, if you're cool and you're ...you're just like one of them, then they're gonna go, "yeah, this really does have some benefit to it." Uh, the teachers are the same way. Uh, if they see a tacky student, that's a Yeager scholar, they're gonna just not want to deal with us. But if they see someone that's actually willing to learn and wants to learn, and wants to work, then they're gonna see that they have a dedicated student on their hands here and it's gonna challenge them as a teacher. But also, you know, have them to encourage them.

Shank: You've had a lot of press because of you're something new and different to this area, so you've been put under the gun quite a bit, from the local newspaper and state newspapers, and radio and t.v. Have you found that an interesting experience, or do you think that was extra pressure for the first class?

Davis: I don't think it was extra pressure. Uh, personally, I try to stay away from all individual reporters for interviews. (mmm-hmm) Just because I didn't want to have to deal with it, but uh, I know...there's a lot of people in this program who just loved it, so I mean, it...you know, I let them do it. They're the hams; they want to be on t.v., let 'em go at it. When we first got here, I think it had some good and some bad; I mean, it was good because it gave the publicity to the program and everything. But it was bad in that it added to the resentment people already had about the program, (mmm-hmm) you know, the more they hear about it, the more they're like, "I hate that program even more now." (mmm-hmm, you think among students, other students you're talking about?) Yeah, mmm-hmm, probably.

Shank: Did you feel any tension in the class room, from other students, the fact that you were a Yeager scholar?

Davis: Well, the fact that they didn't know I was a Yeager scholar, no. But see, no one really ...I don't even know how many people know now that I'm a Yeager scholar. Uh, I know I see it as the student's have resentment towards the Yeager scholars, towards the individuals as Yeager scholars, they don't know who they are, so they don't really hate them as people. But it's just the fact you're a Yeager scholar, okay, fine, I don't like that; I

don't like you. But if they don't find out who you are, then they find you...they appreciate youthey appreciate me for Sharon, then when they find out I'm a Yeager scholar, they're like, "oh, okay." You know; it's like a second thing, but if I came in with this big tag on me, Yeager Scholar, instantly they're gonna go, "I don't want to deal with this chick." (mmm-hmm) So.

Shank: Okay. What would you change, if anything, about the program? If there's something that you could change, a recommendation that you would make, as you're finishing your first year here, (uh...) what would you like to see?

Davis: (pause) I think...well, first of all, the ...to get the mentor, the freshmen year, (mmmh) I think that's one good suggestion. Another one would be when we were at Hawk's Nest, we did a lot of things with leadership, and (mmm-hmm) working as a group; I think if we went back to that, and maybe around Christmas time or the beginning of the winter, like end of the winter, the beginning of the second semester, before things really got off, (mmm-hmm), if we dealt more with working as a group, as a Yeager scholar group, uh, going back and reemphasizing what we had set as our goals, if we had set any at Hawk's Nest. Uh, working more on leadership, I think that's something else I would suggest. And having maybe a mini-retreat in the winter time. (mmm-hmm)

Shank: Similar to the one that was held at Hawk's Nest just before you came on.

Davis: And also a chance just for us to get to re-get to know each other, because everyone now is starting to go their separate ways. I mean, we see each other in class, but we don't see each other outside of class, and usually we don't have, you know, everyone has their own little friend or group now. (mmm-hmm) And it's not really ...to maybe to get more of a cohesion between the group, then to have another mini-retreat just so everyone can re-get to know each other and just talk. (to see where you've been and where you're going). Right.

Shank: Well, I thank you very much for the interview. I appreciate it. And I wish you good luck.

Davis: Thanks!

END OF INTERVIEW