

CONVERSATIONS

WITH ANGELIQUE MEDOW

Photograph By Tyler Oxendine

Charles Davis

Husband and father, writer and storyteller, high school dual-threat quarterback, former University of Tennessee defensive back and Academic All-American (1983-1986)—and award-winning college football analyst for Fox Sports and the NFL Network.

CHARLES DAVIS flew into Knoxville from his home state of Florida to be the keynote speaker for our local Harry Galbreath Foundation event—benefitting the Camp 76 scholarship fund. At the Neyland Stadium West Club, Davis spoke alongside Phillip Fulmer (former UT coach and current special assistant to the athletic director at East Tennessee State University), and Butch Jones (current UT football coach), to an audience that included former UT offensive linemen Bruce Wilkerson and David Douglas and running back Reggie Cobb. Davis captured the audience with anecdotes about practice, the locker room, and the intensity and spirit of playing football. During the event, Davis graciously granted *Cityview* an impromptu interview. Here, Angelique Medow and Davis discuss college football—and its inherent dangers—UT's 1985 season and the 1986 Sugar Bowl—and winning at the Game of Life.

ANGELIQUE MEDOW: Has the multi-billion-dollar college Game grown too large to best serve our players?

CHARLES DAVIS: College football is not too large. The question is: Are the players getting a piece of the pie? A few more dollars could be distributed to players through scholarships—but if players are paid to play, the relationship between players and fans changes. Now, if a kid drops a pass, fans are forgiving and supportive because the player is an amateur. If we start paying kids, fans will expect more.

AM: You were part of the Vols' legendary 1985 season: The first SEC Championship in 16 years, a Top 10 final ranking, and the spectacular victory over Miami in the 1986 Sugar Bowl. What are your memories from that season?

CD: It all really started for us during the last game of the 1984 season against Maryland. We blew the game [the Vols lost 28-27], I gave up a touchdown, and we were all depressed in the locker room. Coach Majors came in and said, "Things are gonna change around here. Go home, enjoy your holiday. Spring practice will be

a blood bath." And it was! Back then, there was no 20-hour rule and every day we were in full pads with tougher drills and big-time contact. That was Coach: Making us a tougher team that would win!

AM: You played during the Johnny Majors era. Describe Majors the coach and man.

CD: I hold Coach Majors in a place of high esteem. He's a living legend. If he was a college player today and did what he did back then, people would be writing songs about him! As a coach, he knew that if his players were successful in football, people would listen to them and give them chances they otherwise would not have had. He loves to read and talk politics. He has a great sense of history, cares about people—and he listens.

AM: Like Coach Majors, you love to read and have a Book Club on your web site. What are you reading?

CD: I love fiction and non-fiction: Stuart Woods, James Patterson, Emily Giffin,



and Catherine Coulter. I just finished a biography on Johnny Cash—that was a good read.

AM: Are the Vols on-track with Coach Jones?

CD: The Vols are definitely on-track. Coach Jones is wonderful in recruiting and football acumen, does his homework, and didn't give lip service to Tennessee—he wants to be a Vol. I expect success.

AM: There has been unending conversation about head injuries—particularly concussions—and the long-term effects of playing football. Your thoughts?

CD: It scares us, but it's not new. Before, if we got hit, we used to say, "It was a glancing blow" or "I'm just feeling a little 'dingy,'" and it was a badge of honor to say, "I don't remember the 3rd and 4th quarter." Now we are making better rules. There's going to be head contact, but not *unnecessary* head contact.

AM: Will you allow your son to play football?

CD: The easy answer is "no." Everyone wants their kid to be safe. If someone told me when I was playing that 20 years down the road I'd have a serious injury, I still would've played. That was my litmus test. He likes to play, so I let him.

AM: What is your fitness regimen, and how do you stick to it on the road?

CD: Consistency! I stay on East Coast time and my routine is my morning appointment.

AM: What's your favorite meal?

CD: A good bowl of oatmeal with brown sugar, half and half, and a cup of Earl Grey.

AM: You have the honor of voting on the Heisman Trophy winner. You have stated that you "vote your conscience." What does that mean?

CD: I'm supposed to vote for the most outstanding football player, not stand in judgment over other issues. I take the issues into account and vote on the info in front of me at the time my vote is due.

AM: After issues with Reggie Bush, Cam Newton, Johnny Manziel, and Jameis Winston, do you think there's an increasing disregard for the Heisman's character and integrity clause?

CD: Eighteen- to 22-year-old kids are going to make mistakes. Google and Facebook just give us access to *know* more about players' lives than we used to.

AM: What is your advice to a college football player who wants to win the Heisman?

CD: Be a great team player and take care of your team first. The tie-breaker of the Heisman will be the player from the winningest team.

AM: What is your advice for any man whom wants to win success in life through character and integrity?

CD: Go to work every day and keep getting better. We all dream of something else—but we get there by being really great at the job we are *in*. Take care of what you've got right in front of you, go the extra mile, take some chances and sincerely try. And having a wonderful wife helps! ✕

Angelique Medow is a 2012 Cityview Entrepreneur and the Principal of Building Ideas, which provides design, decorating, consultation, and project management for commercial and residential properties. She also enjoys exercising her degree in journalism from Arizona State University.