

The game of golf should be the winner



GLENEAGLES SCOTLAND 2014

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Former Dornoch Cathedral minister, Rev James Simpson, an enthusiastic golfer, sums up the spirit of the Ryder Cup, which takes place at Gleneagles next week, and looks back with fond memories to 1993 when he was invited to attend the competition as a guest of the Professional Golfers' Association. This article

I HAVE never kept a golf diary. All I have are memories of special moments, exciting games and great golfing occasions in which I was privileged to be involved, even if only in a small way. Without doubt one of the most memorable was the Ryder Cup held at the Belfry Golf Club near Birmingham in 1993.

Perhaps because I was captain of the Royal Dornoch Golf Club, I was invited to be the guest of the Professional Golfers' Association and to say grace at the pre-Ryder Cup banquet.

My delight at being involved was increased when my son Neil, who at that time was secretary of the Scottish PGA, was chosen to be one of the match referees.

The American team captain that year was Tom Watson, who once again will captain the American team at Gleneagles.

On the final day of the match, Neil had the responsibility of refereeing the game involving

Payne Stewart, one of golf's most charismatic figures.

On the first tee Payne said to Neil, "I don't think I have ever been more nervous." The excitement and tension surging from the massed galleries was palpable.

When Payne's opening drive landed on the fairway, his sigh of relief was audible. As the final day progressed, the cheers and adulation from the crowds grew ever louder.

Despite the immense pressure of the occasion, the Payne Stewart-Mark James match was conducted in the most gentlemanly manner. As on many other occasions, when Payne was involved, the game of golf was the winner.

David Feherty, now a well-known golf commentator, tells how, in his singles match in Florida in 1991, he played probably the best golf of his life.

He was two up with two holes to play against



Rev James Simpson (right) with Colin Montgomerie, the European captain of the Ryder Cup the last time it was held in

Payne. The American crowd were jostling and shouting as Payne and the caddies made their way to the 17th tee.

Suddenly a lady marshal jumped out in front of David, who had fallen behind the others, and said, "Where do you think you are going?"

Payne immediately stepped down from the tee. "Ma'am" he said, "I would love you to stop him, but he is actually playing and winning this match." Putting his arm round David, they walked back up onto the tee.

Such respect has unfortunately not always characterised Ryder Cup matches. At that same match there was a lot of needle between Seve Ballesteros and Paul Azinger.

When Azinger called Ballesteros the "king of gamesmanship", Ballesteros responded by saying the American team consisted of "Eleven nice guys and Azinger."

In the 1957 Ryder Cup, Tommy Bolt, the fiery tempered American and the Scot Eric Brown, who had an equally short fuse, were late arriving at the first tee for their singles match.

One wit in the crowd, well aware of the tension between the two players, was overheard to say, "I saw them a few minutes ago on the practice

ground, throwing clubs at each other." That match, which Brown won, was conducted in an icy atmosphere.

In sharp contrast to this, what Jack Nicklaus did in the 1969 Ryder Cup will long be remembered in the annals of golf.

On the final day he was paired with Tony Jacklin in the deciding match. On the 18th green, Nicklaus holed out, leaving Jacklin with a nerve-wracking short putt to tie the match. If he missed America would win.

Bending down, Nicklaus removed Jacklin's marker, declaring the Ryder Cup a draw. He was not going to let Jacklin, who for three days had played his heart out, have nightmares over a missed short putt.

Chip Beck, another successful Ryder Cup player, who kindly played an exhibition match for Cystic Fibrosis Research at Royal Dornoch, recalls how, on another Ryder Cup occasion when the American team had narrowly won the cup, two buses came to take the teams to the victory dinner.

The American captain suggested, and the European captain agreed, that they should all travel on one bus. Great rivals an hour earlier,

they now sat together, sharing thoughts and experiences. "That," said Chip Beck, "is what the Ryder Cup is all about."

When in 1993, a reporter reminded Tom Watson of what the rather brash Walter Hagen had said when he was captain: "There will be no camaraderie. We're here to win", Watson, a paragon of sportsmanship, said, "That is not my way of being captain."

Europe's captain this year, the highly respected Paul McGinlay is also too much of a gentleman ever to think of offering the advice once given by a British captain to his players, "Not to help search for any ball despatched by their opponents into the rough".

When some of the players protested, he sought to justify his unsporting suggestion by saying he was concerned that they could be penalised if they accidentally moved their opponent's ball!

A Dornoch story highlights what the Ryder Cup can achieve for transatlantic goodwill. In September 1989 Sandy Matheson, Royal Dornoch's best known caddie, caddied for an American who, with two friends, was golfing at Dornoch before going on to the Belfry for the Ryder Cup.

Having a spare Ryder Cup ticket, and being greatly attracted by Sandy's friendliness and very quick wit, they invited him to accompany them. They promised to pay what he would earn in an average week, and to cover his accommodation and other expenses.

During the match, Sandy's verbal cut and thrust, his good-natured banter and golfing reminiscence were so enjoyed by his new American friends, that two years later they sent him airline and match tickets, to make it possible for him to rejoin them for the Ryder Cup in Florida.

It is my hope that such international friendliness, not jingoistic rowdiness or aggressive gestures, will characterise this year's match.

There is no place at the Ryder Cup, or any golf competition, for extreme nationalism or loud mouthed lager louts cheering poor shots and shouting insults.

Ryder Cup golf involves not only a massive act of concentration on the part of the players, it also requires attentive silence from the crowd while shots are being played.

In my grace at the Ryder Cup banquet, I tried to reflect the hope and dream of Sam Ryder that, by this bi-annual match, goodwill would be promoted between the nations, and friendships fostered that would span the oceans, that good manners, sportsmanship and brotherly love would characterise such a great sporting occasion, that the game of golf would be the real winner.