

By Jason Bruno



Ok, it's almost "Go Time" at Gleneagles for the 40th playing of the Ryder Cup.

The Europeans are big favorites in this edition . . . and understandably so. After

the "Miracle at Medinah", there is a clear sense that the Euro's have figured out

the formula for victory. The European PGA keeps the half dozen past captains in

the loop as consultants and vice captains and often grooms the future team leaders

by having them aboard as assistants or observers. The term being thrown around

by the Euro hierarchy is "template", which Captain Paul McGinley has mentioned many

times this week. The PGA of America hasn't embraced such a concept - successful

past captains and their methods are left to be, choosing to turnover regimes without

keeping continuity.

Team Europe, not just top heavy as in years past, has McIlroy, Rose, Garcia,

and Stenson as front runners, but McDowell, Kaymer and Bjorn might be the

backbone. Ryder Cup intensity and pressure is like no other, and Euro 1st

timers: Stephen Gallacher, Jamie Donaldson and young Frenchman Victor

Dubuisson (aka - V Dub) are the wild cards. Westwood and Yankee dominator -

Ian Poulter have been in sub-par form all year, and come in to the event as

perhaps Team Blue's biggest question marks.

Winners of 7 of the last 9 Cup matches, the European contingent appears

loose and confident, and for good reason. The Euro's return 7 of the 12 miracle

makers from Chicago (and Captain Paul McGinley - who was a vice captain at

Medinah in 2012). Can the American's motivation overcome Europe's confidence?

It will be no easy task for Team USA to emerge with Samuel Ryder's trophy.

The venue is Jack Nicklaus' Centenary course at Gleneagles - an American style

parkland course that features tight fairways, heavy rough and softer & slower

greens than the Americans see on a weekly basis on the PGA Tour. . . but for the

most part, the layout favors neither side. If the weather gets ugly, combine that

with a raucous Euro home crowd for two factors that fall heavily in Europe's favor.

Do the Americans and Captain Tom Watson have the horses to make it a dogfight?

Clearly on the top half of the squad - they do. Rickie Fowler, Matt Kuchar, Jim Furyk,

Jordan Spieth and Jimmy Walker have been solid all year. Players like Bubba Watson,

Keegan Bradley, Zach Johnson and Patrick Reed have been up and down throughout

2014 and may end up deciding the final tally. Webb Simpson, Hunter Mahan and Phil

Mickelson have had down years and have only shown short glimpses of brilliance this

year. It will all depend on the chemistry of each pairing, and how the team gels as a

whole.

Likely we'll see Phil/Keegan, Bubba/Webb and Spieth/Kuchar, with the other pairings still unknown. For certain the European Team will toss out combinations of Rory/Sergio, Rory/Poulter, and Rose/Poulter. If McIlroy and Ian Poulter gain momentum early on, it could ease the nerves of rookies - Gallacher, Donaldson, and Dubuisson - pulling them along for the ride. If that's the case, the matches could get lopsided quick.

Here's to hoping the singles matches on Sunday are as compelling as Brookline and Medinah.

Prediction: In the end it comes down to who hits the best golf shots and holes

putts, but it'll take a huge week from new comers Spieth, Walker, and Patrick Reed

for Team USA to have a punchers chance. The two middle aged vets Furyk and

Mickelson will probably need to have a winning record for the Cup to make its way

back to America . . . Europe 15 - USA 13

