

Acute Ryderdespondency

By: Nathan Grace Date: Sept. 21, 2004

Another Ryder Cup has come and gone. Gone again across the pond in the carry-on luggage of the European captain, that is. And once again for the fourth time in the last five tries, we the Americans are left with the feeling of “what just happened?” Didn’t we have the better team? The better players? The homegrown fans? The “home course” advantage? Why does it seem that the Europeans seem to pull together and outplay, outwit, and outlast the American squad so often in recent memory. Even in the American win in 1999, our guys had to rally from the largest deficit in Ryder Cup history and make over two miles worth of putts to pull it out.

Do the Europeans just want it more than the Americans? This is a question that seems to come up every two years in recent years, but I don’t know that the Euros’ desire is necessarily the only answer. More so than simply wanting the Cup more, I think the Europeans want to prove themselves more than the Americans. We had the (until recently) World Number One player, the reigning Master champ, last year’s U.S. Open champ, and DL III on our team! They had David Howell and Ian Poulter—great players, but not major champions and not even the best (in the Order of Merit) on their own team. Some say the Americans are more “I” and “Me” oriented than team oriented—the team trait being exemplified by the Euros only all too well.

Whatever the reasons, actual or perceived, the American squad took a beating for three days like it had never seen before. And it was at the hands of a group of European players who three out of four golf fans in the United States couldn’t name six of with a gun to his or her head. Although there was a glimmer of hope early on Sunday when it looked as though the United States might pull out the biggest comeback ever in the history of the Ryder Cup (since the 1999 comeback), some holes are simply too deep to dig your way back out. And by the time the Sunday singles matches rolled around, it was all over except the awards ceremony.

It is difficult (and perhaps unfair) to blame particular players, but some events obviously stand out in my mind. The Woods/Mickelson team seemed unbeatable on paper and some seemed to think the Euros would show up and concede the match on the first tee. Such was not the case and the pendulum immediately began to swing toward the Euros. And Mickelson’s misfortune at Oakland Hills didn’t end there. During his Sunday singles match against Sergio Garcia, he would watch the young Spaniard follow up a waist-high hosel rocket, which he shanked dead right into the unsuspecting crowd, with four consecutive birdies—a feat so bewildering to Mickelson that he temporarily lost consciousness on the 16th hole and tried to execute an unsuccessful bump-and-run shot through a water hazard. So for all of those fans on our side of the pond reeling from yet another case of *acute ryderdespondency* (which is Latin for the sharp feeling of depression of spirit from loss of hope and confidence in our Ryder Cup performance), here is my simple three step program for recovery by the 2006 matches:

1. Lose the ugly team shirts. The pressure of playing for your country under the scrutiny of the sporting world is difficult enough without the peer pressure of members of the other team snickering at you. How about a red shirt, a white shirt, or a blue shirt? Or maybe some earth tones? Remember the awful 1999 shirts designed by Team Captain Crenshaw that depicted faces of former players? Tiger Woods confessed that when he got home, he burned the shirt in his fireplace because it was so bad. And most of the other members of that team had similar feelings. You may say “But we won the ‘99 Ryder Cup!” That’s the exception that makes the rule. After all, there’s a reason that Ian Poulter doesn’t pick the clothes for the European team.

2. Work closely with the United States Immigration Service to issue green cards to Vijay Singh, Ernie Els, Retief Goosen, Mike Weir, and Rory Sabbatini before the 2006 matches. Seriously, the original Ryder Cup Matches were between Great Britain and the United States, but the format was changed at the urging of Nicklaus and others to include all of Europe because the Great Britain team was routinely taken to the woodshed by the American team in those days. Canada would be a no-brainer to combine with the Americans given our shared border and it would be difficult to assimilate South Africa and Fiji with Europe. Besides, America has long been a beacon for immigrants seeking refuge, who are we to thumb our noses at South African and Fijian golfers—especially when a number of them now live here anyway.

3. Institute the “No Full Monty” Rule. If your Ryder Cup record includes no losses in singles play (and you are from Europe), you must play with either one hand tied behind your back or swing the opposite dexterity of your typical persuasion. After all, it’s only fair and the goal here is to make things more fair...for us.

Of course, we can keep going the way we have been going and hope that future teams work harder, care more, and play better—or whatever needs to be done to win again. After all, we can always continue to take solace in the empty truth that it took an entire continent to beat our one country...the aggravating part is just that they *keep* doing it.

Nathan Grace is a golf course architect whose freelance “Lipouts” column is based, at times, on topics submitted to the author by readers like you. If you have a topic you would like to see discussed or wish to read past columns from the archives, log on to www.lipouts.com and let him know. Copyright 2004.