They’re Still Buzzing About the Ryder Cup

BY LARRY AYLWARD

IT WAS GREAT PR,

BUT THE EVENT

DODGED DISGRACE

LIKE A BAD IRON

SHOT BOUNCING

OVER A BUNKER AND

ONTO THE GREEN

when the Europeans held a 10-6 lead. But then the extraordinary final segment of this North and South-like miniseries began. It started with the spiritual team captain, Ben Crenshaw, talking of fate and hope. Golf’s marketers wanted to shout, “Hallelujah.” Then the Americans went to work on the last day. They won the first six matches to take the lead. And then Justin Leonard sank that birdie putt on 17 to complete the conquest. The comeback was astonishing.

And it was thrilling to see the normally guarded Duval pump his fist in the air after making great shot after great shot. It was stirring to see Woods wear more emotions on his face than Joe Cocker when singing You Are So Beautiful. It was like Duval and Woods finally realized the essence of the Ryder Cup, like the Grinch finally discovered the true meaning of Christmas. Woods and Duval redeemed themselves for their prior remarks, and fans quickly forgave them.

Norton and other promoters were ecstatic. They know what a thrilling ending like this can do for the sport.

“Even for the casual sports fan, the Ryder Cup was great drama,” Norton says. “It will have a positive impact on people who are on the fence about golf. It will get them to say, ‘Hey, let’s go try that game.’ ”

NGF estimates there are 41 million people who would like to try playing golf or play more in the future. In two years, Norton expects to look back at the post-1999 Ryder Cup and see an increase of players nationally.

“It was terrific public relations,” he says.

After what could have been, the game’s marketers thank the forgiving golf gods for that.

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