

## An atmosphere to grip the heart

**A**lmost one month on from the Ryder Cup and I'm still being quizzed by all who caught a fleeting glimpse of me on TV, squatting within feet of poor Bernhard and in direct line of that single breaking putt that slid silently right...

Was it that difficult? I imagine only the immortal Bobby Jones may have known such intense pressure in eventually winning the Impregnable Quadrilateral (The Amateur and Open Championships of both Great Britain and the USA in one glorious year – 1930). Please believe me, Bernhard Langer, having played so courageously down the stretch, was our hero.

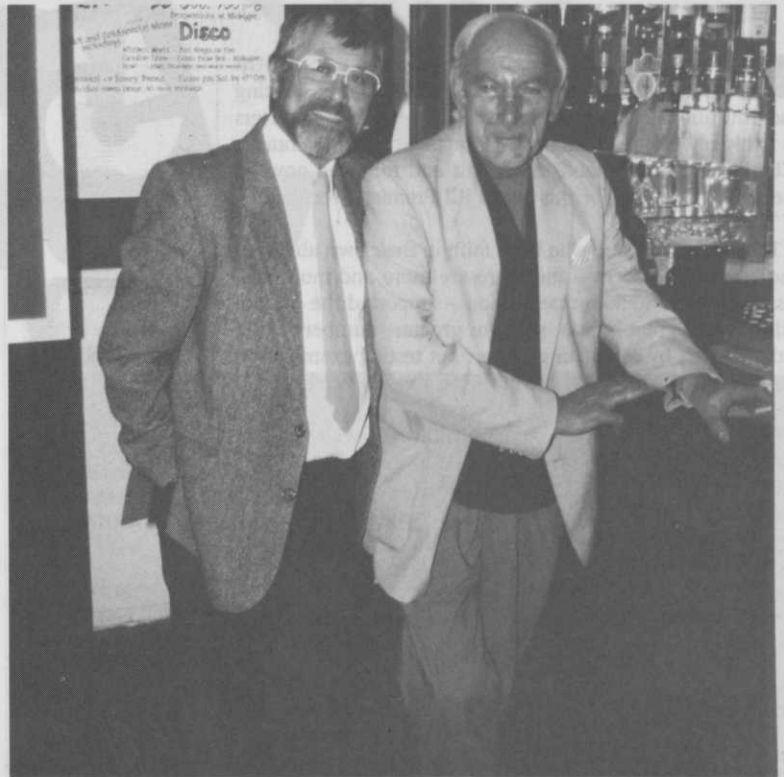
I am an emotional man, known to weep at weddings and much stirred by patriotic fervour. As a mere onlooker I could taste that pressure, easily cut it with a blunt knife, feel it tingling in every limb, for this was golf played for the glory of nations in a steaming pressure cooker. That alone is what made The Ocean a difficult course and one can only vaguely imagine how both teams agonised.

Millions of words have been written and spoken about The Ocean, though somewhat less about it being too tough; and it has been an interesting exercise to listen to those who saw the matches on TV, for almost to a man they criticise a course that I did not see. Perhaps tour professionals have become too accustomed to thrashing a driver 250 or more yards down every manicured fairway and playing short pitch shots to holding greens. Perhaps they have been spoiled by over simplicity. The Ocean that I witnessed gave nothing to such cavalier play, rather it demanded the utmost care of the finest players in the world – in every department of their armoury and including a resurrection of the ground game.

No doubt the cameras foreshortened and distorted, no doubt the commentators spoke of unkind bump or run, faster than average green speeds, fiendish pin placements and acres of sand reminiscent of a Pine Valley dropped by the shore, not to mention the niggling wee scraps of gamesmanship that were almost inevitable; but these were nothing compared to the choking band of steel round the chest atmosphere that grips the heart, a pressure prevailing from the very first tee shot to that last agonisingly cruel putt. This was what I saw at The Ocean and I left each day in awe and admiration of those who had battled upon its acres, whilst applauding Pete Dye's breathtaking and cleverly conceived jewel hugging Carolina's shores.

Great courses are not made overnight – certainly not great links courses – and ultimately the place taken by The Ocean will not be decided by golf writers or TV commentators. Rather it will come from those golfers competing for five bucks a hole from the very playable white tees at 6245 yards or red at 5327, who play it once and come back again and again for more – a blessed and beguiling touch of Scotland in South Carolina, with the added measure of sunshine.

Walking the course each day, sucking in the atmosphere and delighting in seeing so many European supporters (who, incidentally, demonstrated patriotic pride without a hint of malice and matched the good humoured Americans shot for shot and cheer for cheer), my eyes lit up when I finally found The Belfry Course Manager, Derek Ganning, B.E.M., amongst the hordes, pleased to see him looking so relaxed and making good professional use of his time in observing all the little niceties and nuances that Kiawah Island offered. I was surprised, however, to discover that far from being an invited and honoured guest, Derek had taken time from his holiday allowance and paid his own flight, car rental and hotel costs in order to attend. Lest it may have escaped the attention of the organising powers on this side



Called to the bar...  
David White, left, with  
ex-Ryder Cup player  
Sam King

of 'the pond', Derek is the man on whose shoulders the ultimate success of the next Ryder Cup course depends!

And as the Ryder Cup matches again return to The Belfry in 1993, Derek will of course be prepared and no doubt eager to match the best that America could produce – a magnificent feast of a course which in my view is a tough act to follow – and our European players will have had time to perhaps ease the hurt they must feel at this moment. In the same vein, America should savour their triumph now and remember how tough this victory was to achieve.

Returning to these shores and sharing in my own way the burden of Europe's defeat, I was instantly cheered to meet up at long last with a man I have long admired, ex-Ryder Cup player, Sam King, now in his 81st year, as sharp as ever and possessed of a biting wit that holds one spellbound. With total recall of events that took place over 50 years ago (he was the only British player to win in the Ryder Cup of '47, beating Herman Keiser by 4 and 3), and happy to reminisce over his many Open Championships, in which he holds something of a record by never winning whilst finishing in the top ten no less than nine times, I asked him what he thought of the drama recently unfolded at Kiawah. 'It was the most exciting ever', he replied, 'and I enjoyed it far more because it was played on an exacting course with a testing breeze. The Ocean, in my opinion, was just perfect for match play. No doubt when they play at The Belfry in two years they'll be putting for birdies and eagles on every hole, but I personally like to witness 'The Ultimate Matchplay' on totally demanding courses, those where a player must think about every shot and fabricate quite a few. I'd like to see it played there again and again'.

The wisdom of age and experience was never more profound, this from a man who won the princely sum of just £40 for third place in The Open at St Andrews in 1939; and who, one sensed, would have loved to play once again for his country at Kiawah, heart pounding and all.

DAVID WHITE