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How the Ryder Cup was won

Celtic Manor's Jim McKenzie talks exclusively with Scott MacCallum about the finest greenkeeping achievement of modern times

Jim McKenzie was in the middle of his professional life. It was Sunday morning and The Ryder Cup, the event he'd been dreaming about and playing for since 1996, was in the middle of its second big rain delay.

They weren't going to finish that day and there was no prospect of the match not going the full distance for the first time in its illustrious history.

"I was tired of all the ascenders down to the hotel and had a chat with Debbie, my wife, which cheered me up a bit and on the way back I came out of the lift and bumped into Colin Montgomerie. He said, 'Come with me, and we will see a corner and had a coffee,' revealed Jim.

"Colin said, 'The bottom line is this. We're currently two points down and if we don't play today all the matches out there will be drawn/habit and we're up on six of them at the moment. If that happens we go into the Singles and two points down and we're not traditionally strong in the Singles. If we can get off the matches completed this afternoon it gives us a chance,' revealed Jim.

With that message ringing in his ears, Jim returned to his room – 66 of his own Celtic Manor staff and 77 volunteer greenkeepers – and urged them to fill their tired bodies once again for yet another monumental effort.

"I told them that I'd just spoken to Colin and that he'd asked that if there was any way we could get playing we could go down in history as the first greenkeeping crew to help win the Ryder Cup."

And that is exactly what happened. The crew worked tirelessly to make the saturated course playable for an afternoon and the players did their bit by turning their overnight boots into feet and a half point out of six.

"If we hadn't pulled it off on Sunday we would have gone into the Singles two points down and we would probably have got no more than nine points, instead of the magic 14.5."

The shift that the green staff made on that Sunday afternoon, and the Saturday night before, was absolutely astonishing – outrageous. And that Sunday afternoon turned out to be the greatest day in the history of European golf," said Jim, who is not one given to hyperbole.

Weather conditions were always the one variable, double about the 2010 Ryder Cup. The venue was custom built to cope with the demands of the third biggest sporting event in the world and no stone had been left unturned in creating a successful Cup.

However, the pressures on the worldwide golfing calendar had pushed the match into October for only the second time in its history and the South Wales weather can be notoriously fickle. And so it was.

"We had 25% of our monthly rainfall in two days – about two inches," said Jim, who did say that a White Open a few years ago had endured three inches of rain and finished within half an hour of its scheduled time.

"Colin asked if there was any way we could get playing, we could go down in history as the first greenkeeping crew to help win the Ryder Cup"

Jim McKenzie

broccoli, if the match had been played a week before or a week after there wouldn't have been any problems at all in the weather was just fine.

"When the volunteers arrived on the Saturday before the course was looking better than it had ever done," he recalled.

"However, we had 13 and during Wednesday practice and could see things getting worse, but on Thursday we got fresh information from the on-site meteorologist that it wasn't just going to be wet on Friday it was going to be splendidly wet."

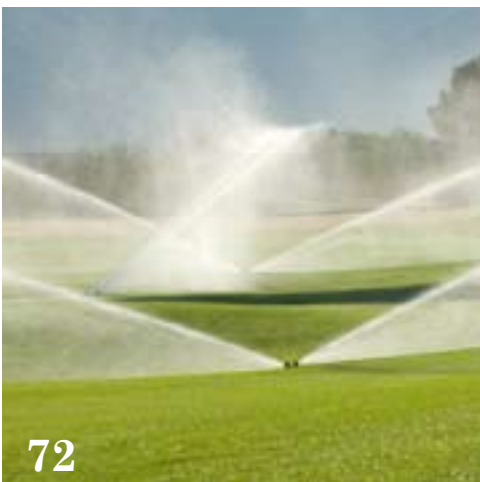




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Featured Inside...

Ryder Cup Exclusive

7-page special: How the 2010 Ryder Cup was *really* won

Also inside...

84 pages including: BIGGA National Championship Review, Photographic Competition Results, Burghley Park Golf Club, BIGGA Delegation News, Jobs for the Boys, and much more...



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