

By KEVIN ROSS

Diary of a Ryder Cup volunteer

Day #1 Sept. 22 — When the alarm rang at 4 a.m., the long trip and work schedule as a 1999 Ryder Cup grounds crew volunteer suddenly set in. Dragging myself out of bed to prepare for the two-hour drive from Vail to Denver for my flight, I realized I hadn't seen 4 a.m. in about a month. I could feel the bite of the 36-degree morning and hoped Boston would bring a little warmer morning starts. Armed with the largest cup I could find, my joe was in hand and I was off. One stop in Denver to pick up my cohort for the trip, Scott Gault, who works for Hall-Irwin Co., a supplier of golf course construction materials. Scott spent some time in New England as an assistant superintendent and helped give Jeff Baker (present assistant at Ryder Cup host Country Club of Brookline) his start in the business.

Once in the air with the *USA Today* sports section in hand with Woods and Duval on the cover, I realized I was attending "The Battle at Brookline" my first Ryder Cup experience. I thought, "Wow! What a Cup to make my first!" With the dreaded Euro's holding the cup, the players compensation issue, a gem of a golf course, and to return to my native New England, I was getting more and more excited.

When the plane set down in Manchester, N.H., our host for the week, Glenn White, greeted us. Glenn is the superin-

tendent at Campbell Scottish Highlands Golf Club, and a former assistant of mine when I was at Falmouth Country Club in Portland, Maine.

Day #2, Sept. 23 — Another day up at 4 a.m., which is 2 a.m. MST and our body clock time. A quick bite to eat, cup of joe in hand and into the rental car for the one-hour drive to the Country Club of Brookline. Walking out the door, we felt rain on our heads and were not thrilled with the thought of a damp Ryder Cup experience.

At the CC of Brookline Maintenance Center, we had a quick meeting with Sean McCormick (volunteer coordinator from the Valley Club of Montecito in California) and off we went. Seven of us were assigned to the dew whip team. We were to take the dew off any low spots in the fairways, break up clippings, and check fairway divots. The overnight rain deposited a half inch, which made the course soggy. The Brookline crew had the complete arsenal out: a helicopter, waterhogs and fans to dry the fairways. The dew whip team followed, cleaning up anything that was left. What a sight, seeing the helicopter hover over the course to help dry it out! When the first tee time arrived at 9:30 a.m. for the final practice round, the course was ready for play.

My fellow Dew Whippers and I re-



Ross' Dew Whipper teammates in action on the 18th fairway: Scott Gault, right, and Jeff Brooks.

turned to the maintenance center for a quick breakfast and our next assignments. It was off to the cover the 12th green, 13th tee and 14th green. My assignment (with two other volunteers) was to keep all debris off the two greens and the tee, rake bunkers if needed, and seed any divots taken on the tee or in the approach. Our staging area on the 12th green was directly behind the green next to a large beech and oak tree. Little did I know that what a wonderful spot this would be to watch the action and meet many dignitaries over the next few days.

Our day throughout the practice round was very busy. Players who came through each played six or more shots from the bunkers, practiced various approach shots, and generally made a mess. Play finished about 5 p.m. and we headed home.

The Brookline crew had the complete arsenal out: a helicopter, waterhogs and fans to dry the fairways.

Day #3, Sept. 24 — OK, this was it, the first day of competition. The assignments were the same as the previous day, so we Dew Whippers headed to the first fairway to prepare for the first tee time at 7:30 a.m. Once the dew draggers showed, it was time to go into action. You could feel that today was a big day. All in our group had perfection on our minds. It didn't take long to work up a good sweat on a near perfect day.

As we finished the 18th fairway and walked through the clubhouse area, we could feel the buzz in the air about the matches. As we continued walking back to the maintenance center, we could hear the roars of the crowd from all over the golf course in response to each hole won by the Americans. This puzzled us to some degree because the players had only made it through eight holes. We soon learned that for \$10, you could purchase a small radio that carried the golf tournament live. It seemed like almost everyone had these. So, whenever the American Team won a hole, it didn't matter what hole the players were on — the roar was from everywhere on the course.

Continued on page 10

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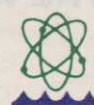


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Ryder diary

Continued from page 9

At the maintenance center, it was some quick eats and off to our holes. I drew the same assignment as the previous day. As I walked up the 12th fairway to the green, I was amazed with the crowds — a sea of spectators.

Upon reaching our post behind #12 green, our team of three

volunteers — Gault, Brett Henk, 2nd assistant at Nantucket Golf Club in Cape Cod, and I — was ready for action. Our goal was to have our areas flawless. As we got to the green and set our tools of the trade down by the TV tower, we put our game faces on and scoured the entire green and tee area with perfection in mind. Not a leaf, blade of grass, sand particle, divot, acorn, or anything could stop us. With four morn-

ing and afternoon groups, play moved very quickly. In no time, the morning fourball matches were finished through the 12th and we ran to the tent for lunch.

Returning to our green for the afternoon, we stayed busy all day as the 486-yard par-4 uphill hole was a battle for all players. It played more like a par-5. The front right bunker was very active and the approach to the green saw its share of activity.

Friday's most exciting shot on the 12th came from Jasper Parnevik (teamed with Sergio Garcia), who pitched in the hole from 30 yds out for a par-4. He had been imitating a Boston Bruin playing hockey until that point. When the shot went in, Sergio did his 200 beats per minute, five laps around the approach, jumping up and down as if he had won the PGA. Brett and I were amazed with his enthusi-

asm, but were more concerned with the footprints and spiking on our approach. As the group went to the next tee, we inspected the damage but found very little. It's a good thing Sergio is just a kid (in size anyway). There were eight points available for the day, with four each from the morning alternate shot format, and the afternoon better-ball competition. There wasn't much to cheer about for the American side as the Euro's were on fire and put it to us for the day, 6-2.

Other than golf, my highlight for the day was that the Bush family, Michael Jordan, Tom Kite, Ray Floyd, and others viewed the action from inside the ropes next to our post. I especially remember Tom Kite saying what a great old course the Country Club was and how the presentation for the tournament was perfect.

Day #4, Sept. 25 — We arrived at Brookline around 4:45 a.m. We wondered, Why so early? Maybe the players were coming by the shop to have breakfast with us — **not!**

As daylight broke, it was the dew whippers in action again. So, off we went to the 1st fairway, where we went through our morning ritual of stretching and performed the ceremonial toast of our dew whips. This being the third consecutive day and knowing the crowds would be at their largest, we knew the comments concerning our dew whips might border on hilarious.

The previous two days we heard the usual ones, such as "Caught any fish?" "Where is the reel?" "What kind of antennas are those?" "Where is the scoreboard?" I mentioned to the rest of the team to keep track of the comments so we could vote on the best remark concerning our tools of the trade.

As we finished the 10th fairway, the sky darkened and raindrops started falling. A few holes later, the rain increased in intensity and we donned our rain gear. The thought of whipping the last eight fairways in the rain was not appealing to anyone, but we kept trucking. The skies continued with a light rain for the remainder of our morning duty. We were never happier to see the maintenance center after finishing #18 fairway. Once back at the volunteer tent, we swapped complaints about how wet and damp we were (sounded like my crew back home). After drinking as much hot coffee as a person could, it was time to gather our afternoon tools of the trade and off we went.

At this time I was beginning to like the 12th hole. It was like a second home. We changed our tack on this wet Saturday. We decided to split up the 12th and 14th greens because the crowd density was so intense that one

Continued on page 13



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The Diary of a Ryder Cup superintendent volunteer

Continued from page 10

team couldn't cover both. On the way up to the 12th, the rain stopped and the sun attempted to appear. Suddenly, as we were making our rounds, the siren sounded for suspension of play. The 45-minute delay was a blessing in disguise, giving us a chance to take a few minutes rest.

As the sun broke, the massive crowd applauded and play resumed. Since play was suspended on hole #9, it didn't take long to reach our hole. As with the previous day, with four morning and afternoon groups, play moved quickly. In no time, the morning fourball matches were finished through the 12th and we ran to the tent for lunch, then back to our green for afternoon duty.

As in the day before, when we arrived at the green a staff member was mowing the green and the new hole location was being cut. We had to re-rake our greenside bunkers, as the PGA official required the rake lines to be all toward the hole location. As Brett and I analyzed them, we thought the lines might have been off, maybe, 5 degrees. But we sucked it up, gave him his wish and prepared for play. This was a definite blow to our pride. In between each group we gave our area the white glove treatment.

The shot of the day for us was a pitch shot from 30 yards by Phil Mickleson. It wasn't so much that the shot coized to 3 feet; it was because of the size and story of the divot. As Brett and I went to repair the large crater, I picked up the divot and he filled it with the mix. As I was walking back to the TV tower, I heard from the gallery, "Hey, divot man, can I have that?" Why, I don't know, but I tossed the divot to the guy and the gallery applauded. It turned out to be one of the classics of the week. I told Brett the guy offered me \$20 for the divot. Being a young assistant,

and not knowing me well, he still probably believes it.

When the last group finished we headed to the maintenance center. On our walk down, we noticed [Country Club superintendent] Bill Spence had the mowing

crew out on fairways. The fairways, composed of 95 percent bentgrass, were cut at 3/8 inch and mowed in two halves in the afternoon using a team of seven triplex mowers with no baskets. In all my years in the business, I've never seen fairways of that age with such a quality stand of bentgrass. As we watched them mow for a few minutes we could tell the staff's pride and concentration.

As the evening sun set and the matches finished, we halved with the Euro's for the day, 4-4. This still gave them a commanding 10-6 lead going into Sunday's play. The best news of the day, however, was that the start time for Sunday morning was backed up one hour. As we drove through the traffic on the way home, that extra hour of sleep sounded very nice.

Day #5, Sept. 25 — At a 5:45 a.m. meeting of volunteers and regular staff in the maintenance complex, Bill Spence thanked his crew for the dedication and the years of preparation it took for the event. He also thanked the volunteers for the help throughout the week. What really hit home to me was how Bill explained that this was the highlight of his career, and maybe if somehow the Americans could pull off a miracle it would make it all the sweeter. Walking down the stairs on the way out, I thought how Bill and his staff had spent countless hours

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and energy only to have the Euro's come here and kick our butts. There weren't many people that morning who thought the Americans stood a chance of even a miracle.

As we met for the final day's assignment I heard the familiar sound of "Kevin — dew whip team." Heck, I did it the previous four days, one more couldn't hurt. Then suddenly the best news of the week: We only had to whip holes #1-7 and didn't start until 9 a.m. This was because of the late 10 a.m. singles start. This gave me a couple of hours to take some pictures of the course conditioning and set-up by the maintenance staff. I marveled at the bunkering with a slight laced-edge appearance and the non-mowed lips of the bunkers. The grass around the bunkers was very long. This caused it to lay over toward the sand and give a true Scottish flavor. My sentiments were echoed when I chatted with Dana Fry of Hurdzan/Fry Golf Design in Ohio. Dana, too, could not stop talking about how magnificent the bunkers were. After the photos, I regrouped with the Dew Whippers and we went into action. A quick seven holes of whipping, back to the maintenance center for lunch and off to our green for the remainder of the day.

As we anticipated, the matches went very fast. The stunning comeback of the Americans had the gallery in a frenzy. The Cup seemed to hinge on one match, Mark O'Meara vs. Padraig Harrington. The word from the NBC crowd was that the United States was dominating eight of the 12 matches and they only needed a

halve from one of the other four. O'Meara's was the only close match of the others. Justin Leonard was four down as he arrived at the 12th green. He then made a great par putt to cut his deficit to 3. The rest, as they say, is history! Shot of the day was Jim Furyk's second to 15 feet and knocking in the slippery side-hiller for a birdie 3. It was only the second birdie of the week there.

As we drove home that evening we were still stunned that the Americans pulled it off. I was happiest for Bill Spence and his staff for the miracle that happened to make their Ryder Cup truly special.

AFTERTHOUGHTS FROM THE CUP

Little did I know when I volunteered for the Ryder Cup what an historical event it would become. Some two weeks later, the magnitude hasn't set in. Still today, it is the talk of the golfing world. I reserve my comments concerning fan behavior, #17 green celebration, heckling, etc. I will say that the event peaked interest of golfers and non-golfers. It can only be good for golf, and whatever is good for golf can only be good for our profession.

GOLFER OF THE WEEK AWARD

Tie between Hal Sutton and Colin Montgomerie. Sutton because he was an absolute horse for the U.S. Team; Montgomerie because of his tenacity. Although heckled by fans, his play was truly outstanding.

NBC MAN OF THE WEEK

Johnny Miller. You can never blame anyone for saying what he believes!

MAN OF THE WEEK

No, not Ben Crenshaw. No, not Justin Leonard. Bill Spence for one awesome golf course!

DEW WHIP COMMENT OF THE WEEK

"Hey, could you tell me what are those things you're carrying?" I couldn't believe someone actually wanted to know! ↑

Hurricane Floyd leaves its mark on golf

Continued from page 1

"We lost quite a few trees. Everybody in the area had pretty much the same thing — a messy cleanup, a lot of standing water, trees and debris.

The worst of the flooding occurred farther north and west.

At one point, water covered half the bentgrass greens, Bermudagrass fairways and roughs of River Landing Country Club in Wallace, said first assistant pro Lonnie Knowles. In mid-October, roughly a month after Floyd arrived, 18 of the 27 Clyde Johnston-designed holes remained closed. The newest nine, which first opened in late August, is located farthest from the river and reopened first, Knowles explained.

"We're reseeding the greens on the front nine and resodding the greens on the back nine," Knowles said. "Come late November we should be back to 18 and to 27 next May."

Significant amounts of silt remained on the greens once the waters receded at River Landing, Knowles said. The flood waters also contained oil, gasoline and other contaminants from cars.

"The silt killed the greens," Knowles said. "The fairways should be fine. The rain helped wash much of the silt away."

Jeremy Shadle, head pro at Bradford Creek Golf Course in Greenville, N.C., said: "We've come through this pretty well. We got a lot of rain during the storm. There were some large ponds out there. But less than 25 percent of the course was underwater right after the hurricane struck."

The rivers began rising two days later, the bridges closed leading to the course, and eventually the entire layout was underwater.

"The local television station took some aerial shots," Shadle said. "The only thing you could see was the clubhouse and a little patch of grass around it. We were completely underwater for several days."

Bradford Creek has hybrid Bermudagrass fairways, common Bermudagrass roughs and a bentgrass blend consisting of L93 and Crenshaw on the greens.

"We had two greens underwater for seven to eight days," Shadle said. "We'll replant those. The others came through real well. In fact, they seemed to grow underwater. They were just as green as a gourd and the turf was very long when they popped out."

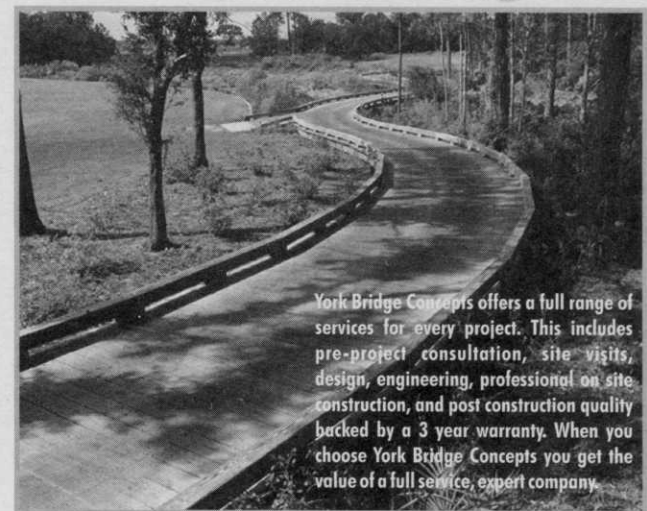
"Unfortunately the waters were contaminated with animal waste, oil and gas. So we had to fight a little fungus and disease with fungicides and a lot of fertilizer. We'll open nine holes this weekend [Oct. 16-17]. We've been closed for a month... Under the circumstances, we came through pretty well." ↑



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