



# No easy Ryder

Almost 80 years since it first teed off, the most famous game of golf in the world is still going strong

Words by Rob Beattie

As the two teams finish competing at the end of the 2006 Ryder Cup (22-24 September), a game that's awash with money and bristling with sponsorship deals, it seems rather quaint to remember that the original tournament in 1927 was played for love rather than lucre. Of course, golfers can't agree on anything – that's part of the fun – and to this day argue back and forth as to whether the tournament was devised by the fabulously named Sylvanus P Jermain of Ohio's Inverness Golf Club or by James Harnett who worked for *Golf Illustrated* and was trying to attract readers to the magazine by creating a new transatlantic tournament.

In any event, informal games had been played between the US and Great Britain since 1921, after which Samuel Ryder, a wealthy seed merchant stepped up to offer a trophy as an incentive and things really hotted up – the inaugural Ryder Cup was held in 1927 at the Worcester Country Club in Massachusetts. Having won all the informal matches in previous years, and now that it really mattered, the British promptly lost their collective nerve and went down 9½ to 2. In fact, Britain went on to win the trophy outright a measly three times before the team was widened to include European golfers in 1979. Since then, matters have been a little more even.

The enduring popularity of the Ryder Cup is the result of high drama on the fairways supported by steady, thoughtful progress behind the scenes. The format has been tweaked to accommodate more games and longer matches and today it's the most eagerly awaited international golf tournament in the world.

And what spectacle the matches provide. Jack Niklaus and Tony Jacklin, two of the game's greats, fighting tooth and nail in 1969 before Niklaus concedes a two foot putt to Jacklin (by no means a certainty), thus ensuring that the match is a tie; the bitter feud between Ballesteros and Azinger which started at the Belfry



in 1989 and exploded into a magnificent classic of a match two years later which the Spaniard wins 2-1; the raucous football-style celebrations of the Americans and their fans after an astonishing comeback in 1999 – Michael Bonallack, guardian of golf rules and traditions and secretary of the Royal and Ancient in Scotland, later described the scenes as a 'bear pit.'

All of that magic is captured in *The History Of The Ryder Cup*, close to an hours-worth of the very best the tournament has to offer – interviews with all the key players, nail-biting finishes from the last 70 years, the changing hairstyles, those clothes! – but most of all, some of the greatest golf ever seen, and an inspiration to shankers and slicers all over the world to keep practicing!

*The History Of The Ryder Cup* can be seen on those aircraft with the AVOD system.

