

Nathan Crace's

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Golf at the "K.O." Club

By: Nathan Crace Date: September 24, 2006

With all due respect to red headed stepchildren everywhere, the American Ryder Cup team has been treated like the child in that old cliché. The one consolation in losing the Ryder Cup by nine points is that it's not a record loss—it merely ties the record loss handed to us in 2004. The performance at Ireland's K Club (or more precisely the "K.O." Club) made Walter Mondale in the 1984 presidential election against Ronald Reagan look like William the Conqueror. Now it would be easy to stand back and say that we had an uphill climb with four Ryder Cup rookies on our squad. Fair enough. After all, the best player on the face of the planet can only win one match at a time and this is a team format—a foreign concept to everyone on our side of the pond. After all, there were two guys on our squad that won their first PGA Tour events this year! This year? How can guys who haven't found a place on the mantle for their new hardware be expected to tote the load of an entire nation?

Kudos to Captain Lehman. His Captain's picks of Stewart Cink and Scott Verplank were some of the only highlights in the Sunday singles matches—a day of last caused before the sun was up. The matches needed to be won outright on Sunday was a seemingly insurmountable obstacle and our guys gave it their all. But you can only climb out of so many holes when they are that deep. If I hear one more talking head say that the Europeans simply want it more than our guys or that our guys are too pampered to appreciate the Ryder Cup, I'm going to go ballistic. Sure the Euros seem to gel more. Sure they appear to have camaraderie. But how much of that is television and how much is reality? Do you really think that the American team members are so self-centered and egotistical that they can't come together for one week to salvage American pride in the biennial event of international golf? I hope that's not the case.

Maybe we can seek solace in the fact that it took an entire continent to beat the USA. If not for Jack Nicklaus's recommendation some thirty years ago, we wouldn't have to deal with the likes of Garcia, Olazabal, and others from mainland Europe. But we would be bored with winning every time. Although to make things fair, maybe we should expand our team to North America. Continent versus continent. Why should they get an entire continent and we get only fifty states? Surely Mike Weir could have picked up a point or two along the way. And as far as I'm concerned, Fiji is close enough to Hawaii to stamp Vijay Singh's passport for the American Team's chartered jet. Didn't we used to have a colony in South Africa in the 1800's?

The reason the Euros have winning of late is the same reason all American teams face stiff competition in all international sporting events. It's not that our folks want it less. Heaven knows it isn't merely talent. But like anything else, other countries like to beat the United States. It's as simple as that. This doesn't mean they hate us. They may love us. But we are the only real superpower in the world right now. We have beat back Nazi-ism, we outlasted and outspent the Soviet Union to win the Cold War, and we circle the globe to try and spread freedom and help the oppressed and those who cannot help themselves. With that comes great responsibility and, as a consequence, increased opportunities to open new business markets. Capitalism is a wonderful tool and once people get a taste of it, they want it to stay.

But in the back on their minds, even those who love us like to win a game or two. People love to pull for the underdog. The little guy. The one who is not supposed to win. Unless, of course, you are the big guy. Competition is as good for international sports as it is for international business. As they say, the man on top of the mountain didn't fall there. But to stay on top, you have to keep ahead of everyone else and be mindful that you are not the only one who enjoys the view from the top. Unfortunately for the American Ryder Cup team, they are the big guys—and everyone comes gunning for them every two years in September. You can liken it to David versus Goliath. Except this time, David's sling concealed a small white dimpled ball instead of a rock.

Nathan Crace is a golf course architect and member of the Golf Writers Association of America whose freelance "Lipouts" column appears in a number of regional and national golf publications. If you would like to read past columns from the archives, log on to www.lipouts.com. Copyright 2006.