

RYDER CUP: THE YEAR'S BIGGEST GOLF EVENT

Set To Tee Off

BY DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

Take the loudest and rowdiest event in golf. Put it on a public golf course in New York notorious for its proud and raucous crowds. Fill it with 50,000 flag-waving fans at Bethpage Black. It's a recipe that has made this Ryder Cup the most anticipated of them all.

"I think hands down it'll be the biggest golf event ever," American golfer Justin Thomas said.

If all that isn't enough, President Donald Trump wasn't about to miss out on the ultimate "us versus them" sporting event. He plans to be there for the opening session on Sept. 26 when the Americans try to win back that 17-inch gold trophy from Europe.

The Americans won on home soil four years ago with their biggest shellacking ever against Europe, 19-9 at Whistling Straits, which prompted Jordan Spieth to say, "If we play like we did this week, the score will look the same over there."

But it wasn't. Europe won for the seventh straight time at home by a five-point margin in Rome. That prompted Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy to repeat his belief that winning a Ryder Cup away from home is the biggest achievement in golf. "And that's what we're going to do at Bethpage."

That will be determined over three days of nonstop action — four matches of alternate shot and four matches of better ball on Friday and Saturday, followed by 12 singles matches on Sunday. Europe needs only 14 points to retain the cup.

Keegan Bradley will be the American captain, not a player, after debating whether to become the Ryder Cup's first playing captain since 1963.

Luke Donald of England was so successful two years ago in Rome that Europe brought him back as the captain, and now he tries to become the first to win back-to-back since Tony Jacklin in 1985 and 1987.

THE COURSE

Bethpage Black was the first golf course owned by taxpayers to host the U.S. Open in 2002. It is championship caliber and famous for the sign above the first tee that says, "Warning. The Black Course is an extremely difficult course which we recommend only for highly skilled golfers." New York fans come out in droves to see how the world's best fare on their course. And they tend to let players know what they think.

THE TEAMS

The Europeans at least will look the same as the team that trounced the Americans at Marco Simone two years ago. They return 11 players, and the newcomer is Ramus Hojgaard of Denmark, who replaces identical twin Nicolai. The Americans have six players from the last team. That starts with Scottie Scheffler, the world's No. 1 player. Thomas is the most experienced at age 32. This is his fourth Ryder Cup.

SHOW ME THE MONEY

This hasn't gotten a lot of attention until recent weeks, but the Americans are getting paid for the first time. The PGA of America decided to award a \$200,000 stipend and

\$300,000 for the players to direct to charity. The American team plans to give it all to a charitable cause, but there's no hiding from the fact they are getting paid. "I personally would pay for the privilege to play in the Ryder Cup," McIlroy said. Expect more of that coming from Europe in the days leading to the competition.

EUROPEAN DOMINANCE

Europe has won 10 of the last 14 times dating to 1995, the last time the Ryder Cup was played in New York. It also is the only team to have won on the road dating to 1993. But the last European victory in America was in 2012 in what became known as the "Miracle at Medinah" when Europe rallied from a 10-6 deficit on the last day.

THE BRYSON FACTOR

Bryson DeChambeau is the only American in the Ryder Cup who defected to Saudi-based LIV Golf. He has become golf's biggest entertainer with his fan engagement, power and popular YouTube channel. "I'm looking to him to be our spark," Xander Schauffele said. "The way he is with the crowd, the way he's become taking the entertainer role, I think he can be the difference."



Scottie Scheffler plays during the 2023 Ryder Cup.

AP PHOTO



Facts & Figures

Event: 45th Ryder Cup matches.

Dates: Sept. 26-28.

Course: Bethpage State Park (Black Course), Farmingdale, New York.

Yardage: 7,352.

Par: 70.

Format: Four matches of foursomes (alternate shot) and fourballs (better ball) on Friday and Saturday, 12 singles matches on Sunday.

Points: The United States needs 14½ points to win the cup. Europe needs 14 points to retain the cup.

All-time series: United States leads 27-15-2.

US vs. Europe series (from 1979): Europe leads, 12-9-1.

Last time: Europe swept the opening session at Marco Simone in Italy and the Americans never caught up. Europe had a five-point lead going into Sunday singles and Tommy Fleetwood clinched it for a 16½-11½ victory. Rory McIlroy led Europe with a 4-1 record.

Major Bethpage: Bethpage Black becomes the seventh course to host a Ryder Cup, PGA Championship and U.S. Open. The others are Scioto, Oakland Hills, Oak Hill, Hazeltine, Pinehurst No. 2 and Medinah.

Tale of the tape: The Americans have combined for 14 wins and three majors this year. Europe has combined for 12 wins and one major.

Key statistic: U.S. captain Keegan Bradley has a better world ranking than five players on his team.

Noteworthy: This is the first European team to return 11 of the 12 players from the previous Ryder Cup.

Quoteworthy: "We've got three days to see who's the better team and it's going to be a good battle." — Scottie Scheffler.

Television (All Times Eastern): Friday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. (USA Network); Saturday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. (NBC); Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. (NBC).