Today, the Ryder Cup is golf’s pre-eminent event, biennially bringing together 12-member teams from the United States and Europe for glory and pride on a three-day worldwide stage. Spanning 87 years and now 40 competitions (including 2014), the Ryder Cup also is among the last great professional sporting events where winning, and not prize money, is the reward.

The idea to stage international matches, at that time between the best American professionals and those of Great Britain, is a subject of debate among golf historians.

PGA President George Sargent (1921-26), a native of Scotland, credited Sylvanus P. Jermain, president of Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio, for first presenting the concept of an international match, in 1921. The first unofficial matches took place at Gleneagles, Scotland on June 6, 1921, when the British side eased to a 10½ to 4½ victory.
Another unofficial match occurred in 1926 when the R&A initiated qualifying for its Open Championship, giving American players more time in England. Englishman Samuel Ryder and Walter Hagen deserve the credit for this match, contested June 4-5, at Wentworth Golf Club in Virginia Water, Surrey. What was known at that time as a General Strike, affected the transportation of many American players to England. Five were unable to compete, resulting in a team that included two Brits, two Scots and an Australian trick-shot artist.

Great Britain cruised to a 13½ to 1½ triumph. It was the genesis of what officially became the Ryder Cup in 1927. No cup was awarded at Wentworth, but medals were given to all competitors.

The Man Behind the Cup
Born in 1858, Samuel Ryder grew up near Manchester where he attended Owen’s College, excelling at mathematics and cricket. He left school to assist his father, a lay minister, in the seed and garden catalogue business. For 15 years, Sam carefully observed horticultural marketing and saw an economic principal that others did not see. In 1895, at age 37, he moved his family to St. Albans, England, where three train stations, cheap rates and a modern postal service awaited his idea. The massive distribution center that was St. Albans enabled Ryder & Son Ltd. to sell by catalogue quality seeds in penny packets, affordable to all.

Ryder’s oldest daughter, Marjorie, wrote that her father was the nearest to a saint of anyone she had found. He tried to redress arbitrary prejudices by his own example and by judicious planting of his money, like seed where it would grow best. He played many roles – as Elder of Trinity Congregational Church, which was built in his time; captain three times of Verulam Golf Club, which was built in his time; mayor of St. Albans (1905-06); and benevolent businessman. But, Ryder’s favorite role was Justice of the Peace, the only position he kept after he took up golf.

At age 50, Ryder’s feverish work pace nearly killed him. During his slow recovery, his friend, Rev. Frank Wheeler, took a reluctant Ryder to a small golf course. After that, nothing was the same for him. He hired a golf teacher and learned in the privacy of his garden, practicing for a year before he played with others (whom he soundly defeated), and joined Verulam Golf Club.

Wherever he would play, Ryder took time to befriend the host professional, to discuss his problems and his future. At one point in 1923, he was so concerned about the professionals’ lack of funds and time to compete that he sponsored a competition at Verulam that paid £5 to each professional who attended. It was “appearance money,” not so that they would play but so that they could play.

Ryder put his money down for professionals without commercial motivation. Some golf historians sell Ryder short by assuming he had
a promotional motivation for himself and his business. There were no British backers of professionals at that time except newspapers, magazines and golf merchandisers.

Many British professionals emigrated to the egalitarian climate of America, where they found better pay and a degree of respect missing back home. Few American professionals were native-born in the 1920s.

Walter Hagen, the exception, probably had more to do with the origins of the Ryder Cup than anyone. In 1920, Hagen left his club professional post at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Township, Michigan, to become his own boss with a publicity staff and a full schedule of challenge matches. As U.S. Open Champion in 1919, he played in his first Open Championship in 1920. He befriended the new Open Champion, George Duncan, and Abe Mitchell, the current Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA News of the World Match Play) Champion.

In October of 1925, Ryder took his first step toward what would become the international match at Wentworth the following spring. He invited Britain’s best professional golfer, Abe Mitchell, to move to St. Albans and become Britain’s first Hagen-style unattached professional. Ryder, by now nearly 70, supported Mitchell with an annual stipend of £500, plus £250 expenses.

The 1926 event at Wentworth laid the groundwork for the first official Ryder Cup in 1927.

The Selection Committee for the U.S. Team convened on April 5, 1927, in Chicago, and announced that it would select American-bred and American-developed players. It was later revealed that one U.S. team member, Johnny Golden, who was an Austro-Hungarian native, had emigrated to America.

The ensuing U.S. selection process in the Ryder Cup has evolved to admit players born outside the U.S., provided they had gained American citizenship prior to their 18th birthday.

In 1927, the U.S. selection process featured a method never previously used. The team was based entirely on their records for the past three years, with the information being gleaned from statistics compiled by Melvin A. Traylor, president of a Chicago bank and a member of the U.S. Golf Association Executive Committee.

Only Walter Hagen, Bill Mehlhorn and Al Watrous remained from the informal U.S. squad of the previous year. The British team was virtually intact from the international match at Wentworth in 1926, with the exception of Charles Whitcombe, who replaced his brother Ernie, and Ted Ray, who took over the captain’s duties from Abe Mitchell, who was diagnosed with appendicitis.

The British Team sailed on the Aquitania from Southampton, a six-day journey. The competition at Worcester (Massachusetts) Country Club, June 3-4, featured four foursomes and eight singles matches. The Americans won nine matches, with only two defeats and one half, for...
a 9 ½ to 2 ½ victory. Ray later summed up the initial matches: “One of the chief reasons for our failure was the superior putting of the American team. They holed out much better than we did.”

The Ryder Cup was first officially presented to the Americans at Worcester.

**War-Torn Matches**

With the outbreak of World War II, the Ryder Cup was suspended from 1939-45, and the U.S. retained the trophy from its 1937 victory. However, the United States continued the spirit of the Ryder Cup by selecting a 10-member team that participated in “challenge” matches to raise funds for the American Red Cross, various service organizations and other war-related efforts. With the 1939 Ryder Cup canceled, challenge competitions were arranged from 1940-43, with two at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Township, Mich., in 1940 and 1942; at Detroit Golf Club, in 1941; and at Plum Hollow Country Club, in suburban Detroit, in 1943. The Ryder Cup Team, which had various members during that period, won four of the five challenge matches.

Walter Hagen captained the 1939, ’40 and ’41 Ryder Cup Teams, while Craig Wood captained the team in 1942 and 1943. There was no competition in 1939, though the Ryder Cup was set for Ponte Vedra (Fla.) Country Club in November of that year. The 1939 U.S. selections were repeated in 1940 in a challenge match at Oakland Hills Country Club against Gene Sarazen’s Challengers. Sarazen, who was left off the Ryder Cup Team, challenged Hagen by assembling a team that included Ben Hogan, Jimmy Demaret and Craig Wood.

In 1939, The Professional Golfers Association of Great Britain had selected eight players and Captain Henry Cotton before war interrupted further plans. The eight players named were: Jimmy Adams, Dick Burton, Sam King, Alf Padgham, Dai Rees, Charles Whitcombe and Reg Whitcombe. The remaining two members were never filled.

During the war, the exhibition matches brought together the greatest players of the era, including amateur Bobby Jones, who led his team to an 8 ½-6 ½ upset of the Ryder Cup Team, Aug. 23-24, 1941, at Detroit Golf Club.

**Europeans Join the Hunt for the Cup**

In 1973, the Ryder Cup was contested for the first time in Scotland at historic Muirfield. The PGA of Great Britain altered its selection procedure by having eight players chosen from a year-long points system and four by invitation.

During the 1977 Ryder Cup at Royal Lytham & St. Annes, Jack Nicklaus approached the PGA of Great Britain about the urgency to improve the competitive level of the event. Coincidentally, the issue had been discussed earlier the same day by then-PGA President Henry Poe and British PGA President Lord Derby. Nicklaus pitched his ideas, adding, “It is vital to widen the selection procedures if the Ryder Cup is to continue to enjoy its past prestige.”

The changes in team selection procedure were approved by descendants of the Samuel A. Ryder family along with The PGA of America. The major change was expanding selection procedures to include players from the British PGA European Tournament Division Order of Merit, and “that European members be entitled to play on the team.”

This meant that professional players on the European Tournament Players Order of Merit could be natives and residents of countries other than the British Isles, as long as they were from continental Europe. The recommendation and succeeding approval of the new selection process followed another American victory at Royal Lytham & St. Annes in 1977. The first Ryder Cup under the expanded European selection format was played in 1979 at The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, W. Va. The first two Europeans to make the overseas squad were a pair of Spaniards—Severiano Ballesteros and Antonio Garrido.
Ballesteros went on to become one of the all-time winners in the Ryder Cup. He had a 20-12-5 record and earned 22½ points in 37 matches.

The move to include the continental players was a major step in upgrading the Ryder Cup competitive level. The U.S. had won all but one outing from 1959 to 1977, being tied, 16-16, in a memorable duel in 1969 at Royal Birkdale in Southport, England.

Expanding the selection procedure to include the European Tour provided the British PGA with a much greater pool of talent from which to select its team. The European Tour Order of Merit also ensured a team comprised of golfers who were playing their best at the time of selection.

The effect of this continental tour, with its varying types of golf courses, climates, food, language and customs, was to produce players of unprecedented durability. They possessed the technique and confidence to deal with all course situations and make the Ryder Cup even more of a quality event.

From the beginning of the series through 1959, the Ryder Cup competition was comprised of four foursome (alternate shot) matches on one day and eight singles matches on the other day, each of 36 holes.

The format was changed in 1961 to provide four 18-hole foursome matches the morning of the first day, four more foursomes that afternoon, eight 18-hole singles the morning of the second day and eight more singles that afternoon. One point was at stake in each match, so the total number of points was doubled to 24. In 1963, four-ball (better-ball) matches were added for the first time, boosting the total number of points available to 32.

The format was updated again in 1977, this time with five foursomes on opening day, five four-ball matches on the second day, and 10 singles matches on the final day. This reduced the total points to 20.

In 1979, when the Great Britain & Ireland Team was expanded to include players from continental Europe, the format was revised to provide four four-ball and four foursome matches the first two days and 12 singles matches on the third day. The total points awarded were 28. This format will continue through the 2014 Ryder Cup.

The Ryder Cup was interrupted for the second time in history following the Sept. 11, 2001 attack upon America. Some eight days following the tragedy, the 2001 Ryder Cup was rescheduled, with all future competitions conducted in even-numbered years.

John Jacobs, captain of the European team with Bernard Gallacher, Severiano Ballesteros, Tony Jacklin, Antonio Garrido, Michael King, Brian Barnes, Nick Faldo, Des Smyth, Peter Oosterhuis, Ken Brown, Sandy Lyle, Mark James at the 23rd Ryder Cup Matches on September 14, 1979 at The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, USA. (Photo by Getty Images)
On behalf of the 2014 United States Ryder Cup Team and the PGA of America, PGA Tournament Corporation will direct $2.75 million to designated charities and youth golf development programs as a way to leverage the Ryder Cup and provide community outreach support.

Since the U.S. Ryder Cup Outreach Program began in 1999, more than $20 million has been donated on behalf of the U.S. Ryder Cup Team and Captain to over 160 designated charities.

All 12 members of the U.S. Team, along with Captain Tom Watson are able to designate $100,000 to the charity or charities of their choice.

Another $100,000 will be directed to help support youth golf development programs designed to introduce children to the game; provide unique approaches to play the game; and deliver world-class coaching and mentoring to advanced juniors who may not otherwise have the financial means to play.

Finally, the three U.S. Vice Captains – Raymond Floyd, Andy North and Steve Stricker – will designate $25,000 to the charity or charities of their choice and another $25,000 to help support youth golf development programs.

Youth golf development programs that will benefit from the Ryder Cup Outreach Program are:

- Boys & Girls Clubs of America – The Outreach Program will help continue funding the delivery of PGA Sports Academy programming through a partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. This program introduces youth nationwide to the game of golf and provides training equipment and instructional support from PGA Professionals.

- Drive, Chip and Putt Championship – The Drive, Chip and Putt Championship, supported by The Masters Tournament Foundation, the PGA of America and the United States Golf Association, is a free, nationwide junior skills competition for boys and girls, ages 7-15.

- PGA Junior League Golf – PGA Junior League Golf, an exciting team concept for young players throughout the country, incorporates the “Little League” approach to the game of golf. PGA Junior League Golf provides youth ages 13 and under the opportunity to learn to play golf in a fun, social team environment.

SILVER PUTTER, NEWEST SYMBOL OF RYDER CUP HISTORY

A silver putter, the newest piece of memorabilia attached to the rich history of The Ryder Cup, made its first exhibition in 2012 at Medinah (Ill.) Country Club. Adorned with 24 silver golf balls – symbolizing the total members of the competing Ryder Cup Teams – the putter links the past and future of golf’s premier spectacle. Similar to the passing of the Olympic torch to the next host site, the silver putter was first presented in 2010 by Ryder Cup Europe to The PGA of America during The Ryder Cup closing ceremony at The Celtic Manor Resort, City of Newport, Wales. Visitors to Gleneagles in 2014 will find the silver putter featuring the sites of past Ryder Cup sites and golf balls representing the 12-member teams and Captains and assistants. As each competition is completed, the site is engraved on a plaque within the piece.

NEWPORT, WALES - OCTOBER 04: Jim Remy, President of The PGA of America, holds up a gift of a silver putter during the Closing Ceremony of the 2010 Ryder Cup at the Celtic Manor Resort on October 4, 2010 in Newport, Wales. (Photo by Sam Greenwood/Getty Images)