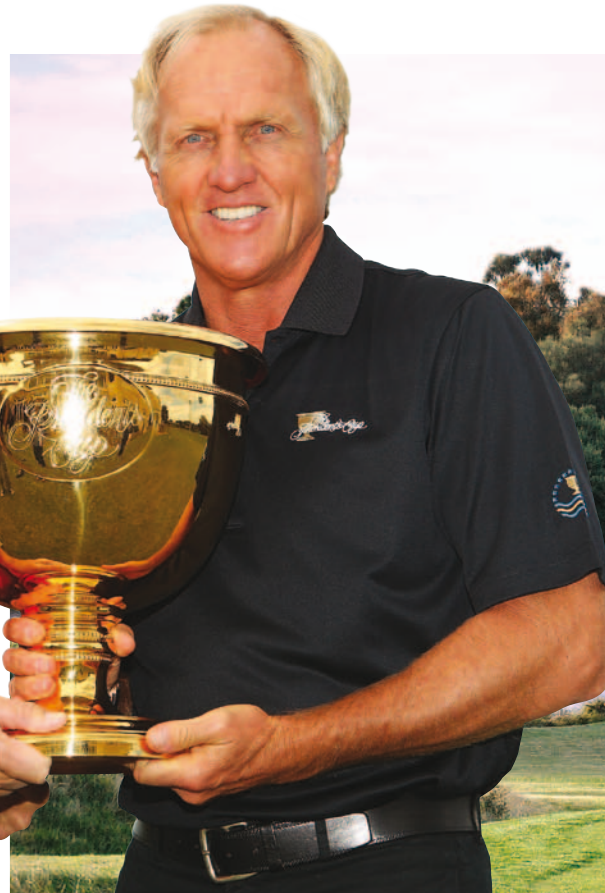


Lighting the FIRE

American domination is threatening to rob The Presidents Cup of its appeal. What the event really needs is for the International team to front up and reclaim the trophy, writes **Brendan Barratt**, who's not entirely convinced that it will happen this year.



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Photograph by Mark Wilson - Wisdom



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1 Both former world No 1s, Fred Couples (left) and Greg Norman will be going all out to win The Presidents Cup. **2** The last – and only – win for the International team in The Presidents Cup came in 1998 at the venue for this year's event, Royal Melbourne. **3** Aussies Adam Scott and Jason Day will lead the International charge on home soil. **4** One of the best holes on display, the par-three 14th hole, with its natural amphitheatre, will be buzzing with spectators.



3

While golf historians will tell you that the Ryder Cup officially began in 1927, those in the know will also point to the year 1985 as when the tournament really started to become the event it is today. You see, prior to the 1985 match at The Belfry, the Ryder Cup was not much more than a one-horse race. Even with the addition of the Irish golfers in 1973 and later the European golfers – to accommodate a large contingent of Spanish golfers – in 1979, American dominance was such that little more was expected from them other than to turn up, smash the opposition and have 'USA' engraved on the cup once more.

The Americans, presumably bored with the easy wins, started to become complacent about the event. Tom Weiskopf famously withdrew himself from the 1977 Ryder Cup in favour of a big-game hunting trip – yet the US team stormed on without the 1973 Open Championship winner, comfortably prevailing by 12½ to 7½. If he were to try a move like that today, he might be lynched for a lack of patriotism. In order to avoid it drifting into

obscurity, the Ryder Cup desperately needed Europe to become stronger – or at least competitive – and we can pinpoint 1985, where Europe surprisingly won by 16½ to 11½, as the tipping point. Suddenly, instead of the walkover that the Americans had become accustomed to, the Ryder Cup was more competitive – so much so that Europe has claimed eight of the next 12 tournaments (one courtesy of a tie). If anything, the Europeans are now favourites to retain the title they secured at Celtic Manor last year.

When it comes to The Presidents Cup, the USA, having comfortably won the last three events and six of the eight played (including one tie), are starting to make the matches look a little like the pre-1985 Ryder Cup. Apart from the epic tie at Fancourt in 2003, none of the events have been particularly close and there's been very little of the 'ra-ra' fist-pumping seen in the Ryder Cup. Dare we say it's been a little bland?

Essentially, the world of golf needs 2011 to become The Presidents Cup's version of 1985. Unfortunately for the Internationals,

not all the omens are promising. On the positive side, the last time the event was played at Royal Melbourne, back in 1998, the International team trounced the Americans in their only victory to date. Home-ground advantage is not to be sneezed at and there's every chance that International team captain Greg Norman will have as many as four Aussies in his squad, two of whom (Adam Scott and Jason Day) are currently in the top 10 in the World Ranking. He'll also have the services of Ernie Els, a Presidents Cup veteran and three-time winner of the Heineken Classic, played at Royal Melbourne, and Geoff Ogilvy, who lives a few hundred metres from the course, to turn to.

On the downside, the Yanks, as competitive and combative as ever, will not easily relinquish their ownership of the event. Despite having more debutants on their team than the rest-of-the-world squad, the American team looks formidable. Their qualifying system, based on earnings – as opposed to the Internationals, who are selected on World Ranking points – favours those players who are in form and there's no denying

that with the likes of Matt Kuchar, Steve Stricker, Dustin Johnson and Webb Simpson in their ranks, the visiting team will be pronounced as tournament favourites. Questions must be asked about the form of the likes of the International team's Ernie Els, Retief Goosen, Kyung-Tae Kim and Ryo Ishikawa. A mixture of youth and experience, the Americans also have the ace up their sleeve of having 14-time Major winner Tiger Woods playing as a captain's pick. Bet against them at your peril.

Everything other than the event's lopsided history would point to a very close finish come Sunday, and who could argue that a perfect result for world golf would be a narrow, come-from-behind win for the Internationals – with Ernie sinking the 15-foot winning putt?

USA

NAME	PREVIOUS APPEARANCES	RECORD (WON – LOST – HALVED)
Matt Kuchar	Debut	
Steve Stricker	3	9-6-0
Dustin Johnson	Debut	
Webb Simpson	Debut	
Nick Watney	Debut	
Phil Mickelson	8	15-13-10
Bubba Watson	Debut	
David Toms	3	6-7-1
Hunter Mahan	2	4-4-1
Jim Furyk	6	15-10-3
CAPTAIN'S PICKS: Tiger Woods (6), Bill Haas (debut)		

INTERNATIONALS

NAME	PREVIOUS APPEARANCES	RECORD (WON – LOST – HALVED)
Jason Day	Debut	
Adam Scott	4	8-10-2
Charl Schwartzel	Debut	
KJ Choi	2	3-6-0
Kyung-Tae Kim	Debut	
Retief Goosen	5	11-10-3
Geoff Ogilvy	2	4-5-0
Ernie Els	6	16-12-2
YE Yang	1	2-2-1
Ryo Ishikawa	1	3-2-0
CAPTAIN'S PICKS: Robert Allenby (5), Aaron Baddeley (debut)		

THE TEAMS

"APART FROM THE EPIC TIE AT FANCOURT IN 2003, NONE OF THE EVENTS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY CLOSE AND THERE'S BEEN VERY LITTLE OF THE 'RA-RA' FIST-PUMPING SEEN IN THE RYDER CUP. DARE WE SAY IT'S BEEN A LITTLE BLAND?"



THE COURSE

ROYAL MELBOURNE GOLF CLUB

By Paul Prendergast

Founded back in 1891, Royal Melbourne is rightfully considered to be the jewel of Australian golf courses. Comprising two public layouts, both of which are ranked in the world's top 100 courses – the only facility outside of the USA to have achieved this – the course that will greet the US and International teams is one that none of their players will have experienced before.

This month, Royal Melbourne's hallowed grounds will see tens of thousands of spectators and millions around the globe tune in to a layout of holes made up from both the club's East and West courses that has never been used in tournament play. The much-vaunted 'Composite' layout, first used for the 1958 Canada Cup and many national and international tournaments since, has been tweaked for the 2011 Presidents Cup to allow for a better matchplay spectacle and crowd movement.

Even Royal Melbourne club members don't get to play the Composite layout, or the course rotation that was used for the 1998 Cup, still the only Presidents Cup victory the Internationals have claimed since the tournament's creation in 1994. What will lie before the United States and International teams are some of the most famous and classically beautiful holes, located in Mel-

ROYAL MELBOURNE COMPOSITE COURSE

1	324m	par 4
2	486m	par 5
3	161m	par 3
4	401m	par 4
5	135m	par 3
6	279m	par 4
7	416m	par 4
8	435m	par 4
9	401m	par 4
10	396m	par 4
11	304m	par 4
12	402m	par 4
13	350m	par 4
14	170m	par 3
15	520m	par 5
16	405m	par 4
17	392m	par 4
18	419m	par 4
Total	6 396m	par 71

bourne's famed 'Sandbelt region', that exist in the world of golf.

Far from being the longest course in modern golf, the holes designed and constructed by the great Alister Mackenzie and 'protégé' Alex Russell in the 1920s are examples of classic, strategic designs. The will reward good play and will yield plenty of birdies in calm conditions. As with links courses in Great Britain, however, the course will take on an entirely different outlook should there be any wind or difficult weather.

Players not used to Sandbelt conditions will find it a tough and

unique experience in adverse weather, especially navigating the slippery putting surfaces and picking the right club into the greens to get near the pin. The bounce of the ball on and around the greens will be more like links golf than the softer conditions experienced most weeks at tour courses around the world.

Given good weather conditions in the months leading into the event, the preparations that have been undertaken over the past two years will ensure that the golf course will be in fantastic condition for The Presidents Cup. The re-grassing programme that has seen the fairways, green surrounds and green surfaces replaced following a number of years of debilitating drought in Melbourne has responded well following a wet summer and good weather conditions so far this year, with the golf course in fantastic shape.

Not a long golf course by modern standards, the new Legends Couch grass was introduced as it grows more vertically, resulting in less roll of the golf ball on the fairways. The fescue green approaches and Suttons Mix grass on the greens will prove to be a bouncier, firmer surface for

approach shots than in recent years and the greens are back to the slick and true surfaces that have been revered by many over the years.

It will be hard for the competitors not to be inspired by the occasion and venue with a magnificent spectacle in store for us again at Royal Melbourne.

KEY HOLES

2 486M PAR FIVE

An early scoring opportunity, the tee shot needs to clear the brow of a hill, with giant bunkers cut into the face swallowing



1 The only win for the International team in The Presidents Cup came in 1998 at the venue for 2011. **2** The 401-metre 4th hole is a long and difficult par four that doglegs from left to right. The slippery green will test players. **3** The historic Royal Melbourne clubhouse.



anything not struck high and long enough. The hole then sweeps sharply to the right around thick tea trees and a glorious vista awaits from the fairway, with cavernous bunkers left and right protecting a large, undulating putting surface. A definite birdie or eagle opportunity.

3 161M PAR THREE

A gorgeous par three, constructed under the personal supervision of Dr Alister Mackenzie during his brief visit to the site in 1926, which requires a mid-iron approach to a green set in an amphitheatre against

a fern- and tree-covered dune backdrop. Classic deep bunkers left and right protect the entrance and a steep slope guards the front of the green. Anything short will run back down the slope some 20 metres, leaving a difficult up-and-down. One of the quickest and most undulating greens on the course.

4 401M PAR FOUR

Widely regarded over the years as one of the best par fours in world golf. An elevated tee shot over a sea of sand and gorse to a wide fairway, which doglegs

PRESIDENTS CUP VS RYDER CUP

While the two events may look very similar, there are some subtle differences between The Presidents Cup and the Ryder Cup. Yes, The Presidents Cup is often seen as the poor man's version of the Ryder Cup, but as a relatively new tournament – having been launched in 1994 as compared to the Ryder Cup's 1927 beginning – the former has been able to learn from the latter and tweak the format slightly.

■ One of the big differences is that each member of the 12-man teams must play each day. Unlike the Ryder Cup, all 12 players must play both matches on Friday and, although two players are rested per session on the Saturday, every team member must play at some stage during the day. It prevents teams from 'hiding' those players considered to be weaker or out of form.

■ The final day consists of 12 singles matches, with any match all square after 18 holes going to sudden-death extra holes

until a winner is determined.

■ If the overall competition is tied at the end of the singles play, the teams will share the cup, whereas in the Ryder Cup, a tied match would see the team currently holding the cup retain it.

■ The daily pairing system is also different. After one captain announces his players or player for a certain match, the opposing captain is able to pick the opponents for that match. This works particularly well in the singles matches, where captains will have worked who they would like their players to play against. In the Ryder Cup, while the captains pick their players or pairings and their order of play, the draw is essentially blind.

■ While the Ryder Cup has been described as 'war' between the two teams, The Presidents Cup has maintained a friendly, good-spirited atmosphere throughout its short history. Perhaps that would change if the Internationals could notch up a few wins!

Photographs by Aaron Newnham, Royal Melbourne GC