Presidents Cup in U.S. Hands







I've had the most amazing experience with these gentlemen here. We did this as a team, we did this together. We've come up against a very formidable International team and to do it on this special golf course under these conditions was an amazing experience.

iger Woods and his United States team tied the biggest Singles haul in Presidents Cup history to overhaul a gallant young Internationals team 16-14 to retain the Cup in a memorable staging at Royal Melbourne Golf Club.

Down 10-8 heading into Sunday, the U.S. won eight matches out of a possible twelve to snatch away the dream from thousands on course and millions watching around Australia and the world, craving just a second Internationals victory in the event dating back to 1994.

For a player with such a prolific and storied career as Woods, finding a 'first' to add to his considerable achievements is a challenge, but winning as a team captain in his debut appearance in the role had the reigning Masters champion gripped by emotion in scenes reminiscent of the 18th green at Augusta earlier last year.

"I've had the most amazing experience with these gentlemen here," Woods said. "We did this as a team, we did this together. We've come up against a very formidable International team and to do it on this special golf course under these conditions was an amazing experience."

Woods also set new standards for a playing captain by going undefeated in three dominant appearances out of a possible five, to partially erase the memory of an inglorious Ryder Cup

for the bulk of this group last year in France.

Sadly for the Internationals, this was a tale of 'so near but yet so far', which could be viewed as a blessing in itself based on recent drubbings, most notably at Liberty National two years ago.

The week promised so much and had started so well for Ernie Els, who, from the day of his announcement as skipper, campaigned for local audiences to get behind the Internationals and not be too supportive of the star-studded American line up that most are so familiar with. Woods' inclusion as a player would have been a blow to that cause, as there's nothing more that galleries delight in than a rare chance to see him play in the flesh.

Australian galleries were no exception to this – and it was clear the largest congregations were around his matches – given Woods' last appearance in this country was at this event in 2011.

Cue the Patrick Reed 'Shovel Gate' affair in the Bahamas and Els' cause was instantly back on track and with ample reinforcements. Following on from fellow player condemnation of Reed's actions, local Larrikins equipped themselves with shovels to mock Reed's exploits in shifting sand in Bahamian waste areas and engaged in a regular commentary with Reed around the course right through until Sunday.



Even before his first shot struck on Australian soil in Tuesday's practice round, Reed was greeted at the tee by a gallery member as 'The Excavator', which drew a wry smile and wave from the former Masters champion. Much worse would lie ahead as the week progressed with caddie and brotherin-law Kessler Karain suspended by the PGA TOUR for the final day after shoving a spectator who had crossed the line with aggressive vitriol aimed at his player.

Faced with a depressingly routine pattern of poor starts that have set the scene for loss after loss, Els needed a response from his team, in what has been their Achilles heel over timethe opening Fourball and Foursomes matches. In 2017, the Americans annihilated the Internationals to lead 8-2 before the weekend and in a bid to turn this around, Els and his support team left no statistical or course knowledge stone unturned in a meticulous preparation.

At the end of the first day, a 4-1 lead would have been more than Els could have imagined. Splitting the points in the Friday Foursomes, despite a late surge by the Americans who birdied the final hole in two matches to claw back crucial 1/2 points, would have inspired confidence that this could finally be the drought-breaking year.

The weekend's 36-holes of Fourballs and Foursomes would always be a critical juncture in this contest and a test of whether the Internationals would sustain their encouraging start. Winning the Saturday morning Fourballs 2.5 – 1.5 suggested they could, but a turning of the tide for the United States in the afternoon Foursomes would be something Els and his captains would have been expecting. They were not disappointed.

Although the U.S. team won the afternoon to trim the overall lead to 10-8, there were some amazing matches and gripping scenes that had the enormous crowds in raptures.

The Leishman/Ancer pairing's performance in halving their match on the final green against Rickie Fowler and Justin Thomas underlined the

DAY ONE Fourball (Internationals 4 – Team US 1)

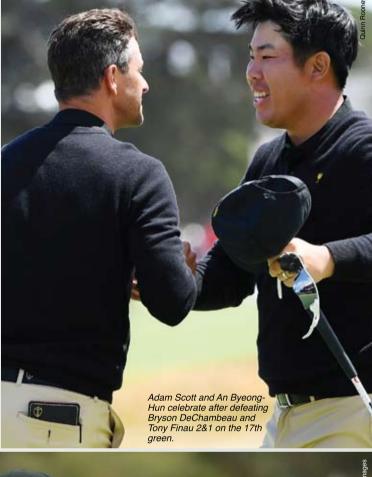






Playing Captain Tiger Woods putts to defeat Marc Leishman and Joaquin

mann 4&3 on the 15th green. His partner was Justin Thomas.





DAY TWO Foursomes (Internationals 6½ – Team US 3½)



Dustin Johnson and Matt Kuchar 3&2 during the Friday



Woods and Justin Thomas celebrate defeating An and Matsuyama 1-up on the 18th green.

difference in this Internationals team to those of recent past. Down by five through the opening 10 holes, but buoyed by vociferous crowd support throughout, the pair showed amazing fortitude to surge back into the match and snatch the most unlikely of half points when the American duo bogeved the final hole.

Earlier, the Americans had cut the four point deficit in half with victories to Dustin Johnson and Gary Woodland and Xander Schauffele and Patrick Cantlay, who ran the tables with seven birdies to down Cameron Smith and Im Sung-Jae 2/1.

All attention then turned to the last match out on course with Joaquin Niemann and Ben An fighting tooth and nail with Matt Kuchar and Tony Finau. The International pair had never led in the match at any point, but birdied the 14th and 15th to square the match. The combatants could not be separated, halving the match despite some dramatic scenes with both teams missing short birdie putts at the 18th.

The two-point margin in their favour was just the third occasion an International team had taken a lead into a final day. "We had set a target of 10 points by Saturday night, so that's why we were so happy at the end of that day, even though we lost the Foursomes," Els would say later.

Having won three of the past four Singles rubbers – albeit from desperate positions where overall victory was virtually impossible – the Internationals had a little history on their side in a sea of statistics that have overwhelmingly been dominated by the Americans.

While it's hard to pinpoint a weak link in the American line-up, leading off on Sunday with captain Woods, Tony Finau, Patrick Reed and Dustin Johnson certainly looked like a plan to stack the front end to try to make the leaderboard bleed red and create positivity and momentum for the remainder of the team.

That they did, with Woods becoming the winningest American Presidents Cup player with his sublime seven-birdie 3&2 victory over a courageous Abraham Ancer.

Foursemes (Internationals 9 – Team US 5) Foursomes (Internationals 10 - Team US 8)



Captain Ernie Els talks to Matsuyama and C.T. Pan during the third day's Fourball matches. They beat Webb Simpson and Patrick Reed 5&3.



Abraham Ancer celebrates after he and Im Sung-Jae defeated Xander Schauffele and Patrick Cantlay 3&2 during the Fourball matches.



Justin Thomas and Rickie Fowler beat Li Hao-Tong and Marc Leishman 3&2.



Gary Woodland celebrates on the 12th green as Dustin Johnson and Adam Scott look on. They beat Scott and Oosthuizen 2&1 in the afternoon Foursomes.





'Captain America' Reed, with replacement caddie on the bag, added to his considerable matchplay gravitas with a 4&2 win over C.T. Pan, while Johnson accounted for the out of sorts Li Hao-Tong 4&3 with his own seven-birdie barrage.

"We threw Patrick out there and he was 6-up and I think anyone looking at that, kind of got very excited," assistant Fred Couples said. "I know Dustin got 4-up (too). But Xander (Schauffele) to beat Adam Scott on a course that he plays very well was really a huge point."

Equally huge was the half point Finau was able to snatch from Hideki Matsuyama, building on the momentum the rest of the American team were now starting to ride. The Japanese star was streaking away with a four-hole lead after 10 holes, however, Finau found a hot hand late to birdie five of the remaining eight holes to square the match.

"I knew I couldn't give up on my team mates and my captains and I know everybody on this team felt the same way," Finau said of his comeback.

Im Sung-Jae and Australian Cameron Smith had days they'll tell their grandchildren about, defeating U.S. Open champion Gary Woodland and the red-hot Justin Thomas respectively, although by the time Smith accounted for Thomas at the 17th, the Internationals needed to win the two remaining matches on course to, at best, share the Cup with the rampant Americans.

Matt Kuchar ensured those aspirations were short-lived by birdieing the 17th to guarantee he would at least halve his match with Louis Oosthuizen – ensuring the U.S. would win back the Presidents Cup once again.

The realisation the work invested in this outcome had paid off was too much for Woods, who shed tears of joy with the team entourage and players. And hats off to them for being able to overcome the multiple challenges posed on and off the golf course to claim their 11th Cup.

The loss of world number one Brooks Koepka at short notice might, on paper, appear to have been a huge blow, but his loss was seamlessly filled by Rickie Fowler. Facing an away game is always a challenge, but the Patrick Reed affair that festered on throughout the week can't have been helpful, despite Woods' statements to the contrary.

The situation certainly provided ample ammunition for the local galleries to take Reed to task for his indiscretions and until his final day victory, Reed had gone winless in three team matches earlier in the week.

Gallant as they have been until the last few hours of this contest, 2 wins out of 12 Singles matches is the cruel mathematical truth that will haunted the Internationals long after the dust had settled on Royal Melbourne.

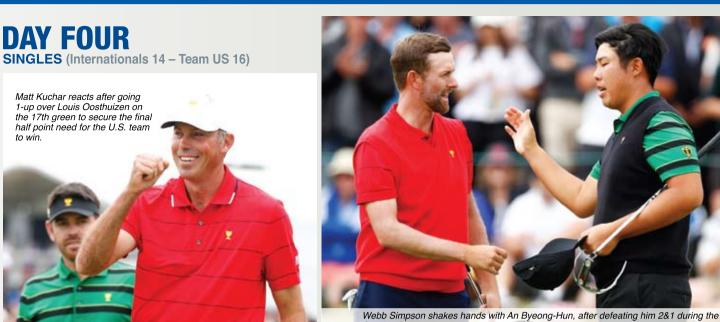
While his rookies contributed 11 of their 14 points in a sterling display, it was a deflated group that fronted the media with their most experienced player Adam Scott noting that despite the positives of the week, which had galvanised his intent to do all he could to be back again in 2021, "It's hard to digest at the moment, it's very disappointing."

The tears streaming down the face of Liesl Els as she watched her husband put on a brave face, shows how invested not only the players are in this contest, but their families and support networks behind the scenes.

That said, Els was already looking forward to the future and did not rule out a potential return bout with Tiger Woods at Quail Hollow in 2021.

"It's going to be tough to swallow, but we do have a great sense of humour in our team. It won't be long before you see the music or hear the music playing in our team room.

"Nobody died out there. It was a sport and we gave it our all. So, so be it."





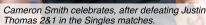
U.S. Playing Captain Tiger Woods and Ernie Els, Captain of the

International team, shake hands after the Singles matches were completed





the first hole during the Singles matches. Matsuyama





Tiger Woods and the United States team celebrate with the cup after they defeated the

INTERNATIONALS - 14 • Team US - 16

ourball: Internationals - 4 · Team US - 1

Joaquin Niemann Marc Leishman

Im Sung-Jae Adam Hadwin An Byeong Hun

Adam Scott C.T. Pan Hideki Matsuvama Louis Oosthuizen **Abraham Ancer**

Patrick Cantlay Xander Schauffele Tony Finau Bryson DeChambeau

Tiger Woods

Justin Thomas

Patrick Reed Webb Simpson **Gary Woodland Dustin Johnson**

DAY TWO

Foursomes: Internationals - 61/2 · Team US - 31/2

Adam Scott Louis Oosthuizen Joaquin Niemann

Adam Hadwin Abraham Ancer Marc Leishman

Hideki Matsuyama An Byeong Hun Cameron Smith Im Sung-Jae

Matt Kuchar Patrick Cantlay

Xander Schauffele Patrick Reed Webb Simpsor Tiger Woods

Rickie Fowler **Gary Woodland**

DAY THREE

Fourball: Internationals – 9 · Team US – 5

Li Hao-Tong Marc Leishman **Abraham Ancer**

Im Sung-Jae C.T. Pan Hideki Matsuvama

Adam Scott

C.T. Pan

Rickie Fowler **Justin Thomas Patrick Cantlay**

An Byeong Hun

Xander Schauffele Webb Simpson Patrick Reed

Tony Finau Matt Kuchar

Foursomes: Internationals – 10 · Team US – 8

Adam Scott Louis Oosthuize **Abraham Ancer** Marc Leishman

Im Sung-Jae **Cameron Smith** Gary Woodland **Dustin Johnson** Rickie Fowler **Justin Thomas**

Patrick Cantlay Xander Schauffele

Joaquin Niemann An Byeong Hun

Tony Finau Matt Kuchar

DAY FOUR Singles: Internationals – 14 · Team US – 16

Abraham Ancer Tiger Woods Hideki Matsuyama Tied Tony Finau Patrick Reed Li Hao-Tong **Dustin Johnson Adam Hadwin** Tied **Bryson DeChambeau** Im Sung-Jae 4&3 **Gary Woodland** Joaquin Niemann **Patrick Cantlay** 2&1 Xander Schauffele Webb Simpson

Adam Scott An Byeong Hun Cameron Smith 2&1 Louis Oosthuizen Marc Leishman

Justin Thomas Matt Kuchar Rickie Fowler

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