

SAM TORRANCE

AN  
ENDURING  
PASSION

My Ryder Cup Years



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SAM TORRANCE



MAINSTREAM  
PUBLISHING

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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First published in Great Britain in 2010 by  
MAINSTREAM PUBLISHING COMPANY  
(EDINBURGH) LTD  
7 Albany Street  
Edinburgh EH1 3UG

ISBN 9781845966294

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A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library

Typeset in Giovanni and Trajan Pro

Printed in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd St Ives plc

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***Carpe diem.***



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mark Baldwin, for his skilful writing.

Sarah Wooldridge and Vicky Cuming at IMG.

Bill Campbell, Graeme Blaikie, Alex Hepworth and Emily MacKenzie  
at Mainstream Publishing for their help with this project.

Ken Schofield, for being a great leader and a good friend.

All my Ryder Cup teammates over the years.

My past captains: John Jacobs, Tony Jacklin, Bernard Gallacher and  
Mark James.

All the staff at the European Tour, especially Mark MacDiarmid.

Mum and Dad, for always being there.

Suzanne, Daniel, Phoebe and Anouska for their love and support.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the valuable reference material provided by the book *Sam: The Autobiography of Sam Torrance* (BBC Books, London, 2003).



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## THE RYDER CUP AND ME

It was my privilege and honour to captain a winning European Ryder Cup team at The Belfry in the glorious late September of 2002. Eight years have now passed since that defining moment of my golfing life, but the memories and the emotion of that week live on within me. More sobering is the realisation that it is now 25 years – a quarter of a century, for goodness' sake – since I sank the putt that ensured Europe's historic triumph in 1985.

That was also at The Belfry, of course, on the steeply tiered 18th green, and it meant that the Americans had been beaten in Ryder Cup combat for the first time in 28 years. Since 1985, the Cup has changed hands five times; in the twelve matches between 1985 and 2008, the match result has been Europe seven wins, United States four wins, plus one tied match.

The task, and the challenge, facing Colin Montgomerie and Corey Pavin at Celtic Manor in October 2010 is the same as has faced 46 previous Ryder Cup captains in 37 matches: to lead with skill and dignity and to combine a finely tuned tactical cunning with a proper appreciation of what it means to the elite golfers who play in the event and for whom you are responsible. And, if you can, to win.

The Ryder Cup has become one of the biggest sporting events in the world. It all began in 1927 at the Worcester Country Club in Massachusetts, and although various Great Britain and Great Britain and Ireland teams enjoyed notable successes in 1929, 1933 and 1957, it was not often an even contest until the Americans agreed to take on a full European team, from 1979.

In the following chapters, my own Ryder Cup story is charted from my debut as a player, at Walton Heath in 1981, until my captaincy in 2002. That's twenty-two years of virtually unbroken involvement, and, without doubt, my eight appearances as a player and then my vice captaincy role under Mark James at Brookline in 1999 gave me an understanding of the Ryder Cup that was to prove invaluable in 2002.

What is largely forgotten, however, is that I had tried for more than ten years as a professional to get into the Ryder Cup in the first place. I was close to qualifying on several occasions and wondered if I would ever get the opportunity to play. But those years of striving also made me even more determined to become, one day, a Ryder Cup golfer. It made it much more special to me when, finally, and at the age of 28, I made the team.

Almost three decades on from my debut, I can look back and see how the Ryder Cup has defined me as a golfer and as a person. It has dominated my career, and I will admit that at times I have been consumed by it. Not in a bad way, because it has been more like a love affair that has stood the test of time. To have been involved in ten Ryder Cups – to have lived the moments and seen grown men cry – has been the greatest privilege and thrill of my sporting career.

That is why I wanted to do this book: so that I could record my own recollections and try to give an insight into what it is like being a Ryder Cup player and, ultimately, a Ryder Cup captain. My love of team golf – and, for me, this has also included the Dunhill Cup, the Hennessy Cup and the World Cup – means that I've always been fascinated with its demands and its nuances.

Yet it is the Ryder Cup that towers above everything else, and it is the job of Ryder Cup captaincy that makes the greatest demands of all. What did I learn from the captains I played under and against? What did my experiences as a player give me when I was appointed Ryder Cup vice captain, and then captain itself? What decisions did I make at The Belfry in 2002 that were directly influenced by those first-hand and hard-won experiences?

I hope the rest of this book will provide answers to those questions and reveal the magic of the Ryder Cup for those of us players who have



been inside the ropes as well as those spectators watching from outside of them.

Not for one minute, moreover, as players, do we forget that every shot is being watched in golf club bars and lounges, in pubs and in private homes by the golf-loving public of Europe and America. As members of the European team, we appreciate that there are thousands and thousands of people watching on their television screens and willing our every shot to finish up well or go in the hole.

We appreciate it fully, and, of course, we all know friends and family who are supporting us as well. At all the Ryder Cups I have been involved in, and, I dare say, the ones I haven't, I can say without equivocation that every European player has felt this huge support – and understood how much the result of the match means to our supporters. For my part, I have often drawn on that knowledge out there on the course.

From chapters one to eleven, Mark Baldwin's narrative provides the backcloth for my own reminiscences, comments, analysis and opinions of the ten Ryder Cups that provided me with the greatest moments and experiences of my golfing life.

Sinking the winning putt in 1985 at The Belfry gave me a fame that I still find hard to believe. People still want to talk to me about it or want to tell me they were there or why it was also such an important thing in their own lives. Sometimes people get quite emotional about it – almost as emotional as I got at the time, or still do when I think back to how I felt at that moment.

Blood, sweat and tears are all relevant words when I think about my own Ryder Cup career: the blood that seeped through my sock from the septic toe that forced me to pull out in 1993 after playing just one foursomes match; the sweat of trying to make the European team – especially before my debut appearance – and of the Ryder Cup competition itself; and also the tears that I have shed unashamedly, both in sadness and in joy, throughout my entire association with this great and unique event.

But it has all been worth it and more. For me, indeed, the Ryder Cup has become an enduring passion. I have loved every minute of those