



VINTAGE

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# MONTY'S MANOR

IAIN CARTER

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# ABOUT THE BOOK

For twenty years Colin Montgomerie has been Europe's go-to guy in the Ryder Cup. He has been the catalyst, the leader, the closer. The man they call on to take down America's big guns, the man they turn to when a win is desperately needed to steady the nerves. Now in the twilight of his career he has one last role to play: In 2010 he is Captain of Team Europe in their quest to regain their trophy.

Montgomerie's record in golf's showpiece tournament is unparalleled. Since 1991 he has performed in eight Ryder Cups, winning five of them and has never, ever been beaten in a singles match. He is the most talked about European golfer of his generation but, agonisingly he has never managed to win one of golf's major championships.

*Monty's Manor* gets right inside Colin Montgomerie's history with the Ryder Cup from his debut in 1991 right up to and including the drama and excitement of this year's contest in Wales. Iain Carter has had unprecedented access to key players on both sides of the pond, caddies, coaches, friends, foes, rivals and reporters. Through their eyes we look back on two decades of successes and near misses. It is through them that we get to see the real 'Monty'.



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iain Carter has been covering sport for the BBC for over twenty years. Since 2003 he has been the voice of Radio Five Live's golfing coverage. *Monty's Manor* is his first book.

# MONTY'S MANOR

Colin Montgomerie and the Ryder Cup

Iain Carter

VINTAGE BOOKS  
London

For Dad for introducing me to the game  
and Sarah and Ollie for being there when I'm not

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# FOREWORD

I would like to begin this foreword by saying that Colin Montgomerie, as well as being an outstanding competitor, has the word 'winner' in his genes. Colin is one of the greatest golfers I have ever known. If he hasn't won a major it is only because luck has not been on his side. His record in golf leaves no room for doubt, and the Ryder Cup will always have the name Colin Montgomerie engraved upon it. You only have to look at his record in this competition to see that, in singles, no opponent managed to win against him. To date he has achieved six victories and two draws. He remains unbeaten.

In my opinion, Monty has always been the player who most embodies the best sort of relationship that needs to exist between a player and his team. When you rely on a player who gets involved in such a determined way, body and soul, as Colin Montgomerie does, the rest of the team functions because he provides that special focal point. In the Ryder Cups I played with Monty, I noticed that his winning spirit was always present. His personality is his reputation. Few players in the world have the qualities that Monty possesses. In the European team his mental strength and charisma are transmitted in a decisive way to the other players. I myself was affected by this when I was his captain at Valderrama in 1997. It was obvious from Monty's performance that he was a winner. Furthermore, his character, which sometimes makes him appear grumpy or

feisty, is what has helped him to develop as a brilliant golfer.

In addition, Colin's feelings and awareness of how to conduct himself make him a person who is as honest with himself as he is with others. I admire him for many reasons, not least because he has proved himself worthy of respect, both at a personal and a professional level. When I have personally needed something, Colin has always been there at my side. To give one example of his generosity, his help for me with the Seve Trophy was reflected in the first four occasions this event took place. His participation as captain of the Great Britain and Ireland team helped the Seve Trophy achieve both its reputation and financial stability. The same applies to the Royal Trophy in 2010. In Thailand Monty stood in for me as captain and achieved victory for Europe over Asia in an extraordinary match.

I want to say here and now that the sport of golf owes a great deal to Colin Montgomerie. If he never succeeds in winning a major I will continue to see him as a GREAT among GREATS; not for nothing has he been, on eight occasions, number one in the rankings on the European circuit. His record will be very difficult to beat.

The great challenge that now faces Colin, as captain of the European team, will be to take the Ryder Cup from the powerful Americans. This promises to be a complex but fascinating task, and there is no one better than Monty to teach his players how to achieve victory in Wales. Obviously I wish for this with all my heart. I am convinced that the success he will achieve for Europe will give my friend Colin Montgomerie the recognition his brilliant sporting career so much deserves.

Severiano Ballesteros  
May 2010

# PROLOGUE

***'The only time I give a stuff about golf is  
when the Ryder Cup is on'***

**My mate Dave in the pub, early September  
2010**

Everything stopped.

People sat in cars, radios on. Others stood in pubs and bars, their gazes transfixed by the big screen. Unfortunate souls stuck in their offices stared at computer pages with golf in the web address. At home the next cup of tea would have to wait; so would the school run. Monday afternoons were not meant to be like this.

By their thousands, many more skipped work to be there; to roar on Europe in their quest to wrest back golf's most precious team prize, the Ryder Cup. No other golf event stirs such raw emotions in so many people.

Right now, on this sunny afternoon, it was within touching distance. An hour earlier victory looked as if it might be achieved without much drama or intrigue. Not any more. America was striving to keep its fingers on that precious trophy. Striving hard. Accomplishing astounding deeds to keep alive hope of taking it back on their return across the Atlantic.



The outcome was hanging in the balance and the options had run out for Europe.

Of all those watching, wheresoever and by whatever means, there was one person who wanted and needed victory more than any other. He had protested that this wasn't the case; that it was about the team, about European golf, the Tour and not him.

Poppycock.

Time after time he'd had his hands taken from the game's biggest individual trophies, but he was always unbeatable on the final day of a Ryder Cup.

Well, he was as a player. What about as a captain?

This was the event that defined him; it was his manor. It provided his legend and yet it could all go to ruin at the very last. What a journey it had been. He always reserved his finest golf for autumnal jousting with the best the USA could throw at him. Rarely was he ever bounced off and if he was he would be straight back on board. They would never get him a second time.

Yet right now he was a helpless bystander watching his heritage being moulded by hands that were not his own. This could be his legacy; a loser, even in his favourite arena.

After two glorious decades representing his continent as a player, after twenty months as its captain, meticulously planning his team's strategy, and following an unprecedented four days of golf it had come to this.

It was down to the guy he had hand-picked for just such an eventuality. Would this lad from Northern Ireland – the US Open champion no less – justify the captain's faith?

All the skipper could do was watch, hope and pray. Just like everybody else, whether they were greenside, like him, or in the pub or their offices, cars or living rooms.

16 JANUARY 2009, ABU DHABI GOLF CLUB

***‘Having played in eight Ryder Cups it doesn’t really affect how I would help the European cause one way or another. I would like to help in any way, shape or form’***

**- Colin Montgomerie**

*His eyes were wide. He was startled. Things had changed. Rapidly. He’d been asked to leave the room. They wanted to discuss him and he had to go. Life might never be the same again. Probably wouldn’t be. This might be what he had wanted for so long. But now? Was this the right time? Could be, that’s what he had just suggested. Why not?*

*The press were waiting - his friends and foes, together in a pack outside the door. They always had been - mates one day, enemies the next; it went with the territory. Right now they were all friends because they wanted to know. He couldn’t tell them. No way. This was between him and those he had left in the room. No one else, no one. He had to say something. He always did. Usually it turned into headlines. Not this time. Couldn’t - that would blow it. He shut the door behind him, quickly. Had to say something. ‘Not today, thank you’ usually sufficed when things had gone badly. But things were going rather well, actually. Even so, this wasn’t comfortable. This could be it, though. Depended on what they thought and said when he was out of the room. A lot to be said: there always was where he was concerned. They’d be starting now. Discussing him for the job, the big job, the*

*one he'd always wanted. Had to say something. The press had noticed who had come out of the room. Gave them a glance but not a clue. Then: 'I need to go to the toilet. Does anybody know the way?'*

It wasn't meant to happen this way. Colin Stuart Montgomerie OBE, who became Europe's most talked-about golfer, was not being spoken of as captain of his continent for the 2010 Ryder Cup. When the credits rolled at the end of the clash with the United States at Celtic Manor in South Wales in October his name was not likely to occupy the lead role. Maybe there could have been a position in the supporting cast, perhaps even a spot as a guest star, but this golfing blockbuster was never intended to be *The Full Monty*.

To be named captain of your continent to take on the United States of America for the famous Ryder Cup is to be given top billing. It is the highest honour in European golf. It is recognition for making a sustained and supreme contribution to the game, for the respect you command among your peers, for your ability to inspire, to be tactically astute, savvy in deed and word and to be a leader of men in golf's most captivating arena. It is an opportunity to secure a place in the history of the sport, to take centre stage and play that lead role. Montgomerie has been the star turn of European golf for the better part of two decades. No European has earned more money through stroking a ball into a hole in the fewest possible shots. No European has talked a better game or split opinion in quite the way the man universally known as Monty has done. To some he is a graceful, sublime golfer, an entertainer on and off the course. To others he is regarded as being boorish and bad tempered; someone who doesn't quite have the requisite temperament when the biggest prizes have been at stake. Worst of all, he is seen in some quarters as

someone who crossed an unbreakable line with the rules of the game. It is impossible to be ambivalent about the man; anyone with an interest in golf has a view on Montgomerie. Fittingly for someone who is such a contradictory figure, you could find his sternest critics agreeing that he was amply qualified to lead Europe in the Ryder Cup but not even his most ardent fans had anticipated him doing it so soon.

It is one thing to play well for yourself, as pro golfers try to do the other fifty-one weeks of a Ryder Cup year; it is quite another to do so when the hopes and fears of eleven team-mates rest on your performance. Yet it was this scenario that always brought the best from Monty during the long period when he was one of Europe's leading players. Whenever his continent required a contribution he would find a way to make it and he would relish the fact that it would be at the expense of an American opponent. Montgomerie's playing record in the Ryder Cup bears comparison with any of the greats who have taken part in it. He played in eight of these matches and was on the winning side a record-equalling five times. As a partner in foursomes and fourball play and on his own during the closing day of singles matches he amassed 23½ points - a tally third only to Nick Faldo who holds the European record of 25 points and Bernhard Langer who has 24. No American was ever able to beat Montgomerie in the all-important final day one-on-one combat and overall the Glasgow-born Scot was on the winning side on twenty occasions from a total of thirty-six matches. He is justly proud of these stellar statistics.

At the height of his powers Montgomerie was Europe's dominant golfer on tour and for a sustained period. He won more money than anyone else each season for seven straight years from 1993. After this run was interrupted in 2000 he bounced back to win another Order of Merit, the

European Tour's league table of earnings, in 2005. Golfing success in the professional game is often measured by the amount of money a player wins and there was no danger of Monty disappointing the statisticians or his bank manager. But he never claimed a major title and these are the events that all golfers want to win most. The Open, Masters, US Open and US PGA are the game's Holy Grail. These are the events that always attract the best players in the world. They are the big ones, the tournaments to win more than any of the others.

Golfing greatness is measured by the majors; Monty was runner up five times at this level. He walked down the aisle many, many times but he never emerged with the ring on his finger. What do they say about finishing second? You are the first person in the tournament to have been beaten. On this basis Montgomerie could be construed as golf's biggest loser but that is a hard argument to sustain. The most telling reason is the Ryder Cup and his extraordinary exploits in this arena, one that has a capacity to turn general sports followers into golfing fanatics once every two years. It stirs emotions like no other golfing event. While polite applause and respectful cheering are the norm, at a Ryder Cup the air is filled with throaty, bellowed roars of encouragement, chanting and celebration. Galleries become crowds in a partisan atmosphere unique in the game of golf whenever Europe and the United States renew their rivalry. Monty loves it, every decibel of passion, to his core. It is ironic, given his vast earning capacity on the golf course, that this is the one part of the professional game where there isn't a penny, cent or dime at stake. His place among golf's elite has always been assured, for his eight Orders of Merit and multiple tournament victories, but most of all because of his ability to beat Americans when that little golden cup has been on the line. He was,

therefore, always destined one day to become captain of his continent, but not for the 2010 match.

It just didn't seem likely to be his moment. Montgomerie had made it abundantly clear that he considered himself a shoo-in to do the job in 2014 on his home Scottish soil at Gleneagles, which is just down the road from where he lives. 'There's a wrong time and a wrong place and the right time and the right place,' he had said. 'I just hope I am in the right place come 2014 when it comes home here to Scotland.' These comments came on a Sunday morning in January 2009, two days before the decision-making process would continue and possibly conclude on who would be skipper for the following year's match. Furthermore, as speculation began to mount as to the identity of Nick Faldo's successor after Europe's 16 ½-11½ defeat at Valhalla in 2008, Monty seemed more concerned with supporting another candidate and playing himself back into the team. He showed no appetite for standing in a leadership contest.

That 2008 defeat in Kentucky had been the first Ryder Cup Montgomerie had missed since his playing debut in 1991 and he had been bitterly disappointed not to have been invited to serve as a vice-captain. Once it became clear that he would not be part of Europe's defence of the trophy, I asked him: 'Have you hit your last shot in the Ryder Cup?' This was the day after Faldo had announced Ian Poulter and Paul Casey would be the two wild-card picks who would complete his team, confirming that Monty would miss out. 'No, I don't think I have' was the unhesitating response. By definition he was setting his sights on returning to the playing fold for the 2010 match and he had said nothing to change that view in the months that followed. If he did return to the team it would be under the captaincy of someone who was yet to be announced.

The decision over who leads the continent's Ryder Cup team is made by the European Tour's Tournament Committee. It is a fifteen-strong body of current and recently retired players to which the Tour's executive reports. Since Severiano Ballesteros had taken over as captain in 1997 a different leader has been appointed for every one of these biennial matches. Bernard Gallacher had done the job for the three matches before Seve took over and before him Tony Jacklin had reigned for four Ryder Cups. Between them Jacklin and Gallacher had presided over the period in which this contest had grown into the biggest event in golf and by some estimates the third most watched sporting gathering in the world behind only the Olympics and football World Cup. Being captain had become a lucrative appointment abundant with spin-off opportunities and the committee felt it right that the post should be shared around as many top names as possible. The unwritten rule that followed Gallacher's departure was that future skippers could only ever do the job for one match.

Making such appointments is a contentious business and a difficult balancing act. Should they go for the player who most deserves the post or the one who is most likely to win the match? This is a question that rarely surfaces in other sports but in golf there is often felt to be an obligation to reward service and achievement with positions of honour. The last time the committee had deliberated the captaincy had been in early 2005, when they felt obliged to make a double appointment. They had two former world number ones to choose from and believed that they couldn't give the job to one without giving it to the other. So Ian Woosnam, the diminutive Welshman who was the Masters champion in 1991, was put in charge for the record-equalling win at the K Club in Ireland in 2006 and Britain's greatest golfer, Nick Faldo, was allocated the away match

two years later. Europe's defeat ended an unprecedented run of three consecutive victories. So when the committee gathered in Abu Dhabi on 13 January 2009 they were deliberating the captaincy issue for the first time in quite a long period. It was regarded as a heavy responsibility because wresting back the trophy was a huge priority for the European game.

As a long-established member of the committee, Montgomerie was one of the fifteen who would decide the next captain. He had given no indication that he was interested in the job and the hot favourite was Spain's José María Olazábal. The two-time Masters champion had been sounded out by committee chairman Thomas Björn months earlier. The Spaniard expressed hope that he would be able to play at Celtic Manor. Being a footsoldier rather than the general would be his preferred role. But few within the game believed the popular Olly would be able to sustain the quality of golf required to make it into the team. He had been a long-term sufferer from rheumatism which severely limited the number of tournaments he could play. Being able to amass substantial quantities of prize money and world ranking points over a year-long period was a prerequisite to qualify for the side. The committee believed the forty-two-year-old would come to accept this harsh reality and set his sights on leading the team rather than playing in it.

'He is going to be an absolutely outstanding Ryder Cup captain whenever it is his turn. He is different class,' said committee member Paul McGinley ahead of the meeting. The Irishman, who holed the winning putt for Europe in the 2002 Ryder Cup, had just played under Olazábal's leadership in an event called the Royal Trophy which pitted a European team against an Asian side in Thailand. McGinley clearly felt the fact that Europe had lost the match 10-6 was nothing to do with Olazábal's captaincy



and team-mate Paul Lawrie agreed. 'Any player who makes José Maria's team when he's Ryder Cup captain will be lucky indeed. He couldn't do any more,' said the 1999 Open champion. Lawrie was also on the committee that met in Abu Dhabi on 13 January 2009.

Olazábal was never going to be short of support but he wasn't the only candidate. The most intriguing contender was Sandy Lyle, the only one of Europe's 'big five' never to have done the job. Lyle was at the heart of the quintet of players from the continent who shattered America's domination of events like the Masters and the Open. Seve Ballesteros, Bernhard Langer, Faldo and Woosnam were the others and all four had been rewarded with the captaincy. Lyle, who won the Open in 1985 and the Masters three years later, played in five Ryder Cups and is one of the greats of the British game. He was one of Woosnam's assistants at the K Club, but there were always doubts about whether he possessed what Europe required in a leader, especially one charged with the task of regaining the trophy.

Ironically, Lyle's biggest supporter at the Middle East meeting to discuss the captaincy was none other than Colin Montgomerie. 'I'd choose Sandy Lyle if I had the casting vote. It would be a shame if of all that big side we had of Langer, Seve, Faldo and Woosnam, Sandy Lyle missed out,' Monty said. This support was rendered even more ironic given the major falling out between the two men that occurred later in 2009. But at the time of the meeting it appeared Montgomerie would be speaking up for his fellow Scot and there was no doubt that Lyle was very keen to do the job. 'I can't see any reason why not me. As far as available captains go there are not an awful lot around. I look like the favourable choice,' Lyle told members of the Scottish press. 'This is my last chance. I'm still fairly well in touch with the present players.' Such strident self-

promotion is rare in golf and was even more surprising coming from the often self-deprecating and modest Lyle. It showed just how much he wanted to lead Europe in Wales. He said that he would appoint the German Langer as a vice-captain and play plenty of events on the European Tour to stay in touch with the players who would make up his team. In what was a public pitch for the job, Lyle also said he believed that his relationship with the American skipper, the man he would have to pit his wits against, should count in his favour as well. 'Corey Pavin and I have grown up together. He played the European Tour in the late seventies, early eighties and I've seen him on a regular basis in America. I know pretty much how he works. And I think I'll know pretty much how the American team will work as well.

'I'm sure the players feel I'm very approachable,' Lyle went on. 'You need to be laid back. It's no good seeing the captain get all red-faced and flustered. They'll think he might not be able to make the right decisions then. Forceful, decisive but also relaxed, that's what I'd want to be.' Whether the committee would share his opinion that he possessed those qualities for a 'must-win' match was another question.

Clearly Lyle was trying to steer the argument away from the fact that if he was given the job it would be seen as an appointment made mainly because it was his turn. He would be fifty-two by the time the 2010 match was played, realistically the very upper age limit for any captain who wanted still to be firmly in touch with his players. He was putting forward strategic reasons why he should be skipper, but they were destined to fall on deaf ears. Lyle felt his biggest rival for the job was Ian Woosnam. This assessment was misplaced, too. Influential figures like 2002 captain Sam Torrance had been championing Woosnam's candidacy because the match would be played in Wales.

Butch Harmon, former coach of Tiger Woods, said the Welshman was surely the only man for the job, especially given his success in 2006 at the K Club. On that occasion the skipper had harnessed a tide of emotional support for the recently widowed Darren Clarke and used it to create an unstoppable European force that surged to a record-equalling win. But Woosnam was never a serious contender because the committee was keen to enforce its unwritten rule that makes the captaincy a one-off appointment.

They were also keen to appoint a continental European. To date only Spain's Ballesteros (1997) and Langer (2004) had broken the British domination of the role. A match that had originally been Great Britain against America at the Ryder Cup's 1927 inception had become an amalgam of Britain and Ireland in 1973 and only genuinely competitive when the whole of Europe came on board in 1979. The great Jack Nicklaus had suggested the move because the event was proving too onesided. Ritual thrashings dished out by America were becoming boring and the Ryder Cup was dying at just the time when golf in continental Europe was starting to flourish. Once exciting Spaniards like Ballesteros, Antonio Garrido, Manuel Pinero and José Maria Canizares became available a kiss of life could be administered. The European influence enabled the Ryder Cup to thrive and grow and a fair few Americans took a golfing kicking along the way. But despite this seismic continental influence the European Tour remains very British-centric. Its headquarters are at Wentworth to the west of London in Berkshire and the executives responsible for its day-to-day running are almost exclusively of British or Irish origin. The vast majority of dedicated golf writers and broadcasters have the same roots and so much of the pre-meeting coverage had a predictable and parochial slant.

The make-up of the Tournament Committee, on the other hand, was more cosmopolitan and was chaired by the Dane Thomas Björn. There were four Swedes – Joakim Haeggman, Chris Hanell, Robert Karlsson and Henrik Stenson – Spaniards Gonzalo Fernández-Castaño and Miguel Ángel Jiménez and Frenchman Raphael Jacquelin around the table in Abu Dhabi. Irishman Paul McGinley, England's Richard Finch, Barry Lane and Mark Roe were there, too, along with the Scots Montgomerie and Lawrie. Northern Ireland's Darren Clarke was also on the committee but missed the meeting because he was playing a tournament in South Africa.

Björn was known to be keen for a continental European to do the job and that was one of the reasons he had already sounded out Olazábal, who had served as Faldo's vice-captain in 2008. Another Spaniard was in the picture; indeed, ahead of the meeting Miguel Ángel Jiménez was a better bet than either Lyle or Woosnam. Jiménez is a hugely popular figure among his peers and with golf fans across the continent, and in a twenty-seven-year career had played in three Ryder Cups and won fifteen times on Tour. He always plays with a smile on his face; a fat cigar and glass of the best red are never far away. His bunched ponytail is not the expected hairstyle of a golfer in middle age, but somehow he carries it off. He is undoubtedly one of the game's most distinctive figures. But Jiménez has never made much commitment to becoming fluent in English and his heavily accented delivery makes him hard to understand whenever a microphone is nearby. The game may have moved into previously uncharted territory in a period of massive global expansion, but English remains the golfing language in Europe. He would have needed to address these issues if he were to become captain and would have needed plenty of persuasion to do so. This

inevitably counted against him and strengthened further the hand of his Spanish compatriot Olazábal.

So when it came to the fateful meeting at Abu Dhabi's sumptuous Emirates Palace Hotel, all the indications suggested a discussion that would consider the merits of Lyle, Woosnam and Jiménez before a decision being taken to offer the role to Olazábal. The forty-two-year-old had been reluctant to discuss his candidacy because he was desperate to play in at least one more Ryder Cup, but as the meeting approached he did seem to be coming round to the idea that the time might be right for him. After saying that he would, of course, like to be playing in the 2010 match, he acknowledged the speculation linking him with the captaincy: 'I would love to be considered, I'm not denying that. I have never denied that. Captaining the Ryder Cup is something really special - it is a real privilege.' Olly had been a mainstay of European golf since turning professional in the mid-eighties. He was the Spanish apprentice to Seve's sorcerer and he and Ballesteros formed the most indomitable partnership in the history of the Ryder Cup. Olazábal confirmed his undoubted playing potential when he won the Masters in 1994, two years after rising to a career high of number two in the world rankings. But soon after that Augusta triumph his prospects could not have looked bleaker. He was struck down with rheumatoid polyarthritis. The condition, which took an age to diagnose, left him unable to walk and in severe and debilitating pain. He didn't play at all in 1996, having managed just seven events on the European Tour the previous year. Confirming astounding powers of recovery, he fought back to claim a second Masters Green Jacket in 1999 in one of the greatest sporting triumphs over adversity. Thereafter his career has been a constant battle dominated by his efforts to keep the effects of rheumatism at bay. He played his way into the 2006 Ryder

Cup and it was the third time he'd been on the winning side in seven appearances. He is one of the best-loved figures in the European game, a genuine, sensitive and talented man with a huge passion for the Ryder Cup. He therefore ticked all the boxes.

In the build-up to the meeting pundits and press were, as you would expect, having their say. Derek Lawrenson, the experienced and respected golf correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, claimed there was 'no credible alternative to Olly'. Mark Reason, having just taken over the reins as correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, suggested a Lyle, Woosnam, Langer 'dream team', with the Scot being assisted by two record-breaking former skippers. In my reports for BBC Five Live I shared Lawrenson's view that the job would go the way of Olazábal, while Tom English wrote in *Scotland on Sunday*: 'If Sandy Lyle isn't appointed then the game of golf may deliver the greatest collective wince since Doug Sanders missed his tiddler at St Andrews nearly four decades ago.' Montgomerie's name didn't warrant a mention.

Not for the first time media speculation proved merely to be hot air. Supposedly informed comment and speculation proved to be, well, not very informed. Not that we should have chastised ourselves. No one had predicted Montgomerie would be appointed captain because no one saw it coming and not just in the sporting media. The same could be said of most of those who were in the meeting room, including Monty himself.

There was a discernible beginning-of-term feeling in Abu Dhabi that week. The European Tour's leading golfers were gathering for the first time en masse since the Christmas break. Some were coming from Thailand where they'd been playing in the Royal Trophy, others, like Masters champion Trevor Immelman, had travelled more than halfway round

the world, having played in the American PGA Tour's opening event in Hawaii, and most were venturing out on Tour for the first time in 2009. Handshakes and smiles abounded on the range on the morning of Tuesday 13 January. Coaches and caddies stood with arms folded watching their charges, carefully checking the progress of winter swing changes.

Less relaxed were the committee members. As they tuned up their games on the range or perhaps headed out for nine holes' reconnaissance on the Abu Dhabi Golf Club course, their minds were also on that evening's meeting. Chairman Thomas Björn had arrived the previous day and, predictably, was giving away little. 'We are going to take our time. We don't need to decide now; the time when we do is before the qualifying points start in September.' We would not have to wait that long. Indeed, it was surely just a comment to deflect the growing feeling of urgency for a decision.

Björn also had to face questions regarding his neutrality in considering the candidacy of Ian Woosnam. The tall Dane is a curious character. On the one hand he is a measured, articulate and intelligent ambassador while on the other he is a passionate and emotional figure not afraid to speak out when he feels he or his cause have been wronged. He was fined in 2006 for a furious outburst against Woosnam after the Welshman's wild-card picks of Westwood and Darren Clarke. Björn felt the captain had been guilty of bias against continental players in deciding to go with two UK golfers to complete his team for the match at the K Club. He was also very angry at being overlooked for a place in the team. He branded Woosnam 'pathetic' and said his leadership ahead of the match was 'the worst ever'. His comments to newspaper reporters had been so unsettling the captain felt a need to seek the backing of his players before deciding against quitting just ahead of the match.

Björn was portrayed as the villain of the piece and officialdom came down hard on him. Chief Executive George O'Grady said the Tour would not tolerate 'personal and unacceptable remarks'. As well as being heavily fined (the Tour don't publish punishments but it is thought the amount was around £10,000) Björn made a humbling apology. His resurrection from this position to that of being Europe's Ryder Cup kingmaker spoke volumes for his diplomatic skills, not to mention the overall high regard he commands among his golfing peers. 'Not my finest hour and that will hang over me for ever,' Björn admitted ahead of the Abu Dhabi meeting. 'But things have to move on. You get emotional at times and you regret what happened. I'm sure it's not at the forefront of Woosie's mind.'

The evening began with a meal. Sustenance was always going to be required because the participants knew it would be a long night. The Ryder Cup captaincy wasn't the only item on the agenda. Important discussions on the direction the Tour would be taking in the months and years ahead had to be aired and the committee needed to appraise developments at their Wentworth HQ. The credit crunch was starting to bite and this had implications for the Tour's schedule, player benefits and prize funds. The issue of who would succeed Nick Faldo as skipper was the headline-grabbing topic but the last item to be debated. They wanted to get the rest out of the way before taking on the subject that was dominating golf chat-rooms, blogs and sports pages in newspapers. As the meeting progressed behind closed doors, an ever-growing group of golf writers waited outside in the hope of learning who would be offered the prestigious job.

We had no idea of the dramatic way in which the meeting had swung from the moment the captaincy discussion began and we remained oblivious when we were presented with the biggest clue after some three hours'



standing guard. This was when the door swung open and out stepped a startled looking Colin Montgomerie. There are few golfers in the world more at home in the company of journalists. He is on first name terms with pretty much all of the main British correspondents and usually handles the media circus with aplomb. But at this precise moment the last people he expected or wanted to see were a bunch of jet-lagged golf reporters idling away time in the desperate hope of finding out who would be Europe's next Ryder Cup captain. Yet there he was, the continent's next skipper, standing before us. It is just that we didn't know it. Monty took one wide-eyed look and blurted out, not altogether convincingly: 'I need to go to the toilet. Does anybody know the way?' He then headed at pace down one of the Emirates Palace's vast corridors in search of relief. This comfort break lasted fully twenty-five minutes, and the longer it went on the more we speculated on his peculiar demeanour as he emerged from the committee room. The best the specialist correspondents of the *Mail*, *Independent*, *Guardian*, *Times*, *Telegraph*, *Mirror* and BBC could muster was that he'd perhaps walked out in a huff after failing to win the argument on Sandy Lyle's behalf. 'Must be Olazábal, then,' we concluded.

Eventually Montgomerie returned - mobile phone clamped to his right ear, avoiding us in much the same way he tries to do after emerging from a recorder's hut following a disappointing round. Not that it seemed unusual for him to evade the press when such a sensitive subject is under discussion. The Tournament Committee prides itself on not making public its key decisions until it is good and ready and is able to do so in a proper manner. So the captaincy issue was shrouded in secrecy. But on this occasion they weren't able to keep a lid on what had been decided for as long as they would have wanted.

When it had become time to discuss the captaincy in the meeting, Thomas Björn made opening remarks and said it was his opinion that they should appoint the best man for the job. The person most qualified to win back the precious trophy for Europe. Sentimentality should not come into it. They shouldn't just appoint someone because it was their turn. Björn then asked whether everyone else was in agreement with this view and he received unanimous support. This effectively did for Lyle's chances. It was also agreed that an appointment needed to be made sooner rather than later. Olazábal's prevarication and stated desire that he would prefer to play rather than lead counted against him. It was known that Miguel Ángel Jiménez wasn't up for committing to language classes and Woosnam had done the job before. There was no suggestion that the unwritten one-off rule needed to be rescinded. So who should be skipper?

Before any real deliberation could begin, Henrik Stenson seized the initiative. The popular Swede, who had played in the two previous Ryder Cups and secured Europe's winning point on his debut at the K Club, announced to the meeting that 'the best man for the job is sitting in this room'. He then looked in Montgomerie's direction. Sources present say that there was a feeling that Monty would decline or at the very least demur, citing a desire to try to play at Celtic Manor or to wait for the 2014 match at Gleneagles. Instead, Stenson's assertion was met with an unexpected silence. Monty didn't appear averse to the idea; in fact it swiftly became clear that he was open to it. 'It was like a light going on in his head,' one eyewitness later recalled. Soon after this moment he was asked to leave the room so that his brand new candidature could be properly discussed by the rest of the committee. No wonder he looked rather taken aback as he emerged before waiting journalists.