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Ryder Cup Stars Shine in Sharjah

THE European Tour and Senior Tour players featuring in the Sharjah Senior Invitational Pro-Am presented by Shurooq promise to make the event one of the most enjoyable days in the UAE golfing calendar. Ireland's Des Smyth, England's Paul Broadhurst and Ulsterman Ronan Rafferty, along with Yorkshireman Malcolm Mackenzie, can look back on a lifetime of memories as stalwarts of The Tour. Smyth, Broadhurst and Rafferty all played in the inaugural Dubai Desert Classic in 1989, won by former Ryder Cup player and Captain Mark James, and have been frequent visitors to the Middle East for many years. Smyth, Broadhurst and Rafferty all played in The Ryder Cup and Mackenzie won the 2002 Open de France at le Golf National near Paris, which will host The Ryder Cup in 2018. WORLDWIDE GOLF talked to Smyth, Broadhurst and Rafferty about their experiences on the Tours and why the Senior Pro-Am will be so much fun.

Worldwide Golf: Do you think the friendly atmosphere of the European Senior Tour is what makes the Pro-Ams and tournaments more engaging for spectators and sponsors?

DES SMYTH: Yes, I certainly do. I believe it's mainly because the players have had long and successful careers and understand the importance of engaging with everybody in the event.

PAUL BROADHURST: There is definitely a more relaxed, yet still ultra-competitive feel to the Senior Tour. The easy-going atmosphere allows the players to converse and interact with the Pro-Am amateurs, sponsors and spectators, which is perhaps not seen as much on the main tour, and this all adds to the enjoyment of the event.

RONAN RAFFERTY: Everything is more light-hearted on the Senior Tour. Most of my golfing buddies are just normal amateurs in the Pro-Ams, so it's another fun day for me. I want them to enjoy the occasion and hit as many good shots on the day as they can. If the people outside the ropes see you having fun with your team-mates, they feel like they can join in too and have a chat and join in the banter. Most of them would love to be playing, too!

WWG: What is it that makes The Ryder Cup one of the biggest sporting events on the world calendar and what was your most memorable moment?

DES SMYTH: It's a combination of team golf, international golf, and the sheer excitement that catches the imagination of the supporters. There are too many to pick one, but the moment the players never forget is their first ever tee shot in the Ryder Cup – which, in my case, came at The Greenbrier, West Virginia in 1979, playing in the opening day Foursomes with Ken Brown against Hale Irwin and Tom Kite. It was also a wonderful honour to be an Assistant Captain to Paul McGinley and be part of Paul's team at The Ryder Cup at Gleneagles in 2014. The atmosphere was as you can imagine – fantastic. As the title of the position conveys I assisted Paul in gathering information, helping him with his decision-making and as a supportive role to the Captain. It worked so well as the

16.5-11.5 victory showed. We had an exceptional team of players who gelled together brilliantly on the week.

RONAN RAFFERTY: I agree, it's the atmosphere! There's nothing like it. As Des says, the sheer tension of standing on the first tee listening to the noise and feeding off the crowd's excitement is quite emotional. I remember the buzz on the first tee in the 1989 Ryder Cup at The Belfry when Europe drew 14-14 to retain the Cup. I have never been more nervous in all my life. It was the real game-changer of my career! Winning my singles match against Mark Calcavecchia was incredible. The moment it was over and I realised I had won the match, was the biggest pressure-release ever! Captain Tony Jacklin handed me quite a responsibility and instructed me to 'just go out and win the point!' He had great faith in me and put me out at Number 4 in the singles list, the match behind Jose Maria Olazabal and Payne Stewart. We had a great game. There was only one hole in it the whole way round. We were all-square playing the last. I hit a good drive and put Mark under pressure. He hit two shots into the water and immediately conceded the game. The noise when he shook my hand was incredible. The sheer relief was unbelievable!

WWG: Could there ever be a Senior team event played on the same lines as the Ryder Cup?

DES SMYTH: The possibility has been talked about for some time but it has never materialised.

PAUL BROADHURST: There has been talk of a Senior Ryder Cup-style match and I would hope that this may happen in the near future. There are so many legends of the game still competing on the Senior Tours that I think it would be a great spectacle and it would certainly appeal to golf fans of all ages.

RONAN RAFFERTY: Yes, I think there would be great interest among players and sponsors. There are still some great names playing – and we are of the age group that people remember. The other advantage is that the Seniors competing would interact a lot more with the galleries and make it an even more enjoyable occasion for the fans.





Des Smyth

Ronan Rafferty