



Tournament Story

February 11-12, 2017



This past weekend the NFJG Foundation and TOUR enjoyed the company, camaraderie and keen competition from our visiting friends from East Lothian, Scotland. This certainly was another NFJG milestone and special golf weekend. Anyone want to go to Scotland?

Over the past couples months many of our NFJG TOUR players played in qualifying events to play in the first ever NFJG TOUR RYDER CUP against a visiting junior group from East Lothian, Scotland. The North Florida team headed by playing Captain Davis Lee and chaperoned by NFJG TOUR Staffer Morgan Johnson was comprised of Patrick Hamlin, Captain's pick Peyton Billings, Lucas Slayden and Reed Lotter. While the Scottish contingency captained by Valdemar Hundeboll and chaperoned by Soren Hundeboll and Pro Marc Owenson brought the likes of Carl Schmidt, James Morgan, Matthew Foot and Jonathan Pryde.

It was once quoted that *"life is like a box of chocolates, you just never know what you're going to get"*. Well for this short period of time, nothing could be more to the contrary. We knew a great junior golf team from Scotland was heading our way to be keen competitors in our Inaugural Ryder Cup. We also knew we had some great golfing weather coming our way to play in and bask in. To boot, we knew we were headed to **TPC at Sawgrass** for the opening round and then off to **The Golf Club at North Hampton** for the final day. What could be better? Related to golf, not much! I'm not sure what the finest piece of chocolate is in the box of mixed candy, but I can tell you we had the finest box available. Golf Life is good!

Our opening day started with a meet and greet in front of the TPC at Sawgrass Pro Shop and from there the Professional Staff at TPC headed by Assistant General Manager Matt Borocz and Head Professional Brian Riddle pulled out all the stops and wowed us all, including me and I've been there a million times. A very informative tour of the beautiful clubhouse filled with history and moments in time, lockers for boys in a room filled with DNA from the top players in the world, a tour of the famed 17th hole, lunch in PUB #17, Private hitting stations with player's names and professional announcements off of the first tee (thanks Doug) along with professional scoring and a fond farewell by Professional Rich Podwalski.

Before the players even struck the first ball they knew they had already won. The smiles were ear-to-ear!

Playing ***Pete Dye's Valley Course*** was a treat in itself. The course was in spectacular shape and the greens rolling to 11/12 on the stimp-meter. The format for the opening round was a 9-hole 2-person match play scramble followed by 9-holes of modified alternate shot. One point for each match and six points total for the day. The scramble would allow the players to ease into their competition, giving them a little time to relax and bond before getting serious.

Teeing it up first would be the pros and juniors, Morgan Johnson and Lucas Slayden against Marc Owenson and Carl Schmidt. Johnson/Slayden were an awesome pairing by the captain and would be relentless from the start. The duo would apply the pressure right off the bat and would display a demeanor of "take no prisoners" showing their "A-game" early on. Johnson/Slayden would birdie the first four holes to take a quick three up lead while the opening pair from Scotland - Owenson/Schmidt playing well admitted they were having difficulty adjusting to the speedy greens.

It was much of the same for the groups to follow. The North Florida Team pounced early taking advantage of course knowledge and the hotter than normal weather conditions which was affecting some of our visitors. I'm sure the effects of a 21 hour trip had to also be a factor. No excuses were to be had though as they all played hard all day. It was admitted our North Florida Boys were playing a tad bit better.

Throughout the day, there were many laughs, high fives, fist bumps, grunts, and moans like in any keen competition. All in the spirit of the game. Some players played hurt, like captain Davis Lee who strained his back in a workout in the gym the day prior. Reports indicate he was working out extra hard for his upcoming snowboarding trip.

At the end of day the North Florida team lead by a score of 5 ½ to 1/2. A pretty sizeable lead to come back from. As I addressed all the boys on their fine play and sportsmanship I made the comment that not too long ago a team from Atlanta had a 28-3 lead at the halfway point and the team from New England came back in the second half to win in over time. The eyes of the Scottish widened and the smiles became bigger while the stern look from boys in red gazing at me reflected back to that game. In a moment it was laughter on both sides.

Day two would be played at ***The Golf Club of North Hampton***, a beautiful links style golf course. The format would be four-ball best ball for nine holes and then singles matches on the inward half. A point a piece for each format and nine points total. As mentioned the day prior, "*never give up the ship*" and that our visiting friends did not. As the teams navigated the front nine the reports were not good for

the North Florida team. The first two matches were both two down with three and four to play while the third was all-square. Could it be a repeat of the "Super Bowl? Could it be a great comeback?

First to turn would be Owenson and Schmidt they would bring the first point home over Morgan and Slayden 2-up. The next group Lee and Billings would be two down with three to play. The third match would also be in favor of the Scots. I was now regretting the comments made the day before about the Super Bowl comeback, but you have to admit it makes for a great story.

Somehow at two down with three to play Lee/Billings would find the magic to come back to win the match 1-up for a crucial North Florida Point. That point would be decisive in sustaining momentum as the Scottish team of Morgan and Hundeboll would win the third match with 3&2 for their second point.

Turning to the back nine the players would revert to singles. The first blow to the North Florida team would come on the 12th when Davis Lee would hit a shot that overstrained his already aching back even more and he would be forced to withdraw giving the East Lothian team another point. Now 6 ½ to 3 ½ with 3 out of the five singles matches down or all square things would get a little tighter than Davis Lee's back.

Lucas Slayden firing on all cylinders would end his match on the 15th hole with a 5&3 victory over Carl Schmidt who played brilliantly on the front nine shooting a fine two over par 38 on the front side to a struggling 13 over par 47 on the back nine. The North Florida team would now just need a "halve" to earn the rights to hold the first ever East Lothian-North Florida Ryder Cup Trophy.

With the Pryde-Lee match already settled and the final two North Florida teams down in their matches the Billings and Foot match would be the match to decide the Ryder Cup. Knowing the importance Billings would step up his game and would also end his match with victory on the 15th hole with a 5&3 defeat over Foot, who also had a rough back nine to determine the winners of this Ryder Cup. In the final two groups Hundeboll would defeat Lotter 1-up and Hamlin and Morgan would end ALL Square. The final score ***North Florida – 9 and East Lothian – 6.***

Many thanks to the professional staff at North Hampton. The course was in magnificent condition.

If I had to explain in one word what this experience was like for all our players and parents, I would say ***AWESOME!*** Many thanks to Soren Hundeboll and David Lee for their outstanding support in getting things coordinated for this memorable two days of golf. Your support is greatly appreciated.

To ALL the boys and our supporting PROS, THANK YOU for your fine and exciting play, your sportsmanship and for your display of friendship. You are all winners as we brought friendship together with GOLF. Until next time, ***Cheers!!***

We'll see you on the links! And I'm hoping in Scotland!!

Sincerely

Jack Aschenbach, PGA