



THE  
RIDGEWOOD  
COUNTRY CLUB

A MEMORABLE HISTORY OF THE RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

## *September 2012 – Samuel Ryder, The Man Behind the Cup*



*Ryder (left) presenting the Ryder Cup in 1929*

For players and fans alike, the Ryder Cup competition has become arguably the most celebrated event in golf. Hosted every two years, the series of matches is jointly administered by the PGA of America and the PGA European Tour. It is unique among professional golfing events in that players receive no money for participating or winning. The Ryder Cup Competition, as we know it, might never have existed were it not for the generosity of one of golf's early fans.

Beginning in 1921, a series of informal matches was held pitting the best British golfers against their American counterparts.

The outcome was typically a lopsided British victory as was the case in a 1926 international

match. But this contest was historic because in the gallery was English seed merchant and entrepreneur, Samuel Ryder.

“Why can't they all get to know each other?” Ryder asked after watching the Wentworth match where British stars Mitchell and Duncan defeated Americans Hagen and Barnes. “I will give 5 pounds to each of the winning players, and give a party afterwards with champagne and chicken sandwiches.” Later that evening in a pub Ryder signed a deed of gift to donate a solid gold cup worth 250 pounds. The first official Ryder Cup would be awarded at the Worcester (Mass.) Country Club in 1927.

Ryder, however, would be called upon again to ensure the success of the competition. When an appeal to raise the 3,000 pounds to fund the first British Ryder Cup Team's journey to the competition in Massachusetts fell short of its goal, Ryder contributed 500 pounds to cover the deficit.

Ryder was an Englishman born March 24, 1858. The son of a gardener, he went to work in his father's business after ill health forced him to quit training to be a teacher. Full of ideas, young Samuel wanted to try selling seeds through the post (mail) instead of forcing buyers to purchase in bulk. When his father would not support the idea, he opened his own business selling 'penny packets' of seeds. They were posted on Thursday to arrive on Sunday, the most popular day for gardening. His 'penny packets' made him a fortune.

Years of working long hours took a toll on Ryder's health. At age 50 after a long illness, a friend suggested he take up golf. The fresh air and light exercise would be beneficial. Ryder immediately fell in love with the game and hired an expensive instructor, Britain's golf star, Abe Mitchell, to teach him. He practiced every day, rain or shine, six days per week. A strict Christian, he would not play on Sundays. Within a year his handicap was 6 as he applied for membership in the Verulam Golf Club in St. Albans in 1910.

Ryder died in January 1936 less than four months after the 1935 Ryder Cup match at The Ridgewood Country Club. At his daughter's request his favorite mashie, a 5-iron, was placed in his casket.

