

# United States completes record PGA Cup rally to reclaim the Llandudno International Trophy

## *Ohioan Bob Sowards' career eagle pitch ignites U.S. first win since 2013*

By Bob Denney  
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**AUSTIN, Texas (Sept. 29, 2019)** - Little over 20 years after “The Country Club Miracle” in the Ryder Cup, a new chapter in United States team golf lore was written among the rolling terrain outside Austin, Texas.

Call it “Redemption in the Foothills” as the United States crafted a 14-12 historic comeback victory over Great Britain & Ireland in the 29th PGA Cup.

The ignition point for the Americans happened in a 45-minute span on the uphill 518-yard par-5 18th hole. Bob Sowards of Dublin, Ohio, holed a blind downhill pitch for eagle for the first U.S. point of the day. Then, rookie Alex Beach of Stamford, Connecticut scrambled to gouge a chip from a sidehill rough to within 10 feet and make his birdie putt. Those 1-up wins set the stage for the U.S. to capture eight of 10 Sunday singles matches.

Humbled 24 hours earlier after losing seven of eight matches on the Fazio Foothills Course at the Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa, the Americans found themselves in a 10-6 hole. It was eerily reminiscent of the same score the U.S. faced on a Sunday in 1999 in Brookline, Massachusetts, against Europe in the Ryder Cup.

This time, it was a team of American PGA Club Professionals manufacturing the first comeback win on a Sunday in PGA Cup history, which also denied GB&I a third straight victory.

The U.S. reclaimed the Llandudno International Trophy for the first time since 2013, when it tied 13-13 to retain the 18-pound piece of silver.

It was America’s first outright PGA Cup win since 2011 (a 17½ to 8½ decision) in the premier international event for PGA Club Professionals. The U.S. now owns an 18-7-4 overall record.

U.S. Captain Derek Sprague of Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, recalled his Saturday night team meeting.

“I think being four points down, some of the players, especially the rookies, might have wondered if we can really come back,” said Sprague. “I told them last night that I believed in them, but I needed them to believe in themselves. And this is what can happen when you believe in yourself.”

The fuel of the stunning comeback was lit by Sowards unimaginable pitch from 25 yards with a lob wedge and was followed 45 minutes later when Alex Beach made up-and-down for birdie from a side-hill lie at 18.

Meanwhile, Ben Kern of Round Rock, Texas - in the day's second match - battled to turn around his fortunes against Scotland's Paul O' Hara. He was one down through 12 holes. He found the spark by chipping in for birdie at No. 13. From there, he scored wins on Holes 16 and 17 with pars to closed out a 2 and 1 victory.

The final two matches on the course would determine the American's fate.

Jason Caron of Greenlawn, New York, closed out David Dixon, 3 and 2, to set off celebration among the U.S. team and entourage. "This morning when I woke up, I had a nice feeling about how I was going to play," he said.

But, the game wasn't over. The scoreboard read 13-12, and one match was left to be decided.

Marty Jertson of Phoenix, Arizona, the Vice President of Fitting & Performance for PING Golf, and who has designed several of the clubs in his bag, got the honor of scoring the decisive U.S. point.

He ran home a 10-foot birdie putt on the 16th hole for his lone point of the week, and a 4 and 2 decision over Craig Lee. The two-year residence of the Llandudno Trophy was adjusted to read, "United States."

"You can never count anything in match play," said Jertson. "I started thinking we had a real chance, so it was time to put the pedal to the metal. It's an unbelievable feeling. I think it was fitting to clinch it (on No. 16 green) in front of all the boys, spouses and fans."

As the afternoon unfolded, it became a staggering series of moments for GB&I Captain Cameron Clark, who had assembled what he had earlier called "our best team."

"It was tough to take today. It was a real honor to captain your country and we'd done a great job up until today," said Clark, who had competed in 2015 and was a vice captain for the past two winning GB&I teams. "I'm very proud of what the lads have achieved this week, they've worked really hard and maybe the end of the week just took its toll on them. I can take away a huge amount of satisfaction. To captain your country is always fantastic. I'm really proud of what the lads have achieved but it will be tough to go in the team room, but we've enjoyed everything we've done this week."

The quality U.S. performance included a pair of flawless wins by rookies Ben Cook of Caledonia, Michigan, and Ryan Vermeer of Omaha, Nebraska. They won Sunday's seventh and eight matches without dropping a single hole - the only players to accomplish that on either side.

Vermeer's 5 and 4 decision over Jordan Godwin was the American's largest margin victory of the weekend and it resulted in his third point, which tied Sowards for most on the squad.

Cook celebrated his 26th birthday by dispatching Jason Levermore, 4 and 3.

Sean McCarty of Solon, Iowa, was another rookie winner for the U.S., downing England's Matt Cort, 2 and 1, handing him his lone loss of the Cup in five starts.

The GB&I scored victories in the day's fifth and sixth matches. Rob Coles defeated Danny Balin of Irvington, New York, 2 up, and Richard Wallis routed Rich Berberian Jr., 6 and 5.

“It was all about getting the momentum going,” said Sprague. “We need to get red on the board, so I put my horses out there early. I talked to the guys in the middle and second part of the lineup, and I told them we need to get red up on the board too. It’s important for everyone to see as much red as possible, because psychologically, the other side could tighten up. That is exactly what happened today.”

Sowards was emotional after his 1-up triumph over Scotland’s Alastair Forsyth, the No. 1 GB&I player and Great Britain’s reigning PGA Professional Champion.

“I normally don’t get emotional, but this week means so much to me,” he said wiping tears from his eyes, “and to come through for my team and my captain.

“My daughter (Jordan) texted me this morning, and said, ‘Dad, you got this?’ She normally isn’t interested in golf. But when I saw that, I almost broke down in tears.”

Sowards shook his head again, adding, “I have never hit a shot like that. I couldn’t see where it landed. Once I did see the ball, it was three feet from the hole and going soft. I thought it had a chance. When it went in, what a feeling!”

Sowards built a steady 2-up lead through 13 holes, winning Holes 5, 7 and 13 before Forsyth rallied with birdies on No. 14 and 16, the latter a 30-foot bomb to tie the match. Sowards’ ensuing tee shot on No. 18 was in the right rough and watched as Forsyth hit his soaring approach 10 feet behind the flagstick.

Sowards’ approach landed on the cart path, bounced high and came to rest at the crest of a hill. From there, Sowards pitched the ball softly down the side of the hill and gravity took over.

The PGA Cup returns in 2021 to Foxhills Resort Club & Resort in Ottershaw, Surrey, England, the site of the last GB&I victory in 2017.

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