



2012
RYDER CUP
PREVIEW

Tree-lined and oft-modified, **Medinah** has never starred as a major venue. However, as a match-play test boasting late risk-reward holes, No. 3 might just shine in the Ryder Cup spotlight

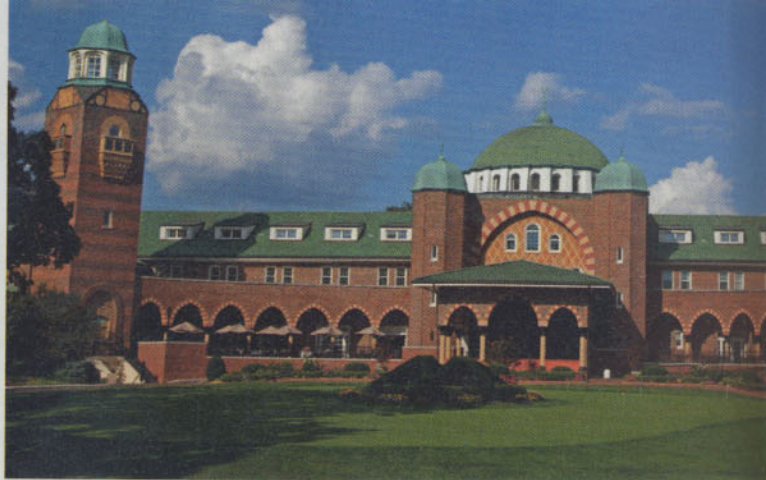
CENTER

BY MIKE STACHURA, PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEPHEN SZURLEJ

An aerial photograph of a golf course green. The green is a vibrant green, surrounded by three sand traps of varying shapes. A white flag is visible in the center of the green. In the foreground, a dark water hazard is separated from the green by a low wooden fence. The background is filled with a dense forest of tall, green trees under a clear sky.

Though Medinah
(the par-3 13th shown)
is highly ranked in Golf
Digest's America's 100
Greatest Golf Courses,
it has sometimes
lacked respect as a
big-time venue.

R STAGE



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ometimes the ineffectual dullard or overeager nerd can become—in the right environment and given the right circumstances—the stuff of legend. Most U.S. presidents, for example. Or that guy in those Twilight movies. Mark Zuckerberg.

In golf course terms, there is no better example than the Belfry's Brabazon

course at the Ryder Cup. As the generally bland, four-time host site proved over and over again, perceived greatness is the only reality that matters.

Here, then, is precisely where we find the No. 3 course at Medinah CC, which will be the stage for the 39th Ryder Cup Matches. Burdened by nearly a quarter century of failing to live up to its billing as the Monster of the Midwest, succumbing to record-setting low scores of one kind or another in every major it has held since 1990 and manipulating itself through two decades of whiplash-inducing course expansion and changes, Medinah No. 3 might have finally found its true calling, not as a brute but as a blast. In the end, it could find itself as an American Belfry.

Despite its perennial position in the top 25 on *Golf Digest's* list of America's 100 Greatest Courses and a collection of five-star winners (Cary Middlecoff, Hale Irwin and Tiger Woods, twice), Medinah No. 3 in its major moments seems to have suffered from several criticisms. Its holes can border on the repetitive, particularly the par 3s (three of the four fly over an arm of Lake Kadijah). Its tree-shrouded fairways can seem too suffocating and dull, forcing all but the most fortunate wayward strikes to simply be sacrificed back into play. Its length, stretched as it is to all-time records, plays all too often shorter than its numbers because drives frequently catch downslopes. Adding to Medinah's low Q rating were the low scores it yielded in its big moments. The winning score at the 1990 U.S. Open tied a then-record low relative to par. In the 1999 PGA a course record was set, despite playing more than 200 yards longer, at 7,401, than in the 1990 U.S.

Open. In the 2006 PGA, despite being stretched to 7,561 yards, a record 60 players shot under par in the first round, a mark that was broken the next day when 61 did it.

Not the sort of résumé that makes for a monster. But Rees Jones, Medinah's consulting architect for the last decade, doesn't think the Ryder Cup needs a monster and now believes the retweaked No. 3 course offers the perfect backdrop for golf's biennial docudrama.

"It's a par-72 golf course, so there's a lot of birdie opportunities out there. It's great for match play, especially in the four-ball," Jones says. "I really think Medinah's going to gain a lot of respect through this Ryder Cup."

The notes on Jones' changes to the course since 2002 account for more than 1,300 words on his website. He has orchestrated the recontouring of all the greens, the re-angling of fairways and tees and the relocation of the nervy par-3 17th back to the edge of Lake Kadijah (the third time it has been repositioned or recast since 1975). But it is his conversion of the lifeless 15th hole to a potentially drivable par 4 with a slivery green beside a pond drowning in portent that might change not only individual matches and the Ryder Cup itself, but the entire reputation of Medinah from soulless slog to first-rate fireworks show.

"The drivable par 4 has come in vogue, and the 15th hole needed some help," Jones says of what was another of Medinah's parade of straight, tree-choked two-shotters. His installation of a new tee allows the hole to play as short as 280 yards. "It was just sort of a hole that didn't have enough pizzazz, a hole that was sort of a stepchild to all the other ones. This was a great opportunity.

"There's a bunker on the left, but there's a 20-yard wide entrance to the green," Jones continues. "They may play left, they may play at the bunker, they may bounce it in. There's a chipping area that we wrapped around the back of the



Identifiable for its distinctive clubhouse (left), Medinah may this year be remembered for risk-reward holes such as the par-4 15th (foreground), which may play as short as 280 yards.

green, and that may give them a certain comfort level, but if they go over the green, they're going to have to manufacture a shot—and if the pin's on the right, that brings the water in play again. So there's a lot of things that go through their head when they play that hole."

Although the competition would be great theater if it were played around desk chairs in an office-break room, Medinah's recent history of low-scoring potential is a bonus as a Ryder Cup venue. It also imbues seemingly every other hole with the risk-reward potential that could make this Ryder Cup as much a series of train wrecks and triumphs as any three episodes of "Dance Moms." A quick look at the card shows four potentially reachable par 5s (depending on how U.S. captain Davis Love III decides to set up the course). There is also the fact that three of the four par 3s play over water to tight greens, and the 12th green has shifted closer to a pond. Counting the new 15th, half the holes at Medinah legitimately bring eagle or double bogey into play. Just what you want in a Ryder Cup.

"The idea has always been that the Ryder Cup is basically *mano a mano*, and the major championships are the player versus the golf course," says Jones, who also thinks the 245-yard 13th is a particularly uncomfortable yardage for today's

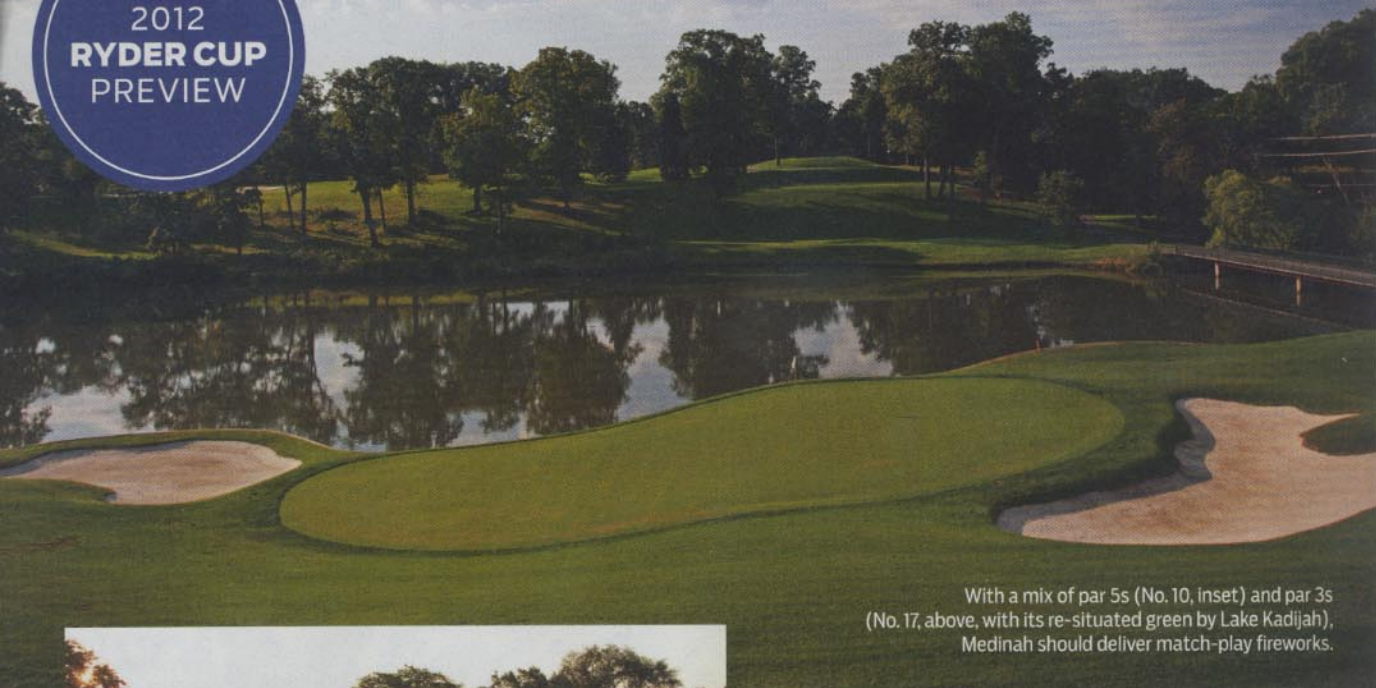
tour players, leaving them caught somewhere between the long iron and a hybrid or fairway wood. "But because every match counts, I think the golf course does matter. It all depends on how the captain can set it up. Just look how Seve Ballesteros set up Valderrama. He won that Ryder Cup by the way he set up the golf course."

Certainly, Ballesteros' pinched fairways at Valderrama in 1997 or Paul Azinger's wide fairways, light rough and fast greens at Valhalla in 2008 were said to have played a role in their respective teams' Ryder Cup wins. Captain Love will try to find ways to encourage his players' strengths, so he'll likely opt for green speeds that more closely mirror PGA Tour and U.S. major-championship quickness than the slower greens European Tour regulars are used to seeing.

Beyond the actual layout and architecture, though, Medinah has made one other key move toward increasing its entertainment value—and perhaps the Americans' advantage. Removing more than 1,000 trees that were suffocating the fairways allows more holes to play with excitement rather than foreboding and resignation. Think Bubba Watson at the Masters, says Jones.

"I'm really a believer in parkland golf courses with trees because you have to manufacture shots," he says. "Trees can really make the game much more interesting. [But] there's a lot more air and distance between the trees at Medinah now. We left key trees in, and now you have options."

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With a mix of par 5s (No. 10, inset) and par 3s (No. 17, above, with its re-situated green by Lake Kadajah), Medinah should deliver match-play fireworks.



As for Medinah's extreme length, do not be fooled. Although the total yardage on the card (7,658) is the longest in Ryder Cup history by a lot, in the new school of course setup that number is merely an expression of the palate Love and PGA of America managing director of championships Kerry Haigh have at their disposal. "That length provides an opportunity to make adjustments based on where the players' strengths are," says Haigh. "It gives you a mix of some fun, exciting, interesting and challenging opportunities. In a way, it's like you're doing away with par."

That idea perhaps would have been sacrilege for most of the major championships held at Medinah, but par is supposed to be meaningless when your opponent isn't the course. At a Ryder Cup the venue should be more tennis court than obstacle course, providing the backdrop for talent to be displayed, not snuffed out. But Love isn't exactly sure that a course setup can so directly ordain the desired results.

"Kerry has done a great job with PGA Championships and Ryder Cups over the years, so we are going to lean on letting him help us with that," Love says, "but I don't know that we figured out a way to make it suit 12 different guys."

Haigh, who is setting up a Ryder Cup for the fifth time

since joining the PGA of America in 1993, admits the idea of the captain controlling the outcome might be more revisionist history than anything else. "The team's going to have a collection of longer hitters and shorter hitters and straighter hitters and less-straight hitters so that complicates it for the captain as he decides what team members he's trying to favor," he says. "And, of course, in some respects both teams have the same types of players, so you could be favoring them just as well. The captain has to have a clear view of how he wants it to play. But there probably is no right or wrong answer."

The point is, Medinah offers plenty of answers to choose from. What it hasn't had in the past as a major championship site—namely the flexibility to be a thrill ride rather than a torture test—is now a strength for the matches. Its changes, rather than a desperate dash to fit into the stark, unrelenting standards of a major, now seem careful steps toward building drama. And there is no better place for the passion play of a drivable par 4 in a Ryder Cup than at the start of the final four holes. Since 2002 more than 92 percent of the matches in a Ryder Cup have reached the 15th tee. That is much better timing than the Belfry's drivable par-4 10th, a cackhanded design with a blind cater-corner green whose ultimate influence on match outcomes in reality was only slightly more significant than shirt style.

With its new late-round drama, could Medinah simply be a better Belfry? That wouldn't be such a bad thing for sheer entertainment value, and it might be the one thing that could change Medinah's unfulfilled great expectations of the last two decades, might be the one change all those course changes finally accomplished. There could be no better fix for Medinah's major-championship melancholy than a Ryder Cup full of roars. **GW**

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MEDINAH NO. 3

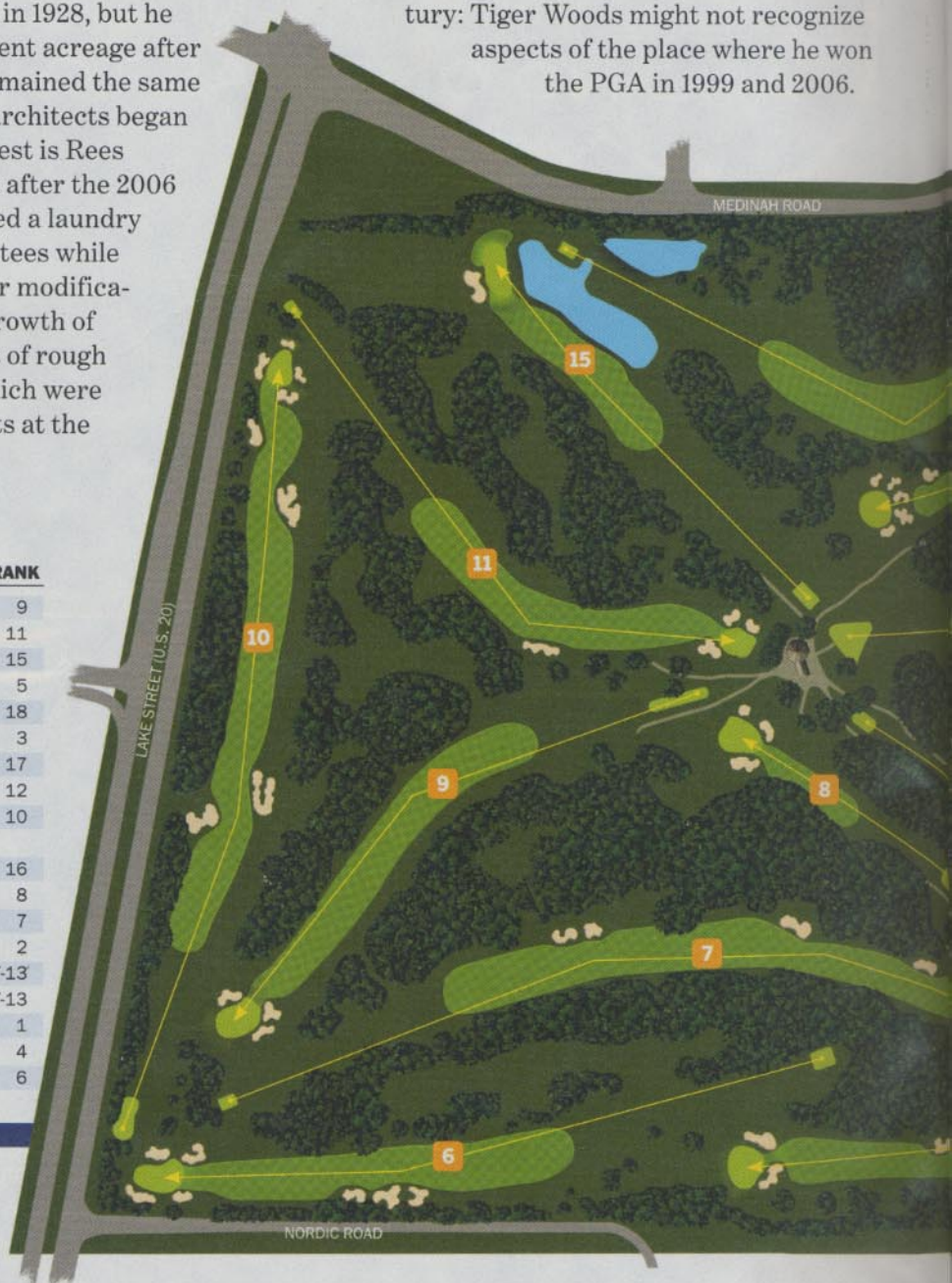
39th Ryder Cup Matches // Medinah (Ill.) CC (No. 3) //
September 28-30, 2012 // Par 36-36-72 // 7,658 yards

The property is the same, it is the course that is different. Again. Although No. 3 crowned its first winner in Harry Cooper in the 1930 Medinah Open, its all-star roster of victors (Billy Casper, Hale Irwin, Byron Nelson and Gene Sarazen among them) might find it confusing to compare notes. Tom Bendelow's original opened in 1928, but he revised it by incorporating adjacent acreage after Cooper's triumph. The course remained the same until 1969, when the first of five architects began a series of modifications. The latest is Rees Jones, employed both before and after the 2006 PGA Championship. He addressed a laundry list of tasks: a batch of new back tees while enlarging others, fairway contour modifications, seeding a two-yard-wide growth of Kentucky bluegrass as a first cut of rough around the fairways (many of which were regraded), eliminating blind shots at the

first and eighth holes, removing about 1,000 trees and reconstructing every bunker and rebuilding every green. And specifically for this event: digging a pond right of a repositioned 15th green at a hole now reachable from a forward tee. Forget the winners from the first half of the 20th century: Tiger Woods might not recognize aspects of the place where he won the PGA in 1999 and 2006.

THE SCORECARD

2012 RYDER HOLE	PAR	YARDS	FROM 2006	2006 PGA		
				YARDS	AVG	RANK
1	4	433	-1	434	4.058	9
2	3	192	+1	191	3.042	11
3	4	412	-2	414	3.924	15
4	4	463	0	463	4.158	5
5	5	536	-1	537	4.567	18
6	4	509	+35	474	4.196	3
7	5	617	+30	587	4.818	17
8	3	201	-3	204	2.984	12
9	4	432	-3	435	4.053	10
OUT	36	3,795	+56	3,739	35.800	
10	5	578	-1	579	4.920	16
11	4	440	+2	438	4.073	8
12	4	476	+5	471	4.087	7
13	3	245	+1	244	3.242	2
14	5	609	+4	605	4.951	T-13
15	4	391	-1	392	3.951	T-13
16	4	482	+29	453	4.331	1
17	3	193	-4	197	3.164	4
18	4	449	+6	443	4.116	6
IN	36	3,863	+41	3,822	36.835	
TOTAL	72	7,658	+97	7,561	72.635	





◀ Making a splash

Three par 3s cross Lake Kadajah, giving those holes a similar appearance while complicating club selection on windy days. The second (foreground) gave up 62 birdies in the 2006 PGA and ranked 11th in difficulty that week. But the 13th (background) ranked second-toughest thanks to 102 bogeys, 13 doubles and three "others." Expect late-match nerves to influence the 13th and the 17th, which gave up the lone ace in '06.

TEXT BY BRETT AVERY // MAP BY RON RAMSEY



Hit it close, pards

Formulating Friday and Saturday morning's duos for foursomes (aka alternate shot) will be among the biggest headaches for captains Davis Love III and José María Olazábal. They will weigh factors such as each player's respective length, brand of ball and temperament. Here's another complication: Barring a wildly wayward drive, if every team goes for the green in two at the par 5s, the player teeing off on even-numbered holes will hit the shot into seven greens on the first nine (all but the fourth and sixth) while his partner will hit into seven of nine on the second nine (11th, 15th).