

Soccer

Portland hosts Flash in NWSL semis

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

PORTLAND — It seems like everything is going right for the Portland Thorns heading into the National Women's Soccer League playoffs.

The Thorns finished out the regular season with a four-game winning streak and claimed the NWSL Shield for the team with the best record. They also clinched home-field advantage for the first time. They face the Western New York Flash in a semifinal game Sunday.

Forward Christine Sinclair credited first-year coach Mark Parsons. The Thorns (12-3-5) always had talent, she said, but that didn't always translate into wins.

"The difference is this year we're a team from the top down," Sinclair said. "I thought when Mark came on board it changed a lot. He stressed being a team — you know, hanging out outside of soccer practice — and I think you're starting to see that on the field. We're willing to do anything for each other."

Sinclair also recognized the players who were with the team all season while their teammates were in and out in preparation for the Olympics. Sinclair won the bronze medal in Rio with the Canadian national team. The Thorns' roster also includes U.S. Olympians Tobin Heath, Lindsey Horan, Meghan Klingenberg, Allie Long and alternate Emily Sonnett. Additionally, Amandine Henry played for France in Brazil.

In a pre-match conference call Thursday, Klingenberg unexpectedly took over to sing "Happy Birthday," even though it was no one's birthday, and Sinclair dissolved into giggles. Parsons deadpanned: "I have no way to explain."

Former Thorns coach Paul Riley took over the Flash in February. He said hard work led his young team to the playoffs.

"We didn't set any goals. Our goal wasn't to make the playoffs, our goal wasn't to make the final. Our goal was to win the first game of the season," Riley said. "That's really the way we've approached every game. We've set no goals for the group, we just wanted each player to get a little bit better each game and believe in the process — and things will happen if we do everything right to the best of our abilities."

The atmosphere at Providence Park could be hostile to the visitors. The Thorns boast the best home attendance in the league with an average of 16,945 fans per game this season.

While Portland is the third team in league history to allow an average of less than one goal a game over the course of the season, the Flash (9-6-5) are just the third team to average at least two goals a game. The Flash are paced by league Golden Boot winner Lynn Williams with 11 goals and five assists.

Golf

Americans sweep, Europeans rally at Ryder Cup

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press

CHASKA, Minn. — Even with the first opening-session sweep in four decades, the Americans were reminded anew Friday that no lead is safe in the Ryder Cup.

Not after one session. Not after one day.

And based on the last Ryder Cup on American soil, not until it's over.

Europe battled back from a 4-0 deficit behind its best tandem, Henrik Stenson and Justin Rose, and capped off a long and rowdy day at Hazeltine when its best player, Rory McIlroy, holed a 20-foot eagle putt and then mocked the crowd by taking a bow.

The American celebration turned into a consolation.

They had a 5-3 lead, the margin after the first day at Medinah four years ago that ended in another European victory. They lost a chance to really put Europe in a hole.

"It's frustrating not to come out a little bit more ahead," U.S. captain Davis Love III said.

Love could not have scripted a better start — a symbolic one, too.

To honor Arnold Palmer, who died Sunday night, Ryder Cup officials placed on the first tee Palmer's golf bag from when he was captain of the 1975 Ryder Cup team. Jordan Spieth and Patrick Reed then set the tone with a 3-and-2 foursomes victory over Stenson and Rose, and the Americans delivered the first sweep of the opening session since that 1975 team at Laurel Valley.

Phil Mickelson, feeling more pressure than usual because of his influence on changes and on this team, also produced big shots. His wedge into 5 feet that Rickie Fowler converted was key in the Americans winning three straight holes for a 1-up victory over McIlroy and Andy Sullivan.

"With everything going on — me not having a point and Phil being a big part of getting the players a lot more involved to Arnie passing and him being a huge part of the week, this is big for us," Fowler said.

It just didn't last.

"The guys were disappointed with the way they played this morning and the way they performed," European captain Darren Clarke said. "But they showed tremendous bravery and heart and desire to go out and play the way they have done this afternoon."

Beaten for the first time, Rose and Stenson went right back out against Spieth and Reed and handed the American duo its first Ryder Cup loss. The Europeans made nine birdies in 13 holes for



AP Photo/David J. Phillip

ABOVE: United States' Patrick Reed hits a drive on the first hole during a foursomes match at the Ryder Cup golf tournament Friday, Sept. 30, 2016, at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn.



AP Photo/Charlie Riedel

LEFT: Europe's Rory McIlroy reacts after making his putt to win his match 3 & 2 during a four-balls match at the Ryder Cup golf tournament Friday, Sept. 30, 2016, at Hazeltine National Golf Club.

a 5-and-4 victory in an afternoon session in which the board was filled with European blue.

Sergio Garcia, who along with Martin Kaymer made only one birdie in a foursomes loss, teamed with fellow Spaniard Rafa Cabrera Bello to dismantle J.B. Holmes and Ryan Moore. McIlroy and Pieters never trailed against Johnson and Kuchar, handing them their first loss in four Ryder

Cup matches.

The lone American point in the afternoon came from Brandt Snedeker and Brooks Koepka, who had no trouble against Kaymer and Danny Willett.

Willett had a little trouble with the crowd, especially when they lampooned him around Hazeltine with references to hot dogs and his brother, Pete, who had written a column in a British publication

USA 5, EUROPE 3

Foursomes
United States 4, Europe 0
Jordan Spieth and Patrick Reed, United States, def. Justin Rose and Henrik Stenson, Europe, 3 and 2.
Phil Mickelson and Rickie Fowler, United States, def. Rory McIlroy and Andy Sullivan, Europe, 1 up.
Jimmy Walker and Zach Johnson, United States, def. Sergio Garcia and Martin Kaymer, Europe, 4 and 2.
Dustin Johnson and Matt Kuchar, United States, def. Thomas Pieters and Lee Westwood, 5 and 4.

Fourballs
Europe 3, United States 1
Justin Rose and Henrik Stenson, Europe, def. Jordan Spieth and Patrick Reed, United States, 5 and 4.
Sergio Garcia and Rafa Cabrera Bello, Europe, def. J.B. Holmes and Ryan Moore, United States, 3 and 2.
Brandt Snedeker and Brooks Koepka, United States, def. Martin Kaymer and Danny Willett, Europe, 5 and 4.
Rory McIlroy and Thomas Pieters, Europe, def. Dustin Johnson and Matt Kuchar, United States, 3 and 2.

disparaging American galleries. "It was anticipated," Willett said. "Coming to America is a tough one, just like when the Americans come to Europe. They gave me a little bit more. I think it was exactly what we thought it was going to be."

It wasn't just directed at Willett, however.

The crowd was loud and boisterous from the opening tee shot in misty conditions. There were a few rude comments, not unusual in America for a Ryder Cup. McIlroy had a 20-foot birdie putt to halve the morning foursomes match against Mickelson and Fowler when a fan from across 100 yards away shouted, "Get an American to putt it for you." That was a reference to McIlroy and Rose losing a playful \$100 bet to an American fan who made a putt in Thursday's practice session.

Most striking was how quickly the crowd cheered bad shots for Europe. Typically, there is the slightest delay. Not on Friday. Sullivan, one of six rookies for Europe, hit his tee shot into the water on the 17th that put Europe 1 down and effectively ended the match. The crowd cheered before there was a ripple.

That's what inspired McIlroy in the final match of the day. He and Pieters were 2 up on the 16th hole, with Kuchar already in for a birdie, when the four-time major champion drained his 20-foot putt. Turning to the crowd, he bowed twice and screamed out, "C'mon!"

"I wanted to put an exclamation on that session for us," McIlroy said. "I thought about that celebration before I hit the putt."

More than a celebration, it was a message from McIlroy to what he felt was a hostile crowd.

"I'm not fazed by anything said by the crowd," McIlroy said. "And I'm not fazed by anything the U.S. throws at us."

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