

Display of fair play and the warmest of Welsh welcomes

The Ryder Cup is one of the few occasions in which people wave the European flag with excitement and a sense of patriotism. **José Manuel Barroso**, the president of the European Commission, is in Wales for the showcase event, and believes there are many more reasons why the nation should be excited about the EU

IT has been a great summer for sport in Europe. And I believe it is just about to get better. A team from Europe won the football World Cup in South Africa and European players are dominating the tennis and golf majors.

Tomorrow, Team Europe and Team USA will come together for the greatest team golf event in the world. The Ryder Cup brings together sports people and fans on both sides of the Atlantic. It brings together two great continents and two exceptional teams. Whatever the outcome this weekend, the United States will continue to be Europe's closest partner and friend.

The Ryder Cup is unique. It is the ultimate test of sportsmanship, dedication and technical skill. The players are the finest the world has to offer. Almost every player competing is a champion. And they are a group of players who want to do it right. Where sportsmanship is more important than sport.

Like everyone in Europe, I will be hoping that Team Europe will wrestle the golden chalice trophy back from a determined and talented United States team.

The Ryder Cup has a special significance for me. It is the one event where Europe is represented by a single team. For 52 years it was Britain

and Ireland versus the United States. Now the whole of Europe is united behind Colin Montgomerie and his team.

To see four Englishmen, two Northern Irishmen, two Italians, an Irishman, a German, a Spaniard and a Swede coming together in one team for prestige rather than prize money should make us all proud.

We will see a blend of nationalities, creeds and styles coming together to achieve great results.

And that's also the magic of Europe. Our strength lies in how much we have in common, despite our differences of tradition, history, language and culture.

It is the perfect demonstration that we can support our local team, our country and our continent. I look forward to seeing thousands of people on the course proudly waving European flags as well as their national flags.

We have new countries represented and new countries hosting the Cup. I am delighted that the Ryder Cup is taking place in Wales and I am able to visit the country for the first time. I am sure we will see passionate crowds, a commitment to fair play on the fairways and the warmest of Welsh welcomes. It will be a real privilege to visit Celtic Manor and I'm sure that for many it will be the first of many visits in the future to the



■ The European team with the prized Ryder Cup

PICTURE: Peter Bolter

THURSDAY ESSAY

fine courses that Wales has to offer.

The Ryder Cup in Wales is much more than an iconic sporting occasion. The Ryder Cup demonstrates that Wales is a global player capable of attracting world-class events. It is a real investment in the future of the country. The legacy will not only see major improvements in infrastructure but an opportunity to showcase to more than a billion viewers in nearly 200 countries a beautiful country rich in tradition, culture and dynamism.

Wales reminds me of my native Portugal. Both are

medium-sized countries on the Atlantic coast of Europe with a similar outlook on life and a passion for sport. In both countries golf is the fastest growing sport. And both have benefited from being part of the European Union.

Just some of the many projects include the ProAct and ReAct programmes set up by the Welsh Assembly Government which have allowed Wales to combat unemployment through EU funding. The Institute of Life Sciences at Swansea University and the Low Carbon Research Institute at Cardiff University are some of the best

examples in Europe of research, innovation and sustainable development.

I look forward to meeting the First Minister to talk about how the European Union can further improve people's lives, in Newport and the rest of Wales, as we battle through the economic crisis.

For a few hours this weekend we can put aside our concerns and witness the huge lift that sport can give a country and a continent. When I see President Obama at the next EU-US Summit I look forward to reminding him of Celtic Manor. It is sure to be close but I'm sure that with passionate home support Europe can get the Cup back on European soil.

■ **José Manuel Barroso is President of the European Commission**