

## Origin of The Vintage Vest Company Brand Concept

There was no specific purpose or motivation for sitting down to write this summary at the same time that I grabbed my TV remote and a cold Sam Adams on that Sunday morning to settle in and watch the final round of the 2016 Ryder Cup in Minneapolis, MN. I was inspired and awe struck from watching the previous two rounds of the golf tournament on Friday and Saturday, leading up to what I knew would be an amazing final round on Sunday. I merely pulled out my computer that morning with some displaced notion that I should somehow be productive that day knowing full well that I would be strapped into my lazy boy for the next 8 hours of riveting TV coverage. And like a lot of people trying to enjoy their Sunday, I knew that Monday morning and the strains of the corporate life were right around the corner.



For the past year I had been developing a brand concept for my own company that was centered around my love of the live music show and the attributes of the human spirit that it celebrates. The idea for the company all started in mid-December of 2015 while attending Power-Gen, the largest corporate tradeshow in our industry at the Las Vegas Convention Center. At that point in my life I was well into the corporate career burnout stage, so I knew that the proverbial writing was on the wall. I was 42 years old with a less than desirable personal life having not let just one, but two of the "right ones" get away, I was void of any remaining motivation for the corporate lifestyle, and I had very little savings in the bank. Needless to say, the future was very uncertain.

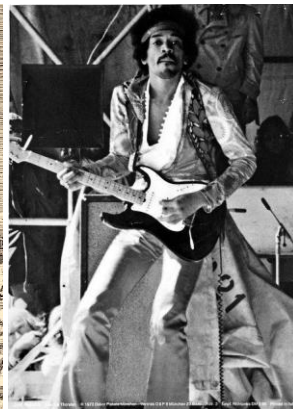


I escaped the tired constraints of the tradeshow that day and wandered over to the Cowboy Christmas exhibits next door. It was a refreshing release to walk around while taking in the sites and sounds that are always prevalent in Las Vegas every December when the NFR rodeo and its fun-loving and free-wheeling community of cowboys and cowgirls come galloping into town. As I made my way around the Cowboy Christmas displays, I came to a booth where there were a few classic western style vests on display. Surrounded by the sights and sounds of a Cowboy Christmas, I liken the joy I felt at that

moment to the joy that Ralphie displayed when he saw the Red Ryder BB gun for the first time in the Christmas Story movie that was filmed in my hometown of Cleveland, OH. For some reason I found myself enamored by the vest. I bought the vest that day with really no specific intentions or greater purpose in mind.



I realized very quickly that it wasn't just the style of the vest that enamored me. Rather, it was the attributes of the human spirit that I felt the vest represented, and that I felt when I wore it. It conjured up inside of me those attributes of the human spirit that are most pure and natural such as the freedom of the Harley Davidson motorcycle, the courage of the early pioneers, and the rebellion of the Rock N Roll musician. It wasn't long before I began to feel my creative ingenuity simmering again after having been made dormant by too many years spent simply surviving in the caverns of corporate bureaucracy and mediocrity.



Three words emerged as my creative ingenuity progressed from a slow simmer to steady boil. "Music, Freedom, Country, (MFC)" began to resonate in my head like the catchy chorus from a memorable song. To me these three words had been born from the vest and captivated the most pure and natural attributes of the human spirit. It was when I then made the connection between the qualities that the vest represented to me and my love of the live music show that the concept of The Vintage Vest Company was born.

For many years I traveled the country at various times celebrating the live music experience. Most of my travels revolved around the Black Crowes or Drive-by-Truckers tour schedules. Both bands often played two nights in interesting cities which provided me the ultimate escape when my corporate career granted me a weekend pass for good behavior. Although I traveled to the shows alone, I never



felt lonely. In fact, it was quite the opposite. The live music show brought together a beautiful community of people that celebrated the most genuine attributes of the human spirit. Regardless of who you were, what you did, or where you came from, the live music show was the ultimate catalyst that lit the fire within the soul of a community of people that longed to feel something real and genuine. It was as though we were collectively given a weekend pass from the insane asylum of life where we were all admitted as patients for what we knew would be the majority of our stay here on earth.



In addition to traveling to live music shows, I spent this same period of my life exploring the national parks of the desert Southwest. My home in Las Vegas enabled me to take advantage of such natural treasures as The Grand Canyon, The Colorado River, Red Rock Canyon, Brice Canyon, Mount Charleston, and Zion. The outdoor experience of the desert Southwest offered the perfect complement to the live music show experience. Where the live music show offered a boisterous community-driven celebration of the human spirit, the desert southwest provided for a more peaceful, introspective, self-examination and internal re-connection with one's spirit and soul. I often considered the national park to be the supreme problem solver. Regardless of the weight of the problem that I carried into the park, I often left with a solution to the problem without any recollection of having consciously focused on it. It just happened naturally. When I didn't leave with a solution, I left with the realization that the weight of the problem that I carried in wasn't so heavy or insurmountable after all. I can't explain it, other than to simply describe it as a natural problem solving process that only the mysterious powers of nature can provide.



The emotions that the vest inspired in me at the Cowboy Christmas that day in December began to form a natural connection with the emotions that I experienced from the live music show and my explorations through the desert Southwest. The mantra "Music, Freedom, Country" which had been born from the vest captivated and celebrated the most genuine attributes of the human spirit, and

those attributes were never better on display than at the celebration of the live music show or in the beauty of nature and the healing power of the outdoors experience.

I began to contemplate whether the combination of the vest and the “Music, Freedom, Country” mantra could form the framework for a brand concept and a company. After all, I now realized that the years that I spent pursuing the live music show and exploring the desert Southwest was not simply a temporary escape from reality, but rather, it now served as a prolonged field marketing research project. The brand concept that I had arrived at was born of many years of data gathering through my actual life experiences. Taken over a sample size of nearly two decades, the data clearly demonstrated to me that there was a fairly sizeable community of people that shared the same admiration and emotional connection to the most genuine attributes of the human spirit that are celebrated through “Music, Freedom, and Country.” But, would it be enough to form the basis for a brand and a viable company? Needless to say, at this point, it still seemed more of a dream than that of a reality.

Fast forward now to where this story started when I grabbed the TV remote and a cold Sam Adams on that Sunday morning and settled in to watch the final round of the 2016 Ryder Cup. The Ryder Cup is a three-day golf tournament that takes place every two years and matches the best golfers from the USA versus the best golfers from Europe. It’s a celebration of everything that is pure, right, and good within the competitive team format. Unfortunately, the tournament’s exposure is greatly overshadowed by the monsters of the midway whose headlining performances on Sunday afternoons in the fall tend to command most of the country’s attention. But ironically on this Sunday, the battle and fight that took place on the Hazeltine track between the Americans and Europeans was far more passionate than any battle that took place on the grid iron that day.

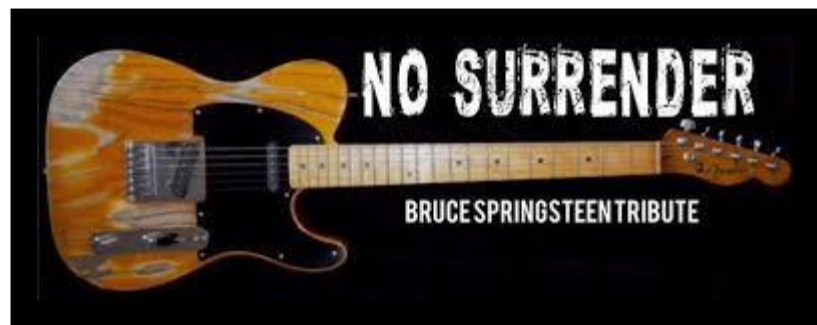
“Music, Freedom, & Country” were on full display on that Sunday in Minnesota as I watched thousands of patriotic fans drape every inch of the golf course grounds donning the red, white, and blue. From their singing of the national anthem and God Bless America at the first tee, to their ruckus renditions of “USA,” and “I believe that we will win,” the fans and country patriots that blanketed the Hazeltine track demonstrated unprecedented levels of passion, joy, enthusiasm and exuberance. What took place that day was not a conventional Sunday golf tournament, rather, it was the culmination of a three-day battle fueled by pride, perseverance, courage, teamwork, and love of country. If ever I had any doubts about the viability of The Vintage Vest Co. brand concept, those doubts were erased that day as I settled into one of the greatest celebrations of the human spirit that I had ever seen.



As I've emphasized throughout this story, The Vintage Vest Co. brand celebrates the most pure and genuine attributes of the human spirit. In my life those attributes were most evident in the celebration of the live music show and in the freedom of the outdoors. Similarly, there are many other passions that people have in life where the genuineness of the human spirit is alive and well. The challenge we face is that we live in a time and place where there are dominant dark external forces that continue to impose limits and restrictions on the unbridled freedom and expression of the human spirit. We only need to look as far as our nation's beloved full contact sport which has progressively increased the power and scope of the yellow flag to include limits on passion, emotion, personality, and individual expression.



Thankfully The Ryder Cup remains one of the final bastions where the endangered species that is the human spirit can find protection and refuge. Like a beautiful bald eagle gliding above the free-flowing Colorado River amidst the deep sundrenched cavern walls of the Grand Canyon, the human spirit has no boundaries at the Ryder Cup. Add to this image the almighty Lord and his band of celestial musicians rocking the heavens and the canyon floor with a roaring rendition of Springsteen's "No Surrender," and the essence of the Ryder Cup celebration is complete. It's unfortunate that within our most recognized and celebrated professional sports, the traditional values of competition that enable the human spirit to flourish have been put on trial and found guilty by the courts of commercialization and political correctness. It's only when the Americans and Europeans collide in a global confrontation every two years that the traditional values of competition are released from imprisonment and embraced once again as the natural laws of healthy human competition.





The impact that the traditional values of competition had at the 2016 Ryder Cup was most evident in the freedom that the American and European teams had to express their own individual personalities. This was never more apparent than in the blistering battle between Patrick Reed (aka Captain America) and Rory McElroy on that final Sunday. One of the most fiery and ultra-competitive personalities in our universe, Reed's no-fear approach transformed the jovial, even-keeled McElroy into the likeness of his fellow and flamboyant Irish countryman, and MMA champion, Connor McGregor. In fact, based on the heights of the passion and emotion that they displayed, Reed and McElroy should have been battling in an outdoor octagon that day rather than the eighteen hole Hazeltine track. It was a beautiful spectacle to watch as these modern-day gladiators of the links, and young Jedi of their ancient craft, rode the freedom to express their personalities to new performance heights culminating in one of the greatest and most entertaining "one-on-one" showdowns in sports history.



In my life the freedom that I have to express my personality appears to be getting more and more limited. I often feel like a character actor trying out for different roles as I attempt to alleviate the various pressures of life that come my way. Like a chameleon, I'm constantly changing my colors based on the different circumstances that I find myself crawling in and out of. And it's not long before I inevitably find that there's suddenly a lot more sand at the bottom half of the hour glass of my life than at the top, and that the sand seems to be falling at an increasingly rapid rate. This is the reason why the Vintage Vest Co. seeks and celebrates those experiences throughout life, like The Ryder Cup, the live music show, and the outdoors; where the freedom of the individual personality is enabled to flourish.



In addition to unleashing the individual personalities of the American and European teams, the 2016 Ryder Cup celebration also revealed the essence of their characters. Since the members of both teams play on very high profile and prestigious professional golf tours throughout the year where multi-million dollar purses and corporate endorsements make them very wealthy and earn them star status,

it's easy to lose perspective on what initially motivated them to ascend to the summit of their craft and become the best in the world. It's not uncommon that the public mistakenly assumes that they were simply motivated by the conventional spoils of vanity, fame and fortune. Thankfully we are blessed every two years when the golf gods bestow upon us a divine gift by providing us a time machine that transports the masters of the golf universe back to a simpler time and place when all they had was a belief in themselves, the support of their families, their love to compete, and their pure passion for the game. This is the environment where we get to witness the essence of their character as they proudly shoulder the ultimate responsibility of representing millions of their fellow countrymen in defending the pride and will of their native lands at The Ryder Cup.



In my life I relish the opportunities that reveal the essence of my character, especially as I get older. When I was young and unencumbered by life's mysteries, my raw character was on full display. I didn't know any better than to simply be who I actually was. As I've grown older, I can't say that I've gotten any smarter, but I have learned the art of compromise. And I think we all know that while the art of compromise is necessary in life, it can also be the quick fix that we seek that leads us into greater internal turmoil.

As I wind this narrative down, I saved one of the most meaningful character stories for last. The three-day battle at Hazeltine between the Americans and Europeans was an emotional roller coaster ride that exhausted even the strongest of heart. Yet the emotions of the 2016 edition of the tournament were ratcheted up to an even higher, unearthly level, as it coincided with the passing of the people's champion, Arnold Palmer. As I cranked up the volume of my surround sound speakers, I felt like I was a part of the celebration of Arnie's life as the boisterous, heart-felt chants of "Arnold Palmer" seemed to echo throughout the plush green grounds of the Hazeltine golf course. While his talent made him a legend of the game, his character made him a friend to everyone.



And finally, the summary of the origins of The Vintage Vest Co. would not be complete without highlighting the third major tenant of the “MFC” mantra that celebrates this county, and most importantly, the appreciation that we have for our military. The Vintage Vest Co. holds in the highest regard the commitment to character that we as mere mortals could never aspire to. Chris Kyle and Pat Tillman exemplified transcendent character, we salute them, and we use their memory to pay homage to all our military men and women.



*“Somewhere inside, we hear a voice. It leads us in the direction of the person we wish to become. But it is up to us whether or not to follow.” – Pat Tillman*

This brings this story and the origins of The Vintage Vest Co brand to a conclusion. I recognize that it may be confusing to many, but hopefully it sparks enough interest for some folks to want to read further into the more detailed description of The Vintage Vest Company in the following pages. In addition to its core charter of celebrating those attributes of the human spirit that are conveyed through its mantra of “Music, Freedom, Country (MFC),” The 2016 edition of The Ryder Cup inspired the company to develop a few more lofty objectives. In two years the company aspires to be in a position to charter flights and reserve hotel rooms for its community of followers to join Patrick Reed, aka Captain America, in taking the fight to the shores of France to battle the Europeans at the 2018 Ryder Cup tournament. And by 2020 the company hopes to amass an even larger army to lead the charge with the ageless Phil Mickelson against the Europeans when the battle returns to the great banks of Lake Michigan at Whistling Straights in Kohler, WI.

