

KELLY MURRAY'S DRIVING FORCE

Canadian pro, Kelly Murray, can hit the ball prodigious distances and this month will see whether he is the longest in the world.

by MICHAEL PATTERSON

He's Canadian, good looking, very cocky and hits a golf ball probably further than anybody in the world. His name? Kelly Murray — a tall, smooth-talking pro from Vancouver who, in August last year, wiped out the 13-year world long driving record with a mighty blow from atop the Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver. The drive measured 422.3 yards which easily broke Tony Jacklin's 1974 mark of 385 yards.

This month Murray will attempt to further that distance, again hitting from one of Vancouver's skyscrapers, this time the World Trade Centre, to the harbor below. However he won't be flying solo as he will be pitted against the long drive champions of the U.S., Europe and Japan to decide once and for all who is the longest hitter in the world.

Kelly Murray's name might not be too well known in Australia but back home he is quite a celebrity on the small Canadian Tour. The galleries flock to see him "give it a rip" and he obliges them with an almost maniacal determination. One of his fellow Canadian pros, Jim Nelford, summed up Murray's all or nothing attitude by saying it's like asking an alcoholic not take a drink to ask Kelly to hold back with the driver.

Although tournament wins have been scarce Murray is not just a gorilla on the tee. He holds the Canadian PGA record for the lowest tournament round, a 10-under-par 60 during the 1986 Manitoba Open, has won both the Manitoba and Alberta Opens and the 1982 Trinidad and Tobago Open in the Caribbean and has performed reasonably well, if unspectacularly, on

the Australian circuit.

Kelly Murray's quest for distance began ironically through playing baseball. He had been playing baseball since he was seven years old and had always been a poor batter. When it was his turn to bat the coach would always give him a bunt signal, to play a little knockdown shot which may get him to first base or other runner home.

"I was sick and tired of getting that bunt signal and devised a method which was a bit like a golf swing, not so much the horizontal baseball swing but one which allowed me to lob the ball back over the pitcher's head.

"I also started to really hit the ball hard and before long I was leading the League batting averages.

"When I was in high school my golf coach gave me the choice — golf or baseball, I took golf so baseball went out the window," Murray said.

"I was then encouraged to hit the ball as hard as I possibly could and worry about direction later. I didn't need much encouragement," he said.

From that point onwards all Kelly Murray wanted to do was become a golf pro. He went to college in the U.S. and eventually turned pro eight years ago at the age of 23. He has attempted to join the U.S. Tour a number of times but has failed to get his Tour card, on two occasions by a mere two strokes. He has played the Canadian Tour since turning pro and has roamed the rest of the world playing in Asia the Caribbean and Australia.

Throughout his career Murray has entered long driving contests all over the world and his record to date is 54 wins out of 63 contests.

"All the contests I have lost, I have lost them mentally. Not being in the

right frame of mind, not being confident, can really upset your potential," he said.

Well he must have been in the right frame of mind during the Tournament Players Championship at the Riverside Oaks course at Cattai earlier this year as he notched up yet another long drive competition. On the 13th hole on the third day of the tournament Murray cranked out a drive which measured 338 metres or 370 yards to easily win the contest. His prize was a trip to the British Open.

"I have always had a dream to play in the British Open and now that I can get there I only hope that I can qualify to play," Murray said.

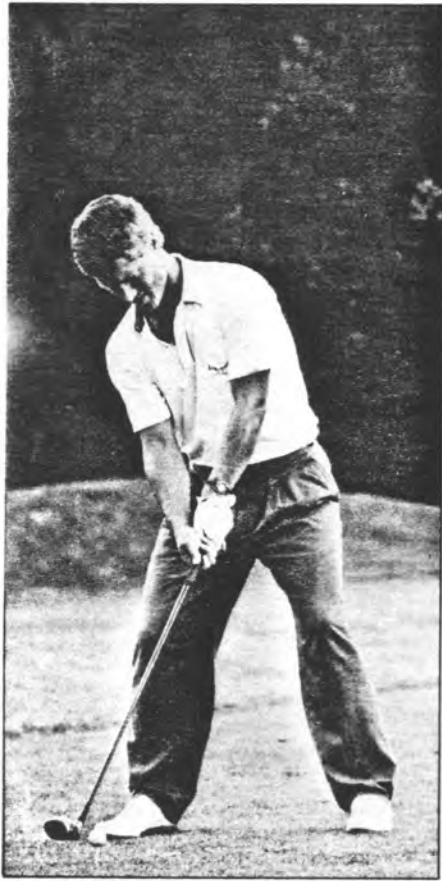
After the TPC event Murray returned to Canada to prepare for the long drive in Vancouver. Preparation means hours in the gym each day getting his body in just the right shape to perform at the optimum level.

"I will concentrate on my lower body. The legs are the most vital part of being able to hit the ball a long way. When I was at college and stopped riding my bicycle I started to lose distance, so I sold my car and gained 30 yards," he said.

"I do a lot of yoga exercises to keep supple and I believe that to perform well you must have a full range of motion. Yoga is also vital for good balance and the positive thinking aspects are a must," he said.

If confidence has anything to do with it then Kelly Murray certainly has a head start on his rivals and if, on June 6, he arrives at Vancouver's World Trade Centre on his bike then the other big hitters just may be playing for second place.

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Kelly Murray's leg action is very evident in this swing sequence and although it is not entirely conventional it certainly gets results. His stance is very wide, much wider than his shoulders and he has an exaggerated flex of the knees.

"By having a wide stance and really bending the knees you can set yourself up for a really wide turn and with the legs primed the whole body can be unleashed through the ball.

"I like to tee the ball very high and often set one tee peg into another to get the ball high enough.

"The drive must be hit with an ascending blow and you can't do that effectively unless the ball is teed high.

"I like to think I am launching that ball at a 45 degree angle to obtain maximum distance in the air. I like to think of extension when hitting the ball, I don't pick a spot on the fairway I aim at a cloud," Murray said.

Murray uses two drivers and nicknames them 'Big Daddy' and 'Little Daddy'. Big Daddy is three inches longer than standard while Little Daddy is conventional and is used on those tight driving holes or off the fairway (he doesn't use a three wood).

Although Murray had not sufficiently warmed-up for the photo shoot he was still carrying the ball 270-290 metres and with great accuracy.

His advice for all players — get the fundamentals right, get into shape, particularly the legs, then hit that ball as hard as you can. ■



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