

## SPORTS

## Canada's Murray a longshot in the golf world



## ON THE KEEN EDGE

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Three legendary golfers hit milestones in 1996 by winning their 100th competitions. I'm speaking of Jack, Jumbo and Kelly.

Recognize the first two? Of course you do.

Jack Nicklaus won The Tradition in Scottsdale, Ariz., on April 7, and collected \$150,000, raising his career tournament earnings to \$7,521,744. It was the Golden Bear's 10th Seniors' title which, coupled with 70 PGA victories and 20 wins in international tournaments, gave the 56-year-old idol of millions the magic number of 100.

In Japan it was Jumbo Ozaki who won his 100th on Nov. 17. The 49-year-old former pro baseball player captured the prestigious Dunlop-Phoenix tournament for the third consecutive year and pocketed ¥36 million, raising his career earnings to a whopping ¥1,947,282,414, more

than double Nicklaus' total. For Jumbo, 99 of his victories have come on the Japan PGA Tour, with one lone win overseas, the 1972 New Zealand Pro tournament.

"But who's the third golfer to reach the century mark in 1996?" you ask. It's not a surprising question. The little-known event took place on July 30 in Toronto when Canadian Kelly Murray won the Long Drive Contest at the Deloitte & Touche Tour Skills Challenge.

The win was Kelly's 100th in 125 long-drive tournaments, for which he collected \$2,000 in prize money. Asked what his career long-drive earnings are, Kelly confessed, "I guess that \$2,000 figure would be a good average for the 100 victories. At the low end I sometimes made only a few hundred dollars, but the best tournaments paid about \$10,000."

The 40-year-old native of Vancouver was in Japan this past week to promote his tie-up with new club maker Sunzen and the nutritional food PowerBar.

On Nov. 7, I journeyed to the driving range at the Tokyo Sports Center in Odaiba to see what the right equipment, a lot of power and a terrific swing can do to a golf ball. The results were amazing, bringing repeated "oohs" and "aahs" from the crowd that had braved the rainy night to see Murray's long-drive exhibition.

The Tokyo Sports Center's golf range fence is 200 yards out, and Murray was reaching it easily with his 5-iron during his warmups. When he finally pulled out his driver and cut loose, the ball sailed over the fence and landed in Tokyo Bay, roughly 350 yards from the tee.

Murray joked with the crowd on one of his last shots. "I'm going to deposit this one on top of the Tokyo Tower," he said. As the prodigious shot rose into the rain above the fence and headed straight toward the tower, it was easy to imagine the ball carrying all the way across the bay.

As he usually does, Murray ended his exhibition by asking for a volunteer to become a human tee from which he could launch his final moonshot. "Usually no one volunteers, and we all have a good laugh," said Murray after the exhibition. However, on this night, a brave (or stupid) soul's arm popped up right away.

Ryotaro Kikuchi, a senior at Waseda University, was the volunteer. Murray had Kikuchi lie down on a blue warmup jacket and started to position a tee on the 22-year-old's chin. Kikuchi, bold but clearly very nervous, could not keep his head from shaking and, after a few attempts at stabilizing the tee, Murray said, "Well, we've got to hand it to this young man for his bravery, but I don't want to try to hit a moving target."

Kikuchi got a big round of applause, as did Murray, and that was the end of a memorable demonstration.

Murray, for you trivia fans, is holder of the Guinness World Record for the longest drive. He hit a golf ball 684.8 yards on an airport runway in Fairmont Hot Springs, British Columbia. That may make some purists laugh, but Murray trained intensively for three months prior to the 1990 feat and bulked up his already sturdy 188-cm, 88-kg frame with seven extra kilos of muscle.

"Being the consistently longest driver in the world, why don't we hear more of you on the regular tour?" I ask.

"I am probably a 2 handicapper as far as my iron play goes. That means I'm down eight strokes by the end of a four-day tournament, and that usually means I finish somewhere between 25th and 40th. Prize money in that range usually is only double expenses, and you can't bank a lot of money that way. But winning the long-drive contests and the endorsements that follow help me make a comfortable living out of the sport I love."

Because he is so long off the tee, however, Murray gets a big gallery every time he plays in a tournament. "People know that, because I hit so far, I have a chance for a course record every time I go out. In 1986 I shot a Canadian Tour record of 60 at the Manitoba Open. That's just one stroke off the PGA record. And in the 1988 New Zealand Open I had eight birdies in nine holes, and just missed the ninth. Nine in a row would have been a world record."

Kelly might not be as well known as Jack or Jumbo, but since he consistently outdrives them by 50 to 100 yards and is an inspiration to every would-like-to-be-longer golfer in the world, try to see him drive the next time he's in town. You won't be disappointed.



Kelly Murray