



PAT HICKEY

Canada has its own long hitter

TRACY — John Daly captured the imagination of golf fans all over the world when he cranked up his driver and won the PGA championship earlier this month.

But when it comes to hitting the long ball, Daly is a piker when compared with Kelly Murray, who once hit a ball more than 600 yards.

The Vancouver native skipped yesterday's pro-am preliminary to the CPGA golf championship at Les Dunes in favor of a long-driving exhibition. As the participants in the pro-am quaffed a pre-dinner cocktail, Murray amused them by driving golf balls across the Richelieu River. He made the sponsor, Transamerica Life, happy by using a cardboard model of the Transamerica Tower in San Francisco as a tee.

Hitting the long ball has always been Kelly Murray's forte but he says that it has led to misconceptions about his ability to play golf.

"I think the success that John Daly had this year takes some of the pressure off me," said Murray. "Throughout my career, people have criticized me for relying too much on my driver but it's my best shot and I've always believed that I can drive past any potential trouble."

"There are times when I come up to a narrow fairway and people say I should be using a long iron," said Murray. "But I can remember Moe Norman saying: 'Narrow fairway? You can fit 1,000 golf balls across that fairway.'"

Murray says most of the big names in golf have been big hitters, starting with Arnold Palmer and continuing with Jack Nicklaus, Johnny Miller, Seve Ballesteros and now Daly.

"I've always believed that the game is driving, chipping and putting," said Murray. "I'm known for hitting the long ball but I think I can do some other things. When I go into long-drive contests, most of the other guys in the competition are just guys who can hit the ball long. When they play in tournaments, they usually miss the cut. I make the cut in 80 per cent of the tournaments I play."

The long-drive contests have become a lucrative sideline for Murray, who set a world record of 684.8 yards with a drive that had a generous roll down an airport runway at Fairmont Hot Springs in B.C. He also had a drive of 422.3 yards off the roof of the Pan Pacific Hotel in Vancouver and he has a long string of drives over 350 yards under more conventional circumstances. He has been the Canadian, B.C. and Washington State long-drive champion and is thinking about taking a run at the U.S. championships next month in Florida.

"I have to make a decision," said Murray. "The competition is the same week as the (Tournament Players Championship in Caledon, Ont.). I'd like to play there but there are advantages if I win the U.S. long-driving championship. The money is good and it could lead to some invitations to play tournaments in the U.S."

Murray says he enjoys demonstrating his power off the tee. As a bonus, it helps him pay his expenses.

"For example, this exhibition tonight will pay my expenses for the week," said Murray. "When you don't have to worry about hotels or caddy fees, it takes some of the pressure off."

Murray, who will celebrate his 35th birthday next week, has played all over the world but he has never qualified as a regular on the PGA Tour or the European Tour.

"I missed qualifying for the PGA Tour by two strokes and the European Tour by one stroke," said Murray. "I don't think it's too late to get on the PGA Tour. When you've only missed by two strokes over eight rounds of golf, you know that you're close."

In the meantime, Murray says he scrambles a lot to find paydays. While he prefers playing in North America, he took a month off after the Manitoba Open to play in Asia and finished eighth in a tournament in Taiwan.

He's 38th in the Order of Merit for this year's Canadian Tour but he could have been higher except for two unfortunate incidents which illustrate how important a stroke or two can be.

At the Manitoba Open, he missed a starting time after a rain delay. He was penalized two strokes and wound up missing the cut by one.

At last week's Quebec Open, he again missed the cut, this time because he was trying to be a good guy. When playing partner Michel Boyer was putting, Murray pulled the pin from the hole so that Boyer wouldn't incur a two-stroke penalty for hitting the stick. Instead, Murray was penalized for illegally removing the pin. Those two strokes represented the margin by which he missed the cut.