

Canadian pro real driving force

TORONTO GLOBE & MAIL
SEPT 14/87

Murray puts fun back into golf

Vancouver's Kelly Murray doesn't study the line of a putt. He explores it. He doesn't hit a golf ball. He attacks it.

So what if Murray isn't leading the Canadian Professional Golfers Association championship at the Scarborough Golf and Country Club this week? The point is, he is Canada's most entertaining young professional golfer.

The 31-year-old Murray is an endangered species. He enjoys golf rather than deriving some masochistic pleasure from suppressing every emotion he feels. Here's a fellow who hits golf balls from the roofs of hotels, uses a 44-inch driver he calls Little Daddy and a 49-inch weapon he knows as Big Daddy, and constantly encourages his opponents. And means it.

And like his brother-in-golfing-spirit Moe Norman, Murray generates endless stories. He lost his clubs this year and put a notice in a Vancouver newspaper pleading that they be returned since "they're the only ones I have." Most pros have backup sets, but Murray didn't. Charmed life he's got, though. The clubs were returned.

Then there's his long driving. On Aug. 24, Murray drove a ball 422.3 yards into the ocean from the roof of the Pan Pacific Hotel in Coal Harbor, B.C., surpassing the previous world mark for the longest drive at sea level set by British pro Tony Jacklin in 1974, also from the top of a Vancouver hotel. It was the 50th long-driving contest Murray had won in 55 attempts.

Murray is beginning to earn a decent living from the long-driving exhibitions. About time, too. He needs some money after years of globe-trotting without many happy returns. He has had enough of the Asian tour, to cite one arena in which he has suffered. His sixth time this



past winter was his last.

"Going to Asia was a mistake," Murray said at Scarborough, where he's shot 75 and 78 in the opening rounds. "I'm allergic to mosquitos. And I can't stand eating nothing but Chinese food for 2½ months. Plus we play on scrubby ground, jungle courses, too narrow for my game."

Most good courses are too narrow for Murray. He has enough touch for the short game and putting, but he doesn't like to hold back on the full swings.

"That's like asking an alcoholic not to take a drink," said fellow pro golfer Jim Nelford, who has advised Murray more than once on the importance of course management.

Murray has his own way of managing courses. At Scarborough in the first round, he drove one ball 50 yards left of the fifth fairway and into a creek, then on the next hole smashed one so high and deep into the woods one would have thought he might find elephants in there. One thing he didn't find was his ball.

Still, Murray deserves credit. Most golfers turn themselves into mechanical men. Murray golfs with an abandon that reminds one of Seve Ballesteros and Greg Norman. He's fun to watch. And he can burn up a course when he's hot.

Last year, for example, Murray shot a 10-under-par 60 in the first round of the Manitoba Open at Winnipeg's Southwood Club. He did so without having hit a practice shot on the course. But then came rounds of 73 and 77. Typical Murray stuff.

Like his friend Norman, Murray thinks of extension when hitting the ball. His target isn't the flag. It might be a cloud or even Toronto's CN Tower. Anything to get him thinking "out there" and stretching, which is easy for Murray since he practices yoga.

Anybody wondering how Murray can launch a golf ball so far need only ask him. The response might be unusual, though, as John Gordon, editor of the Canadian golf magazine Score, discovered. "I sold my car and gained 30 yards," Murray explained to him.

It's simple, really. Murray cycled more after selling his car. That translated into better physical condition, which meant longer drives.

It's hard to believe Murray could get in better shape. His waist is narrower than a fairway on a U.S. Open course and his shoulders wider than a fairway on a public course. He is as flexible as a dancer and also happens to be so good looking, in a Gary Cooperish sort of way, that you'd think he'd make a fortune from endorsements if he could win some tournaments.

More than anything, Murray wants to win tournaments. "I want to be known as more than a long driver," he says.

Well, you gotta believe. But then Murray will pull out Big Daddy. He'll turn so far behind the ball that his back has shifted more than 180 degrees from the starting position, transfer his weight violently at the top of his swing from his right to his left side and absolutely kill the poor golf ball.