

A handicap, you say? Just watch!



MIKE HENSEN The London Free Press

HERE TO WIN: Despite losing his left arm and leg in an electrical farming accident, Robert MacDermott is the defending champion at the Canadian Amputee Golf Championship this year at Forest City National. "I didn't come here to lay up," says the Edmonton golfer, who commonly hits drives of more than 300 yards.

You'd never know Robert MacDermott plays with a handicap if you looked at the leaderboard this week at the Canadian national amputees open at Forest City National. Not just one handicap but two.

FORE THE RECORD

The Edmonton golfer plays with both an artificial left arm and leg, replacing limbs he lost in an electrical accident while helping out on his father's farm back in 1987.

On the way to the hospital to be treated for serious burns, which led to the amputations he was thrown from the ambulance and suffered more injuries.

What might surprise you about MacDermott's story is that he's a tremendous golfer, the envy of a lot of others with two goods legs and arms.

The defending champion shot 74-74-75 for 213, finishing second to Australia's Geoff Nicholas. Nicholas shot a final-round 4-under-par 68, to finish at 214. His first two scores were 74-72.

Tournament organizer Ron Versteegen says players like MacDermott and Nicholas best demonstrate what amputees are capable of doing on and off the golf course.

"This isn't a novelty (sport). Some people hear about amputee tourneys and they say, 'Oh, I feel so sorry.'

"Then they see the scores in the paper and they say, 'Wow! These are legitimate golfers and the competition is fierce.'"

MacDermott says he's like everyone else at the tourney. He came to be with his peers



MACDERMOTT: Lining up a shot.

from across Canada, renew friendships and perhaps show the public and other amputees what goals they can achieve.

Mostly, he came here to win after a third-place finish in last week's U.S. nationals when he shot 73-72-71.

"All in all, it was a good tournament. I couldn't keep up with Geoff's putter," he said.

"I'm going to have to take a hand off Nicholas to beat him — he's only missing a foot.

"To put it in perspective, for a lot of us our focus is on ability, not the disability.

"This tournament raises the profile of amputee golf and, hopefully, inspires others to continue with the game because it has a lot to offer."

Former Londoner Liz Walker, whose husband Doug also played in the tourney, says there's a sense of community and comfort within the group.

"New amputees realize, hey, I can do that do," she says. "There's a sense of of belonging.

"This is also about getting a bunch of people together with a common bond.

"That is, they love golf and they obviously have had an amputation and overcame incredible odds."

One of those is 66-year-old Jeanette Kneider of Toronto. She had her left leg amputated at the knee a year ago to rid herself of unbearable pain from circulation problems.

Walker, a close friend, says Kneider has been "just dying to golf."

"Her world world crashed. The first thing she wanted to do was to be able to drive the car. The second was to golf."

Unfortunately, because of pain from her new prosthesis, Kneider could only play a few holes on the first day of the three-day event.

It mattered little.

"My granddaughter found this group (amputees association) on the Internet," Kneider says. "It's been fantastic.

"This is the greatest support group. They know exactly what I am going through. It means friendship. You can play in tournaments almost every week.

"I just hope Tiger Woods doesn't join."