

Amputee golfers drive to limit

By Chris Cariou

BOB MacDermott's golf bag reads, in bold gold letters: Life Without Limitations.

It's his sponsor's slogan, to be sure. But the fact is, the 47-year-old Edmontonian has severe physical limitations that are only compounded by the challenges a golf course presents. Just as clear is that he has overcome them, as have the other 87 competitors at the 2003 Canadian Amputee Golf Championship at Southwood this week.

MacDermott birdied the last two holes to shoot a one-over-par 72 yesterday and claim a share of the first-round lead with Australian favourite Geoff Nicholas, the leg amputee who beat him for the Canadian Open title last year. There are competitors from South Africa, England, Australia, the U.S. and Canada at the event, which winds up tomorrow.

"Geoff's been the guy to beat, no doubt about it," the svelte MacDermott said, sipping on a beer after coming off the 18th green with Mike Lincoln of Liverpool, England, Florida's Hank Roe and Snowflake-born Tom Rinn, the 21-year-old Winnipeg resident who led Canada to the 2003 World Amputee Hockey Championship in Finland last winter.

"He's been the world champ for 10 to 12 years I think and I was the runner-up to him last year," MacDermott said. "It's nice to be even with him starting out. At least he's still in sight. A lot of times he can be 10 to 12 ahead of you at this point. Maybe we have to get him drunk or steal his clubs or something."

Throughout the back nine yesterday, that was MacDermott — joking in between shots with a lone spectator or kibitzing with the other three golfers. He's been a Canadian champion and is one of the best amputee golfers in the world. Seeing him play with prostheses on his left arm and left leg, and watching him swing with no right thumb either, is an amazing sight.

What he simply calls a bad day in 1987 is something most of us would consider the day from hell.

He was operating a cultivator on his farm near Kindersley, Sask., trying to negotiate the huge machine around a power pole when it got caught up in an electrical wire. He got off his tractor — "It was

just a dumb mistake," he said — and got tangled up in the wires himself, severely burning his left arm and right hand.

But the story only gets worse.

"En route to the hospital — they saved my life on the way from Kindersley to Saskatoon — two tires blew on the ambulance and we rolled three times and I went out the back end into a field," MacDermott says. "And that's where the limitations started, just basically fighting for your life."

His left arm and the thumb on his right hand were amputated as a result of the electrical accident, and his left leg had to be amputated because of the ambulance mishap. But today, 16 summers later, MacDermott is the best amputee golfer Canada has.

Ralph Warrington, the tournament chairman at Southwood who lost his right leg as a result of a long fall from a ladder in 1989 that broke the limb in 17 places, said MacDermott is good for the game.

"You can't stop Bob," he said. "He's worked so hard developing. He's absolutely amazing. And he spends so much time encouraging new amputees to get involved. When they look at him, they say, 'Hell, if he can do it — good Lord, look at all the parts he's got missing — I can do it too."

"He's a great ambassador for amputee golf."

MacDermott only took up golf in 1985, two years before the horrific accidents that claimed two limbs and a digit. But he fell in love with it and it helped him overcome the shock of losing an arm, a leg and a thumb.

He tells anyone who wants to listen — and shows them, on the fairways and on the greens — that amputees are no different from anyone else and that losing a limb doesn't have to mean the end of the world.

The first year after his injury, MacDermott was shooting in the mid-80s — for nine holes. "It was painful," he said. But two years after his injury, he was playing to a seven-handicap at the Saskatchewan Amateur Championship. He was a three-handicapper in Year 3 and is now a two-handicapper.

"It can happen to you tomorrow," he said. "But I think what we're trying to say is the limitations don't have to limit you. You don't have to not want to play hockey like Tom, you don't have to not want to moun-



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MacDermott: going for another championship

tain-climb, water-ski, golf, and to play at a competitive level.

"Through technology and determination and hard work... like anybody else, you're not focusing on the disability; you're focusing on the ability. That's the key: It's attitude. We're working with what we've got left and with the best of what we've got. We're using technology and the mind and game management to do the best we can."

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