



# The Canadian Amputee and Disabled Open Comes to Alberta

By Gord Montgomery

Don't judge a book by its cover, or a golfer by his handicap. That has never been truer, especially when one looks at the world of disabled golf.

Speaking about the success of the 2019 Canadian Amputee and Disabled National Open Championship, held in Okotoks at the River's Edge GC, Calgary resident Vic McClelland noted that while that event was successful, this segment of the sport has a ways to go in the world of disabled athletics. After all, the goal of many, worldwide, is to become part of the Paralympic Games.

The national championship is virtually a newborn, having teed up for the first time in 2016, said McClelland, who at that time was a board member of the Canadian Amputee Golf Association. "Using what I found from 2014 having played with other golfers from Europe and Asia, we developed a plan to follow their lead with our association. In 2015 we had the first national Disabled and Amputee Open."

McClelland, who was ranked 42nd in the world in amputee/disabled golf as of December 1, 2019, said Canada is falling behind in making disabled golf

as inclusive as blind golf and Special Olympics golf. "We're trying, but there's still a long way to go," he emphasized.

The latest national final this past summer saw Jesse Florkowski from Medicine Hat, and playing to a zero index, walk away with the title with rounds of 75-71-74 to edge Chris Biggins by one stroke in the 54-hole event. This tournament marked the first time that World Disabled Golfer Ranking points could be achieved in Canada, with 20 players slotting into that category. Players were divided into two divisions based on handicap with players under 18.5 in a stroke play format, and players over 18.5 playing in net Stableford.

At Okotoks, players wishing to compete for the championship title played from the blue tees which were set at approximately 6,300 yards. Senior and Super Senior players and players with a handicap under 25 had the option of playing from the white tees at 5,900 yards while Super Super Senior players, females, and players with a handicap over 25 could, if they wished, play from the red tees at 5,300 yards.

This year's event included golfers with other disabilities such as cerebral palsy, scoliosis, varying degrees of paralysis, amputees and even a para-golfer!

The Okotoks event, said McClelland, hopefully leads to bigger things not only event-wise but also player-wise as the years go by. But, he again stated, it's tough to draw new players into this component of the game given the stigma some people place on disabled persons and the difficulties many have in getting from one part of Canada to another in order to take part, competitively or socially, in the national final.



Californian Dennis Duchi plays with a paragolfer rig

"It has grown a bit. The Canadians the year before this was about the same number of people, but the year before that it was substantially less. We only had about 32 players this past year," despite it being the first World Ranking event, but at the same time that fact helped draw in extra competitors. "We had a gentleman from California come up. It's growing but the big challenge in Canada is travel."

One person witnessing the abilities on display at the championship in Okotoks was Kevin Smith from Alberta Golf, who noted that these guys can play. He also pointed out that the provincial amateur golf association welcomes all into its fold.

"Alberta Golf is for everyone and there's no better example of that than amputee and disabled golf," Smith, Alberta Golf's Director of Communications, said. "Watching golfers compete at River's Edge and also seeing amputee golfer Bob MacDermott compete at the Alberta Senior Men's Championship in Edmonton against able-bodied golfers was very inspiring."

"What blew me away was the variety in high tech adaptive equipment for disabled and amputee golfers. I saw people playing while sitting in adaptive seats, the golf clubs had hooks for amputee golfers. No matter what the disability there's technology out there to help them make a full swing. It's awesome." With the 2020 national final to take place in Manitoba, McClelland is hoping that his message, and the humble beginnings to this segment of inclusive golf will lead to bigger things in the future for all involved. ■



President of the CAGA, Kristian Hammer