

Ames finds a course worthy of Canadian Open



LORNE RUBENSTEIN
rube@sympatico.ca

MAPLE, ONT.

What a course," Stephen Ames said Monday on the fifth tee at the Eagles Nest Golf Club in Maple, just north of Toronto. Ames was playing in ScoreGolf magazine's annual awards day, and was recognized later in the day as the Canadian male tour pro of 2006.

Ames praised the Doug Carrick-designed course start to finish. There was something ironic about this, given that Davis Love III was nearby at the Angus Glen Golf Club's North course in Markham, where he reviewed changes he had made to that Carrick course for July's Canadian Open.

Carrick wasn't hired to build a course suitable for the Canadian Open. He and Jay Morrish were recruited to do a high-end public course. Love, a PGA Tour player and architect, was hired because of the belief he would talk up the course. His involvement, supposedly, would entice more big-name golfers to the Canadian Open.

But Love revealed that only Mike Weir has been asking about the changes. Meanwhile, Carrick has had to cope with the impression that he can't design a tournament course. Ames dismissed that notion while playing Eagles Nest at its full yardage, 7,476 yards. He hit 17 greens in regulation and made 17 pars and one bogey, on the 359-yard, par-four fifth hole, the shortest on the course. He shot one-over 73, missing about a dozen putts inside 15 feet, many from six to eight feet.

Ames had practised on the weekend at the Glen Abbey Golf Club in Oakville, Ont., with his coach Sean Foley, and was using the round to sharpen his swing for this week's PGA Tour stop in Memphis, Tenn., and for next week's U.S. Open at the Oakmont Country Club near Pittsburgh. Should his putting near the standard of his ball striking, watch out.

On the 10th hole, Ames had 165 yards to an elevated green. The shot was playing perhaps 15 yards longer because of the elevation. He went after a 6-iron and pulled it slightly. The ball finished on the back of the green, 45 feet from the hole. His putt had eight feet of break along a soft-but-continuous slope. It slid just by the right side.

"This is good design," Ames said. "I missed left and had that [treacherous] putt. Imagine if the green was as fast as it would be in a tournament. You pay the penalty for playing away from the flag."

Ames was referring to the fact that the hole was put on the right side of the green, beyond a massive waste bunker below. He'd taken the bunker out of play with his approach to the left.

"But if you want to go at the hole, you have to take on that stuff," Ames said of the fearsome bunker. "You don't want to go there."

Could the course hold a Canadian Open? Absolutely, Ames said, although he suggested a few places where



You have to shape your ball off the tees and into the greens and use your imagination around the greens ... It's a good test. It's a great test.

Stephen Ames, on Eagles Nest near Toronto

cross-bunkers could be removed and a tee added. As for the final hole, a 484-yard par four with water down the right side, Ames pronounced it the strongest on the course. He hit a "little" 5-iron from 200 yards that finished 25 feet behind the hole.

"You have to shape your ball off the tees and into the greens," Ames said, "and use your imagination around the greens," because of the fall-offs into chipping and pitching areas. "It's a good test. It's a great test."

And what about the Presidents Cup at the Royal Montreal Golf Club in September? Ames is 15th in the standings for the International team.

Ten players will qualify automatically, and captain Gary Player will have two picks. Player said Monday during a news conference at Royal Montreal that he wouldn't pick Ames and Mike Weir just because they're Canadians.

"Is this a sentimental tournament or is it to try and win?" Player asked.

"If I make the team automatically, great," said Ames, who has no particular affection for Player. "I can't do anything about whether he'll pick me. I don't worry about it."

Ames has been told that Nick Price will captain the International side for the 2009 Presidents Cup at Harding Park in San Francisco, and that Greg Norman will take on the role at the 2011 event in his native Australia. If Ames doesn't make it to Royal Montreal, well, he could make one or both of those teams.

Not that it matters much to him, at least at the moment. On Monday, Ames was happy to be at Eagles Nest. He'd like to return there - for the Canadian Open, preferably.