Ames finds a course worthy of Canadian Open

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"What a course," Steve 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 Denis 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 Morish were recruited to do a high-end public course. Love, a PGA Tour player and architect, was hired because of the belief he would take up the course. His involvement, supposedly, would entice more big-name players 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 length, 7,495 yards. He hit 17 greens in regulation and made 9 pars and one bogey, on 399, 319, 331, 310 and 490 yards, par-four fifth hole, the shortest on the course. He shot one-over 73, missing a simple putt inside 15 feet several times from six to eight feet.

Ames had practiced 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 improve, the standard of his ball striking, watch out. On the 17th hole, Ames had his yardage to an elevated green. The shot was pinning up perhaps 10 yards longer because of the elevation. He went left 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 past by the right side.

"This is good design," Ames said. "I missed left and had that [cuyền] 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. He'd taken the bunker out of play with his approach to the left.

"If you want to go at the hole, you have to take on that stuff," Ames said of the formidable 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 more bunkers could be removed and a tee added. As for the final hole, a 491-yard par-four with water down the right side, Ames pronounced it the strongest on the course.

"You have to share your ball off the tees and into the greens," Ames said. "Use your imagination around the greens, because of the fall-off into the 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 on 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 would 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 make the team automatically, great," said Ames, who has no particular affinity 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 2006 Presidents Cup at Harding Park in San Francisco, and that Greg Norman will take on the role at the 2007 event in his native Australia. If Ames doesn't make it to Royal Montreal, 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.