

Eagles Nest is best new course



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Golf World magazine's current issue focuses on next week's U.S. Open at the Shinnecock Hills Golf Club and includes a lengthy story on the nearby courses in Long Island. That magazine, or any golf publication for that matter, might do something similar come Bell Canadian Open time in September at the Glen Abbey Golf Club in Oakville, Ont.

The reason behind this thinking is the huge number of courses in and around Toronto, especially the new ones. Toronto isn't the centre of the Canadian golfing world, and this column isn't meant to offend readers across the country who think enough attention is already paid to the area. But there's no denying what's going on in the Greater Toronto Area. Whether all the development makes economic sense is another matter. The marketplace will determine that.

For one, there's the much-bally-hooded Eagles Nest Golf Club,

about 20 minutes northeast of Pearson International Airport. Doug Carrick designed this public course, which opened on May 17 and charges a \$190 green fee, and he has outdone himself. Magazines might as well hand the best new course award to Eagles Nest. It's hard to imagine anything better.

Eagles Nest was built on what was a sand and gravel yard next to a former landfill site. Carrick had enough dirt moved to build five courses. He created a course with enormous high mounds that frame fairways and provide views of downtown Toronto. Eagles Nest puts one in mind of Waterville, a wild Irish links.

The course is super tough and plays 7,476 yards from the back tees.

Director of golf Euan Dougal expects plenty of public interest and some 50 corporate events this year. Anybody who plays should study the clever green sites. The 12th and the 14th holes, in particular, reward study.

It will be interesting to see how well golfers will cope with the ferocious layout, and it is ferocious, whatever tees a player uses. Eagles Nest is more suited to tour professionals than to the average golfer, who should forget about posting a score and just enjoy the design and surroundings. The Royal Canadian Golf Association need look no fur-

ther than this course for another Canadian Open site.

As it happens, the RCGA's executive director, Stephen Ross, visited the property last year. He said the other day that he wasn't looking at it as a possible Canadian Open site. Maybe not, but the owners haven't built such a powerful track without thinking of its tournament possibilities.

"I was impressed with it," Ross said this week. "The vistas are beautiful. I suppose we'll look at it as a host for the Open. But there's so much more to hosting an Open than the course. There's the clubhouse, moving people around, and other things."

The clubhouse at Eagles Nest is 35,000 square feet, but it sits almost on top of the last green. There's no room for spectators behind the green, as there is at Glen Abbey. Spectator stands could be built out into the lake to the right of the green. Crowd movement could be a problem in a few spots, but any difficulties can be overcome. The course is there. It would test Mike Weir, Tiger Woods and all their colleagues.

Eagles Nest isn't the only new course drawing attention. Club-Link Corp.'s 27 holes at the Glencairn Golf Club are full of pot bunkers. Glencairn is the course that Tom McBroom designed in Milton, a half-hour west of the air-

port. A rail line that is still in use runs through the property. There's something of the look of the Muirfield Golf Club's holes and clubhouse. McBroom, like Carrick at Eagles Nest, has done some of his best work here.

On the other side of the city, Gord Stollery, the co-owner of Angus Glen Golf Club in Markham, has contracted English architect Donald Steel to build 27 holes. Stollery recently said he hadn't decided whether the course will be public or private. Steel envisages the holes running through the valleys and hills on the property.

Not far away, on rolling land in Uxbridge, a group of investors has hired Tom Fazio to build a private course. Construction is about to start. Alan Chud, one of the founders of Wooden Sticks in the area and an accomplished architect in his own right, is managing the project, which will include an 18-hole course, a 40-acre practice area and 10 practice holes.

This is all happening in an area where good golf can be played six months a year at best. It's happening during a time when participation in golf is stagnant at best. No city in North America has more courses, old and new or under construction. Amazing? That it is. Hard to figure? For sure.