

Distractions slow Nelford

By TOM MALONEY
What makes Vancouver native Jim Nelford the hottest Canadian prospect on the PGA tour?

If the 23-year-old Nelford can harness his emotions during the Cana-

dian Open, he'll show us. His nerves may have to be constructed of galvanized steel though.

Nelford's wife, Margie, is expecting their first baby anytime this week. He met her while on a golf

scholarship at Brigham Young University in Utah, and they now keep an apartment in nearby Orem for the sake of convenience and economics. He'd like a house in Vancouver.

Furthermore, he calls the Canadian Open the most important personal stop on the PGA tour. At the same time, he is fighting to win a place among the exclusive list of Top Golfers, those who

are not required to qualify among the 100 or so Monday morning rabbits.

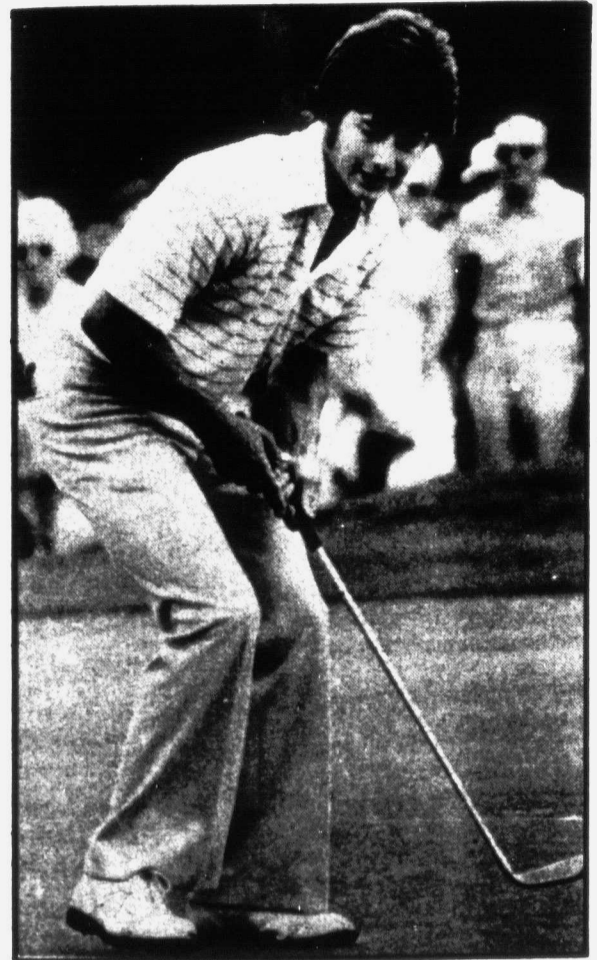
Adding to and sustaining the pressure, Nelford says he'd like to gain his first PGA title this year. The Canadian Open would be markedly convenient.

Given that patriotism that influences Canada's golf fans, Nelford is a golfer likely to be inundated with attention in the near future. International Management Group is banking on it, as a matter of fact. IMG, which is to sports agencies as Exxon is to oil, signed Nelford to a three-year contract last year, agreeing to pay all expenses for the Nelfords in return for 20 per cent of his income. Nelford grossed about \$60,000 including \$29,959 (87th place) in official prize money last year, and is thus far making out like Butch Cassidy with the IMG deal.

IMG is not, of course, investing in Nelford solely because he is Canadian, although George Knudson's endorsement throne has lain in wait for some time. Nelford has obvious potential. Brigham Young's golf team won an unprecedented seven consecutive tournaments during the NCAA season, with two of the team's golfers finishing one-two in each tournament. The five golfers — Nelford, Pat McGowan (second, 1978 Canadian Open), Mike Brannon, Mike Reid and John Faught — all compete on the tour, and each is looking for his first win.

Nelford earned his PGA card on his first try in November, 1977, after winning the 1977 Western Amateur and the 1975 and 1976 Canadian Amateur titles. His drives are relatively long and his unique left handed putting stroke is stable. This year, he finished 10th in the Bing Crosby Pro-Am at Pebble Beach and won the unofficial World Under-25 championship last year.

What with the



Jim Nelford: Concentration a must.

scholarship, the university success, the amateur titles and the IMG contract, the carpet to the end of the golfing rainbow — and its pot of gold — seems to be laid out for Nelford.

So what prevents the good-looking Nelford from becoming Canada's most acclaimed golfer? The mental side of the game.

Like many golfers, Nelford entered a period during his first year when he agonizingly questioned his abilities.

"When I first came out I was awed by everything," Nelford says while sitting in an Ohio hotel room that looks strikingly similar to the one from the previous week. "All the idols I had through junior and college ... and then I'm on the same course with them. It took a little time to adjust."

"There were times when I was wondering if I'd ever get into a tournament. It was a very trying time. You had to figure out what makes what go. It was very frustrating."

"I did a lot of soul-searching," says Nelford. "I can't really point to anyone in particular who helped me through it. There are a lot of people on the tour who will tell you that you have lots of talent, but that won't get you to play better golf. You've got to convince yourself."

The Sunday duffer who can recall two consecutive drop shots into the lake might easily sympathize with those words, particularly when considering that Nelford must compete against the best golfers in the world.

Now he uses a magic word — concentration. To Nelford, it is a mental plateau he must reach, a place that will allow him to mix lessons from experience, physical ability, confidence and pride into a combination for professional tour success.

The tour golfer has to do much more than hit the ball. He has to think about hitting the ball (and therein lies the joy of knowledgeable fan obser-

vation). There is the money a bad shot can cost Nelford; and the people who will scoff when he strikes a bad shot; and the people in Canada who watch his scores; and those who wonder whether he's actually good enough in the first place to make the shot; and the question of how in the world he can compete with Nicklaus and Watson and Trevino.

"When I first started, there was a lot of pressure in the first two rounds to make the cut, because it was your livelihood," says Nelford, who turns 24 on June 28. "If you miss the cut or miss in the qualifying round, you might not get into a tournament for another couple of weeks."

"After I started making the cuts, I often had a let-down on the weekend. Now I've been able to equal out the pressure between the first two and the last two rounds."

Nelford has had to qualify only twice this year, and, after a five-week layoff to give a shoulder injury healing time, he came back for a 26th placing at the Colonial in Fort Worth, Texas.

"If I finished in the top 26 in every tournament, I'd finish in the top 60," he said after that feat.

The development of his concentration powers will be put to its most severe test this week. As if the pressure of playing in the Canadian Open and expecting their first child is not enough, he'll be faced with one of the world's most challenging golf courses in Glen Abbey. He says he'll just try to make par.

"Sure, there will be a feeling," he says. "It's great to know there's a country behind you. It gives me something different from all the American players on the tour. But if you're not making it for yourself, you're not making it for your country, either."

And now for a little concentration



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