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LRTO: Putting math works for McCarron

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Scott McCarron doesn't consider himself to be some kind of math wiz, but to hear him talk about his new approach to reading putts, you might think he was an MIT graduate.

"It seems very difficult and confusing when I explain it," said the three-time PGA Tour winner, who tees off at 8:17 a.m. today in the first round of the Legends Reno-Tahoe Open at Montreux Golf & Country Club. "Once you do it, it's so easy, it's unbelievable."

That's up for debate, but all that matters is the results, and there's no arguing that they're much improved. McCarron is having his best year putting since 2003.

"It's a great way to read greens," he said. "It's certainly helped my game."

The system was designed by Mark Sweeney, who invented the technology for AimPoints, "the blue line that reads the greens (on The Golf Channel events)," McCarron said.

The tour always sets pin placements on slopes of 0.5 degrees to 3.0 degrees, McCarron said.

The mathematical system takes into account the slope, which players can determine by taking levels and other measuring devices with them during practice rounds, and the pace of putts, determined by a Stimpmeter.

It also helps that players have a general idea of where the four pin placements are going to be.

McCarron, one of a handful of players on tour who uses a long putter, calculates those two factors to reach the break on any given

putt.

"If you have an idea what the percentage of slope is, whether it's 1, 2, 3 or 2.5, those

types of things, and if you know what the Stimp is, then all you do is plug in (the numbers)," he said.

What's truly remarkable is the miniscule change it has provided and how important that change is. McCarron is averaging 1.766 putts per hole, 62nd on tour. Last year he had his worst putting year since 2002 --100th with an average of 1.790. His best year in that span was 2003, when he averaged 1.741, which ranked 18th.

So, the difference between his best and worst year was .049 putts per green, or about one putt every 20 holes. That's basically the difference between being the 18th-best putter on tour and the 100th-best putter on tour. To put it in dollar terms, the difference between the 100th player and the 18th player on last year's money list was about \$1.5 million.

"I'm definitely stroking the putt with a lot more confidence because now I have an idea," he said. "I'm confident in what it's going to do, where before, you were guessing."

GRONBERG, BERGANIO OUT; HJERSTEDT, MCROY IN

Wednesday morning saw two withdrawals -- Mathias Gronberg and David Berganio Jr. -- and two additions from the alternates list -- Gabriel Hjerstedt and Spike McRoy.

Gronberg, who is Swedish but has a home in Florida, had visa issues and was apparently not allowed to enter the country. He played in the Canadian Open last week in Oakville, Ontario.

No reason was given for Berganio's withdrawal, but a tournament spokesman said he had been dealing with an injury recently.

Hjerstedt, who is Swedish, and McRoy each have played in the LRTO multiple times. Hjerstedt has two PGA Tour wins. McRoy has one.

ODD STAT OF THE DAY

Former Wolf Pack golfer Charlie Wi is tied with three other players -- Pat Perez, Steve Stricker and Jesper Parnevik -- for the lowest round in relation to par this year -- an 11-under 61.

All four of those rounds were shot on the PGA West Course (three at the Palmer Course, one at the Nicklaus Course) in La Quinta, Calif., during the Bob Hope Classic.

THE SAVAGE 16TH

No hole in the history of the LRTO Has produced more "double-bogeys or worse" than the 183-yard 16th.

The hole is in the trees and fronted by a pond. Players have trouble judging the wind

there.

McCarron, who on Tuesday threw out the first pitch at the Reno Aces game, thinks it could be especially brutal today and throughout the weekend if the wind blows.

"I think the par-3 16th could be one of the toughest holes we play all year because of the swirling wind," he said.

The hole has been among the toughest holes on tour in years past, but last year there was relatively little wind and it played just .191 strokes over par. The 50th-toughest hole played .317 strokes over par.

NA WINs PRO-AM

Kevin Na's fivesome finished in first place during Wednesday's pro-am after shooting an 18-under-par 54.

Andres Romero's team finished in second with 57 and Todd Fischer's team was third.

Fifty teams competed in the pro-am.
