

Switch-hitting Rick Acton and his Indian-head pennies moved methodically to his third Ernst Washington **Open** Invitational championship at Bellevue's sun-splashed **Glendale** Golf & Country Club yesterday afternoon.

Swinging right-handed and putting from the left in his trademark fashion, Acton shot a 70 for a virtually error-free three-day 204 to place another oakleaf cluster on the Washington **Open** titles he won in 1979 and '81. He also won the 1994 Washington PGA Championship in April and the Northwest **Open** last September.

“I'm on a roll,” he said after yesterday's victory in his only concession of the day.

Tied for second two strokes back were Todd **Erwin**, winner of the past two Opens, and John McComish, plagued by errors in a frequently brilliant bid for his first **Open** championship. Bob Conrad of Overlake Golf & Country Club was top amateur at 212.

The victory earned Acton \$11,250 to go with the lucky coppers he carries through every round.

“I always mark the ball with this one,” he said, indicating one of three Indian-head pennies he pulled from his pocket during the victory interview, “- 1899, the year my grandfather was born.”

The coins rated an assist, but Acton needed little help.

The Sahalee pro started the day tied at the top with Mike Barnett, birdied the first hole and made his challengers play catch-up. Pursuit was difficult. Acton gave them nothing to act on. He clicked along almost flawlessly on the front end.

His one lapse was a bogey on the 17th hole but he promptly shrugged off the slip.

At 48 ((age)), Acton personifies the cliché, getting better not older.

“As far as ball-striking, that's about as solid as I can hit it,” he said. “Don't ask me why, but I'm playing better now than I have in years.”

He also explained his ambidextrous style. The first time he played golf, he borrowed his father's left-handed clubs, which were not available thereafter so young Acton switched to hitting right-handed. A natural left-hander, he stayed with putting from the left.

Orthodox swingers fired and fell back.

McComish, took a run at the pacemaker but ran into a double-bogey.

“I made 19 birdies in the tournament,” the bearded pro from Oak Knoll, Ore., said, “but I made a lot of errors.”

Playing in the same group with Acton, Barnett finished four behind the winner.

“My timing was off,” the Seattle Golf Club pro said. “I tried hard but I didn't hit many good iron shots and I wasn't putting well. But he didn't slip and give anybody a chance to get close. He didn't miss any greens.”

On a green flanked by two sand traps and a fountain-fed pond glittering in the sun, he sank his final putt of the tournament. He plucked the winner out of the cup and held the ball aloft to the crowd. He tipped his white visor. He shook hands with two rivals and hugged his caddy. Unusual, maybe, but Debbie Heaton is a Sahalee club champion whom Acton has been dating the past couple of years.

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