

If you're going to try something new, you might as well not hold anything back.

That must have been Jeff Gove's attitude Wednesday during the final round of the \$100,000 Ernst Washington Open at Glendale Country Club in Bellevue.

Having a lead in a golf tournament is something new for the 23-year-old from Seattle. He's been among the leaders during his high school career at Inglemoor High, and during college at Pepperdine, and even during his first year on the Nike Tour, but he never really had a lead before.

Before Wednesday that is, and his play on the 6,502-yard, par-71 course was so dominating he didn't have just an ordinary lead. After going out with a 31 on the front nine, he built an eight-stroke lead with seven holes to play.

"I've never had a lead like that, and I didn't know what to do," he said.

He learned quickly enough, righting himself from a slight stumble to finish with a 3-under 68. His 9-under 204 total for the 54 holes was worth \$11,250 for first place, plus at least another \$3,750 that's guaranteed with his entry in the Ernst Championship in August.

Seven strokes back in second place was Jeff Coston, a former Nike Tour player, who closed with a 66, the best round in the tournament, for a 2-under 211.

"This will help his confidence," Coston said about Gove's return to the Tour next week. "If he can hold it with him. Good players hold on to the good things and let go of the bad."

What Gove let go of in his two-week return home was his old putting grip. He spent some time last Friday with Sahalee pro Rick Acton and came away with new ideas.

"He showed me a couple of things and I went with them and it felt really good," Gove said.

The results bear him out. He didn't have a three-putt through the 54 holes and was nailing key putts all over the place on his front nine Wednesday.

Acton was impressed.

"Then he goes out and plays great, takes all my money (from the tournament purse), and I didn't even charge him," Acton said with a laugh. "He better give me some credit, or send me a shirt or something."

Gove's two biggest putts weren't even in his hot stretch of five birdies in six holes on the front side. His first key putt was an uphill 4-footer to save par on the first hole.

"That gave me a lot of confidence," he said.

The other big putt stopped some bleeding on the back side. After hitting the first 11 fairways and greens in regulation, Gove stood at 11-under on the 11th hole. His nearest competitor at the time, John Bowen of Portland, needed two to get out of the bunker on the 11th hole, and then missed a 4-foot bogey putt to drop from 5-under to 3-under, eight strokes back. This left Gove in unfamiliar territory.

"I've never had a big lead before."

From there, Gove found even more new territory. He pulled his next three drives into the rough and came away with bogeys on 12 and 13. After coming out of the bunker on 14 some eight feet past the pin, he was facing yet another bogey. Instead, he nailed the par-saving putt and ensured it would be a triumphant march

home rather and wobbly last few holes. "I'm realizing how much of a better player I am."

* Notes - Todd **Erwin**, an assistant at Canterwood, closed with a 70 for a 1-under 212 to lead a three-way tie for third. It was worth \$3,725. In the last four years, **Erwin** has finished first twice, tied for second and tied for third. ... Said Coston of his 66: "I was very committed on every shot; aggressive rather than second-guessing myself." His 66 included a three-putt for bogey on the second hole and a bogey on 17. ... Gove is the nephew of Astoria (Ore.) pro Mike Gove. Mike won this tournament in 1985 with Jeff as his caddy. ... Bruce Stewart of Molalla, Ore., aced the 187-yard 15th hole. Jim Wilkinson of Bend, Ore., holed out his second shot for eagle on the 377-yard 13th hole. ... The three-year contract with the option year to hold the tournament at **Glendale** has now run out. Both the sponsors and the conducting Pacific Northwest Section of the PGA have shown interest in keeping it at **Glendale**. It's now up to the club's members, and there's apparently no strong resistance.

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