

LAKEWOOD - The odds of a greenskeeper winning the Washington **Open** against more than 100 of the best pros in the Northwest seem remote.

As remote as fairway moles overrunning a pro shop. Or Tiger Woods joining the Nike Tour.

But there was **Keith Coleman** standing outside **Tacoma** Country and Golf Club with two trophies yesterday afternoon. One was for the overall championship and the other for being low amateur in a wire-to-wire triumph in the three-day event.

Only about one-third of the pros in the tournament knew who Coleman was when it started, a tournament official estimated. They know him now. And they can thank him for keeping his hands off the prize money. As an amateur, he won \$500 in merchandise. Defending champion Jeff Coston of Blaine finished second and took home the top prize money of \$11,000.

"I'll take the prize money, but I'd rather have the title," Coston said.

Sorry. This was Cinderella's year.

Coleman, 27, the assistant superintendent at Harbour Pointe Golf Course in Mukilteo, fired a 1-under-par 71 and birdied the final hole for a one-stroke victory over Coston, a former PGA Tour player. Coleman's three-day total was 10-under 206.

Playing one group ahead of Coleman, Coston did his best to force a playoff by finishing a 66 with a 51-foot eagle putt on the par-5 final hole.

Coleman started the final hole with a 328-yard drive and then poked a 6-iron from 180 yards to 22 feet from the pin. He two-putted for the biggest victory of his life.

"This whole three days hasn't sunk in yet, not even close," he said. The new champion is a solid athlete. He is 6 feet 4 and can dunk a basketball. He played three sports at Meadowdale High School in Lynnwood and was an all-state basketball player. He played two years at Edmonds Community College.

Coleman has worked on the greens crew at Harbour Pointe for six years. He started playing golf seriously about three years ago. One pro who has helped him the most is Harbour Pointe instructor Tom Sovay, who finished third yesterday.

Coleman's biggest victory had been in the 1995 Puget Sound Amateur. However, he had done well enough in various tournaments last year to win one of 10 berths on the amateur Hudson Cup team that absorbed its annual pasting from Northwest pros.

Why isn't Coleman a licensed pro like the others in the field so he could win money?

"It takes time and money, and I don't have both," he said, referring to the coursework, apprenticeship and pay cut such a move would entail.

Coleman became only the sixth amateur to win the **Open**, which began in 1922. Amateur Jeff Bloom won in 1986, and Fred Couples won as an amateur in 1978.

Coleman didn't three-putt yesterday. He hit 14 greens in regulation and rescued himself from the brink of trouble twice in the final three holes.