

Bill **Porter** said when it comes to protecting a lead in golf, he's no Tiger.

But by all other standards, he's still pretty elusive.

The 42-year-old ((age)) golfer from Quincy shot a 54-hole tournament total of 10-under-par 206 to win the 76th annual Merrill Lynch **Washington Open** by three shots at Meridian Valley Country Club yesterday.

After posting an opening-round 66 on Monday, **Porter** extended a two-shot lead to four in Tuesday's second round with a 3-under 69.

He watched his advantage dwindle to two shots on the back nine yesterday before finishing strong enough over the final three holes to outdistance Michael Combs (209) and Jeff Gove (210).

"I didn't really rest well last night," said **Porter**, a teaching pro at Lakeview Country Club. "I just kept thinking, 'How do I protect a four-shot lead?' It's very hard to play defense in golf. Tiger does it well."

Keith Lienes shot a final-round best score of 67 to catapult from 17th place into a fourth-place tie with Mark Olson at 211. Defending champion Jeff **Coston** finished in a five-way tie for 21st with a 217.

**Porter**, who collected the winner's check of \$7,150, added his first **Washington Open** championship to a crowded trophy case that includes three Northwest Opens, three Oregon Opens and the 2001 Pacific Northwest Club Championship title.

A victory at the Rosauers tournament in Spokane in July would cap his collection of major regional golf championships.

Having placed sixth at last fall's Western PGA Club Professional Championship in Calimesa, Calif., he'll gear up for next month's PGA Club Professional Championship at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Ky., June 20-23.

**Porter**, savoring yesterday's win while holding the crystal trophy, credited victory to his shot consistency and a short game he said held up under final-round pressure.

"I'm thrilled with the win," **Porter** said. "Overall, I think I hit the ball well and made putts when I needed to."

Brad Mombert of Quail Run Golf Club and Roger Thorn of the Members Club at Aldarra tied for low amateur at even-par 216, finishing in a six-way tie for 15th.

Mombert shot 4-under 68 on Monday, but blamed poor putting for shooting 74 the final two days.

"I'm happy, but also disappointed," he said. "It's disappointing the way I finished. I shot 68 and really hoped to challenge the pros."

NOTES: Proceeds from the 2002 **Washington Open** benefited the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

**Washington Open** officials announced adoption of the institution as tournament charity for the first time, presenting a hospital representative with a check for \$8,000 before the awards ceremony yesterday.