



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First-Round Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Ken Looper	62 (-9)
2	Kyoung-Hoon Lee	64 (-7)
3	Three players tied at	65 (-6)

Ken Looper cards 62 for first-round lead at the News Sentinel Open

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – Entering the week without a nagging shoulder pain for the first time in months, Ken Looper took advantage Thursday with an opening 9-under 62 to take the first-round lead at the News Sentinel Open presented by Pilot. Looper’s career-low leads Kyoung-Hoon Lee (64) by two shots at Fox Den Country Club in Knoxville, Tennessee.

“I’ve been working really hard this week on my ball striking, and I’m finally feeling like my shoulder’s not hurting everyday, so it’s nice to be able to get into some kind of rhythm with my swing,” Looper said. “It’s been bothering me pretty much the whole year, and it finally doesn’t hurt right now so it’s kind of nice.”

For much of this season, inflammation in his left shoulder created a pinch in his backswing that caused a two-way miss, hampering both his results and his ability to practice. He started thinking about applying for a medical extension at one point in the season, but it was too late he said.

“I’ve been hitting it pretty poorly, but the doctor told me you can either sit at home and not play golf or you can play with the pain,” Looper said. “You’ve just gotta find a way to keep pushing through. I couldn’t practice that much. I’m not hitting the ball well, and I couldn’t go out and hit balls or it will just make it worse.”

In recent weeks, he’d started to feel the shoulder turn for the better through his work with a chiropractor and physical therapist, and it felt great for the first time in a while upon his arrival in Knoxville.

It showed on Thursday in a round in which he hit every fairway and needed the putter only 23 times. Beginning the day on No. 10, Looper poured in his first birdie of the day – a 25-footer – at the par-4 12th and followed it up with a 15-footer at the 14th and a 10-footer at the 16th. He then reeled off five consecutive birdies from No. 18 – No. 4 to get to the top of the leaderboard. After a disappointing par at the par-5 fifth, the former LSU Tiger added another with a four-foot birdie at the par-4 eighth to grab a two-shot lead entering the second round.

“After a while, the hole looked like a bathtub. It was easy to see,” Looper said. “I hit the ball extraordinarily well, and I made almost everything. I made quite a few 20 footers out there.”

Looper, who enters the week at No. 122 on the money list, needs to make a significant charge over the next two events up the money list to get inside the top 75 and secure fully exempt status on the Web.com Tour next season and a berth in the Web.com Tour Finals. In 19 starts this season, he’s made 11 cuts but hasn’t finished inside the top 25.

“I haven’t had a great season so far, so this is quite a time for me to step up and keep my Web.com Tour card. Maybe even challenge to get my PGA TOUR card,” Looper said.

If he doesn't turn it around these last two weeks, he's well aware of what awaits. He's already signed up for it in fact, but he's trying to keep that out of his mind with two more weeks left to change his fate.

"I've already signed up for Q School because that's what can happen," Looper said. "But I'm just going out here and playing my normal game now that I can actually play my normal game and try not to think about it too much."

Lee's 7-under 64 came courtesy of his first hole-in-one in a professional event. After beginning on the back nine, Lee entered the par-3 sixth at 5-under and promptly dunked it from 162 yards with an 8-iron for his fourth career ace but first in competition.

"It felt so good. I saw the pin a little bit on the right side, and it hit the green and looked like it was going to the pin and it went in the hole," Lee said. "Unbelievable experience today. I'm happy."

Tyler Duncan (65), Jeff Gove (65), and Shaun Micheel (65) all sit in a share of third after recording 6-under 65s.

Thursday Notes:

* Thursday weather: Mostly Cloudy, High: 89, Winds: SW 5-10 mph.

* This week's purse is \$550,000 with \$99,000 going to the champion.

* Stephan Jaeger is in the hunt for his third win of the season after an opening 5-under 66. Jaeger, who lives in Chattanooga, is staying at home this week and could become the first player on the Web.com Tour this season to win three times. Jaeger is currently No. 3 on the money list with two events remaining and is looking to climb back into the top spot.

* Micheel, the winner of the 2003 PGA Championship, posted a bogey-free 6-under 65 that was his best round of the season. Micheel was a perfect 8/8 in scrambling.

* Jonathan Hodge, who was born in Knoxville, lives in Jasper, Tennessee now, but he found a return to the Volunteer State a welcome sight with a 4-under 67 Thursday. Hodge is currently No. 67 on the Web.com Tour money list and could use a high finish this week to lock up his Web.com Tour card for 2018 and a spot in this season's Web.com Tour Finals.

* Tyler Duncan, who enters the week at No. 30 on the Web.com Tour money list, is projected to jump into the top 25 after a 6-under 65 has him within three shots of the lead. Duncan has now broken 70 in his last nine rounds on the Web.com Tour.

* Fresh off a career-best runner-up finish at last week's Price Cutter Charity Championship, Talor Gooch opened with a 5-under 66. Gooch enters the week at No. 20 on the money list following his fourth top-10 of the season.

* Monday qualifier Andy Pope opened with a 5-under 66 and is in T6. Pope has made two starts on the Web.com Tour this season with a T17 at the Rex Hospital Open.

* MKurt Kitayama made a hole-in-one on Thursday as well, dunking a 7-iron from 184 yards at the par-3 second.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INTERVIEWS from today's play are available via the following FTP site:
website: <https://moveit.pgatourhq.com> <<https://moveit.pgatourhq.com/>>

Username: webcom_Highlights

Password: pgatour13

* First click on "FOLDER" on the top left of the main page. From there, navigate to the following folders:
/Home/Highlights and then locate the event folder of your choice.

* All footage is HD and use is free.

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