



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**Sept. 28, 2017**

**Contact: Royce Thompson**  
**(321) 246-7687**

**First-Round Leaderboard**

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Sam Saunders	59 (-12)
T2	Matt Atkins	62 (-9)
T2	Steve Wheatcroft	62 (-9)
T4	Tyler Duncan	63 (-8)
T4	Ben Silverman	63 (-8)

**Sam Saunders enters golf's record books with opening-round 59  
at Web.com Tour Championship**

**ATLANTIC BEACH, Fla.** – Just three days removed from the one-year anniversary of his grandfather Arnold Palmer's passing, Sam Saunders put his name in golf's record books with a 12-under 59 at the season-ending Web.com Tour Championship, contested at Atlantic Beach Country Club. Playing on his home course, Saunders recorded 13 birdies on his way to becoming the seventh player in Web.com Tour history to post a round of 59 or better.

Saunders, who moved to Atlantic Beach from nearby St. Augustine earlier this year, took full advantage of his home-course knowledge on Thursday, birdieing Nos. 10, 11 and 12 after starting on the back nine to race out to a 3-under par start.

A birdie at the par-4 14<sup>th</sup> pushed him further into the red at 4-under par, but a bogey on the par-3 15<sup>th</sup> – where he was forced to get up and down from a greenside bunker after leaving his second shot in the same bunker – proved to be the only blemish on an otherwise brilliant Thursday scorecard.

"It was fun. You know, it was a good time out there and it was a real special day. Certainly memorable. I played with my buddy Steve Wheatcroft and we kind of fed off each other," said Saunders of his fellow Atlantic Beach member. "Honestly, it just felt like a regular day at home playing our little money game and I got into a good rhythm. It was a blast."

With the mindset of a Saturday money game, Saunders played his final 12 holes in stunning fashion, beginning with birdies on 16 and 18 to turn in 5-under 31 before a birdie on the arduous par-4 second moved him to 6-under on the day.

On the short par-3 fifth, an errant tee shot over the green left the former Clemson golfer with a demanding up and down attempt, putting back downhill from 40 feet towards a green fronted by a pond and a shaved bank.

He holed it.

"I hit it over the green. I mean, you're dead. You've got no shot there. I putted it up the hill and it was going Mach one, it would've been 30 feet past the hole and it hit dead center," he said. "I was just hoping for it to hit the pin. When I saw it was about 2 feet away, my heart rate went down thinking I was at least going to hit the pin. Then it when it went in I was embarrassed because it was a horrible shot, but you need to get some luck sometimes. I hit a lot of good shots today, so to see something like that go in was fun."

The fun continued shortly thereafter when Saunders recovered from an errant tee shot on the par-5 sixth to post yet another birdie to reach 9-under for the round.

"At that time, when I made that birdie, I realized I was 9-under and had a par-5 left. I really didn't start thinking about anything beyond that, until I birdied No. 7 to get to 10 (under par), and then I thought, 'Oh, I can birdie these last two and do a little 59,'" said Saunders. "And No. 8 is a tough hole, so I was pleased to hit a good shot there and it felt good. It was fun to chase it and feel pretty good while I was doing it."

Saunders' tee shot at the par-3 eighth settled approximately 18 feet from the hole, and he converted the ensuing putt to reach 11-under on the par-71 layout, just one hole removed from a piece of golf history.

At the par-4 ninth, a pulled tee shot left gave way to a short wedge shot from the outcropping of trees, which nestled down 10 feet from the front-left hole location.

With a crowd of members and fans around the green and cheering from the club's iconic halfway house, Pete's Turn, Saunders delivered with one more birdie and a fist pump to match.

"It was dead center, I saw it going in from a few feet out," he said.

With the round, Saunders joins Notah Begay III, Doug Dunakey, Jason Gore, Willy Wilcox and Russell Knox as players to shoot 59 in a Web.com Tour event. At the 2016 Ellie Mae Classic at TPC Stonebrae, Stephan Jaeger became the first player in history to record 58 in a PGA TOUR-sanctioned event.

"Honestly, I was excited because my wife (Kelly) and my son Cohen (8), who is really getting into golf, got to watch. He's only watched me play three full rounds of golf probably. He's watched me fail in golf a lot, which is good, that's a good lesson for him," said Saunders. "For my wife Kelly to be there; she's watched the ups and downs of this whole deal. I'm really glad that they got to be out there and watch me do that."

Saunders spent the 2016-17 season on the PGA TOUR, where he finished No. 129 in the FedExCup standings after notching seven top-25 finishes, including a season-best T5 at the Puerto Rico Open in March. The 30-year-old recorded three of those top-25s in his last five starts of the season, but still wound up four spots shy of playing his way into the Playoffs.

With a return to the Web.com Tour Finals on the docket to secure his PGA TOUR status, Saunders opened with a T11 at the Nationwide Children's Hospital Championship and a T40 at the Albertsons Boise Open before a missed cut at last week's DAP Championship left him at No. 24 on the Finals-only money list entering the week.

"Today was about putting. I putted well. I've been hitting the ball pretty well and a couple of days ago I figured something out because I hadn't been hitting it great," Saunders said. "I've been pretty tired in these Web.com Tour Finals, so it was nice to get home and get some rest and not over-practice coming in. But, on Tuesday I had a really good warm up session and was able to figure things out. Like I said, it comes back to putting, and I made everything today. That's how you go low."

Saunders will begin second-round play at 8:35 a.m. (ET) on the front nine of Atlantic Beach, playing again with Wheatcroft as well as Japan's Ryo Ishikawa. When asked of the difficulty of following a low round up with another one, Saunders brushed aside any pressure and welcomed the opportunity to play another home game.

"Tomorrow will really help with the familiarity of the golf course. I'm playing with my friends out here and this is a great place with a lot of good local people here – all the folks at the club and all of the neighbors watching," he said. "I'm not going to be too stressed, hopefully have fun and shoot a low one tomorrow."

Wheatcroft and Matt Atkins finished the day with matching rounds of 9-under 62, three shots off of Saunders' torrid opening-round pace.

## **THURSDAY NOTES:**

\* Thursday weather: Mostly sunny; High of 89; Wind E 6-12 mph.

\* This week's purse is \$1M with \$180,000 awarded to the champion.

\* This is the fourth and final tournament in the Web.com Tour Finals, a series of four events that will conclude this week. Twenty-five PGA TOUR cards were awarded last month following the WinCo Foods Portland Open presented by Kraft Heinz. An additional 25 cards will be issued to the top 25 players on the Finals-only money list on Sunday night, with positioning for all 50 cards set at that time as well.

\* Notes on prior 59s recorded on the Web.com Tour:

<b>58</b>	<b>Stephan Jaeger</b> (29-29), TPC Stonebrae (par 70), Hayward, Calif., first round, 2016 Ellie Mae Classic at TPC Stonebrae (12-under), 12 birdies. Began on back nine, was 1-under after three holes but reeled off birdies on 10 of his next 12 holes. After pars on his 16th and 17th holes of the day, Jaeger nailed a 10-foot birdie putt at the par-5 9th for a first-round 12-under 58 to break the Web.com Tour record.
<b>59</b>	<b>Notah Begay III</b> (27-32), The Dominion Club (par 72), Richmond, Va., second round, 1998 Dominion Open (13-under), 2 eagles, 9 birdies. Began on back nine, was 12-under on final 13 holes. Made the turn and eagled the par-4 first and then had hole-in-one two holes later. Closed with consecutive birdies to break 60. Finished T6.
<b>59</b>	<b>Doug Dunakey</b> (27-32), Heatherwood GC (par 70), Springboro, Ohio, second round, 1998 Miami Valley Open (11-under), 1 eagle, 1 bogey and 10 birdies. Began on front nine and was 10-under through 11 holes. Three-putted final hole from 25 feet for bogey. Finished T2.
<b>59</b>	<b>Jason Gore</b> (28-31), Champions Run (par 71), Omaha, Neb., second round, 2005 Cox Classic (12-under). Began on the back nine and was 4-under after a bogey on No. 1. Closed with four birdies and two eagles, the final one coming on the 315-yard, par-4 ninth hole. Drove the green and made a 20-foot eagle putt for his 59. Won the tournament in a playoff.
<b>59</b>	<b>Will Wilcox</b> , (30-29), Willow Creek CC (par 71), Sandy, Utah, fourth round, 2013 Utah Championship (12-under), 1 eagle, 10 birdies. Began on the back nine, with five birdies and one eagle on par-5 17th. Birdied his final two holes (Nos 8-9), making a 6-foot birdie putt to secure his 59 for a 21-under-par 263 total. Finished T3, one shot out of the playoff.
<b>59</b>	<b>Russell Knox</b> (29-30), Hillcrest CC (par 71), Boise, Idaho, second round, 2013 Albertsons Boise Open (12-under), 2 eagles, 8 birdies. Began on the back nine and played his last 13 holes in 11-under. Needed to two-putt from 70 feet on his final hole. His putt for 59 was a 7-footer. Finished T12.

\* Sam Saunders round in detail: 10 of 13 fairways, 14 of 18 greens, 20 putts

10: Par-5 600 yards (birdie) / Driver, 3-wood, two-putt from 30 feet

11: Par-4 441 yards (birdie) / Driver, PW to 10 feet

12: Par-3 165 yards (birdie) / 9-iron to 5 feet

13: Par-4 420 yards (par) / 3-wood, 8-iron to 20 feet, two-putt

14: Par-4 369 yards (birdie) / 2-iron, sand wedge from 105 yards to 6 feet

15: Par-3 168 yards (bogey) / 7-iron into left greenside bunker, left ball in bunker on first attempt, blasted it to 3 feet

16: Par-4 472 yards (birdie) / Driver, 8-iron to 12 feet

17: Par-4 330 yards (par) / Driver in right greenside bunker, second shot over green, up and down from hazard

18: Par-5 545 yards (birdie) / Driver, two-putt from 25 feet

1: Par-4 385 yards (par) / SW to 25 feet, two-putted

- 2: Par-4 444 yards (birdie) / Driver, 8-iron, putt from 20 feet on fringe
- 3: Par-3 229 yards (par) / 7-iron, two-putt from 30 feet
- 4: Par-4 387 yards (birdie) / 3-wood, gap wedge from 125 yards to 6 feet
- 5: Par-3 153 yards (birdie) / 9-iron over green, putt made from 40 feet off green
- 6: Par-5 562 yards (birdie) / Driver, 3-wood, chip to 8 feet
- 7: Par-5 575 yards (birdie) / Driver, 2-iron, chip to 9 feet
- 8: Par-3 169 yards (birdie) / 7-iron to 18 feet
- 9: Par-4 435 yards (birdie) / Driver, 9-iron, 120 yards to 10 feet

\* Only two of the six players to record a 59 or better on the Web.com Tour went on to win that same week – Jason Gore (2005 Cox Classic) and Stephan Jaeger (2016 Ellie Mae Classic).

\* Wheatcroft spent the 2016-17 season on the PGA TOUR, posting two top-25 finishes in 17 starts on his way to a 179<sup>th</sup>-place finish in the FedExCup standings. Playing in the Web.com Tour Finals to try and regain his card, Wheatcroft entered the week at No. 23 on the Finals-only money list thanks to a T11 at last week's DAP Championship near Cleveland.

\* Atkins entered the week as one of 25 players who secured 2017-18 PGA TOUR membership via the Web.com Tour's Regular Season, which concluded at last month's WinCo Foods Portland Open. The Kentucky native opened his year with five missed cuts in his first six starts before breaking through with a win at the El Bosque Mexico Championship in April. The victory, which came courtesy of a bogey-free 68 in the final round, delivered a \$117,000 first-place check and was one of six top-25 efforts that gave way to a 19th-place finish on the money list.

\* The 9-under 62 by Atkins matched his career-best effort on the Web.com Tour, which came in the opening round of the 2016 Utah Championship. He went on to finish T13 that week.

\* Atkins' 62 marked the sixth time in 66 career Web.com Tour starts that he opened with a round of 64 or less.

\* Duncan finished No. 31 on the Regular Season money list after a missed cut at the WinCo Foods Portland Open, but rebounded in the Finals with a pair of top-25 finishes – including a T5 effort at the Albertsons Boise Open – to secure his PGA TOUR card.

\* Ben Silverman (63), who earned Web.com Tour status at Q-School in 2015, made 24 starts on the Mackenzie Tour – PGA TOUR Canada between 2014 and 2016, recording four top-10 finishes – including a career-best T2 at the Syncrude Boreal Open Presented by AECON in 2015.

\* The Web.com Tour Championship field includes five players who are Atlantic Beach Country Club members: Sam Saunders (59), Steve Wheatcroft (62), Chris Baker (68), Vince Covello (69) and Luke Guthrie (72).

\* Players ranked Nos. 23-30 on the Finals-only money list and where they stand:

Player	Finals \$	Score	Standing
23. Steve Wheatcroft	\$29,025	62	T2
24. Sam Saunders	\$27,900	59	1
25. Cameron Percy	\$27,855	69	T64
26. Zac Blair	\$26,830	70	T78
27. Roger Sloan	\$25,495	70	T78
28. K.H. Lee	\$24,955	69	T64
29. Matt Harmon	\$24,400	67	T34
30. John Chin	\$24,193	73	T118

\* Money earned by the No. 25 player on the Finals-only money list in each of the past four years:

2013:	Bobby Gates	\$33,650.00
2014:	Eric Axley	\$36,311.66
2015:	Rob Oppenheim	\$32,206.00

2016: Tim Wilkinson\* \$27,425.00

*\*denotes three events played (Web.com Tour Championship was cancelled)*

\* Scoring Averages at the par-71 Atlantic Beach Country Club:

	<b>Front 9</b>	<b>Back 9</b>	<b>Total</b>
R1:	33.865	34.587	68.452

**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.

**For the latest information and updates on the Web.com Tour visit [www.pgatourmedia.com](http://www.pgatourmedia.com)**

**Scores available at [www.pgatour.com](http://www.pgatour.com) or on the Associated Press wire**

**Follow the Web.com Tour on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/webdotcomtour> on Facebook at [www.Facebook.com/WebDotComTour](http://www.Facebook.com/WebDotComTour) and on Instagram at [www.instagram.com/webdotcomtour](http://www.instagram.com/webdotcomtour)**