



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First-Round Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Xinjun Zhang	64 (-8)
T2	Adam Long	65 (-7)
T2	Michael Arnaud	65 (-7)
T4	Aaron Wise	66 (-6)
T4	Jason Gore	66 (-6)
T4	Anders Albertson	66 (-6)
T4	Albin Choi	66 (-6)

China's Xinjun Zhang grabs opening-round lead at LECOM Health Challenge

CLYMER, N.Y. – Xinjun Zhang of Shanxi, China posted a bogey-free 64 in the first round of the Web.com Tour's LECOM Health Challenge on Thursday. The Tour rookie, who is attempting to become the first Chinese-born player to earn a PGA TOUR card, will take a one-shot lead into Friday's second round of the second-year event.

Zhang opened his week at Peek'n Peak Resort's Upper Course on the back nine, recording birdies on 11, 12, 17 and 18 to turn in 4-under 32.

"Starting out the first two or three holes we were a little tight," he said. "I had some good opportunities early on but didn't capitalize on them. But after that my swing came around and I started making some putts."

Birdies on Nos. 2, 4 and 5 put him in a three-way tie for the lead late on Thursday afternoon, but it was a birdie on the par-5 eighth that vaulted him to 8-under par, where he finished after a par on No. 9 left him with a career-best 64 (in relation to par).

"I liked the course from the moment I got here," said Zhang after his round. "It is in spectacular condition. The greens and fairways are immaculate, which helped the round today."

Zhang, who turned professional in 2010, starred on PGA TOUR China over the last three years, recording wins at the 2014 Beijing Open and 2015 Chongqing Open, as well as six runner-up finishes. With ¥504,675 in earnings, he finished fifth on the Order of Merit to secure his Web.com Tour card for the 2017 season. The 30-year-old is the all-time earnings' leader on PGA TOUR China, with ¥1,664,016 in 29 career starts.

Zhang's Web.com Tour play this year has been stellar, with runner-up finishes at the Chitimacha Louisiana Open and BMW Charity Pro-Am giving way to over \$125,000 in season-long earnings and a 15th-place standing on the money list entering the week. With seven events to go in the Tour's regular season, he is closing in on one of the coveted 25 PGA TOUR cards issued at the conclusion of the WinCo Foods Portland Open in August.

Over the past three Web.com Tour seasons, the average earnings for the 25th and final TOUR card has been \$152,738, which puts Zhang in good position to capitalize over the next three days.

“That’s something I’ve been thinking about a lot,” said Zhang of sitting on the precipice of earning a PGA TOUR card. “Right now, my wife and trainer have come over to give me the support I need. I’m trying to put that aside and play each tournament without thinking about that. I’m trying to focus on the moment, get my confidence back and take it one step at a time.”

Adam Long and Michael Arnaud are tied for second, one shot back of Zhang after matching rounds of 7-under 65 in the morning wave.

Long, who starred in college at Duke University, birdied four of his opening nine holes to turn in 4-under 32 before posting closing birdies on Nos. 4, 6 and 9 (he began on No. 10) to finish off a first-round 65. The effort marked his second-best of the 2017 Web.com Tour season, trailing only an 8-under 63 in the final round of the Chitimacha Louisiana Open in March.

The 63 in Louisiana delivered a season-best, solo-fourth-place finish for Long, who entered the LECOM Health Challenge with three top-25 efforts on the year. The St. Louis native has made 75 starts in four seasons on the Web.com Tour, recording seven top-10 finishes, with a career-best T2 coming at the 2015 United Leasing & Finance Championship.

Arnaud, who earned his spot in the event after a 7-under 65 in the Monday qualifier, birdied six of his first 10 holes to race out to the day’s early lead before falling back with bogeys on Nos. 3 and 5. The 35-year-old closed with birdies on Nos. 7, 8 and 9 to round out a 2-under 34 on his back nine and a 7-under 65 in his first Tour start of the year.

The former Stephen F. Austin golfer had full status on the Web.com Tour in 2015 and 2016, but failed to keep his card for this season after finishing 127th on last year’s money list. With only two top-25s in 2016, and more cuts missed than made, Arnaud was open and honest when discussing his struggles over last season.

“It was a lot of things. I can’t really pinpoint one exact thing. It was one of those years where I didn’t play bad but I also didn’t play good when I needed to,” he said. “Those years are going to come, but you just have to take them in stride and come back stronger.”

Arnaud estimates he has attempted five or six Monday qualifiers this year while trying to play his way back onto the Tour. At Shorewood Country Club in nearby Dunkirk, N.Y., 150 players competed for one of 12 open spots on Monday, with 6-under 66 forcing a seven-man playoff for two spots, and 81 players breaking par for the round.

“It’s just a matter of coming to a Monday (qualifier) and putting it all together. Mondays are tough. You can shoot really good scores and never sniff getting into an event, but I was lucky enough to shoot 7-under and that was good enough to get me in,” said Arnaud. “I’m just trying to take it in stride and play good golf. If I play good, everything will take care of itself. I don’t really feel any pressure. There are always more tournaments and Q-School as a backup plan, but I just try to come out and play good like I’ve been out here all year. I just want to finish in that top 75 or even top 25.”

Thursday Notes:

* Thursday weather: Partly cloudy. High: 80, Winds: SSW 6-12 mph.

* This week’s purse is \$600,000, with \$108,000 going to the champion.

* In search of his second win on Tour this season, Aaron Wise carded two eagles, four birdies and two bogeys for a 6-under 66. In his last two starts Wise has moved from No. 35 to No. 6 on the money list thanks to a win (Air Capital Classic Supporting Wichita’s Youth) and a T11 (Nashville Golf Open Benefitting the Snedeker Foundation). For the year, the 21-year-old Wise has posted four top-25s including two top-three showings. Trailing leading money earner Stephan Jaeger by a little under \$70,000, Wise could supplant Jaeger with a victory on Sunday.

* With seven victories on his resume, Jason Gore is the winningest player in Web.com Tour history. On Thursday, Gore carded an opening 6-under 66, his lowest first-round score this season. The former PGA TOUR winner entered the week No. 18 on the money list with three top-10s in his last six starts. Gore’s last win on Tour came at the 2010 Miccosukee Championship in south Florida.

* Michael Johnson’s 5-under 67 in the first round marked the fourth time he’s broken 70 in the first 18 holes of a tournament this season. Johnson has competed in all 14 events, made four cuts and recorded one top-25 (T25 – United Leasing & Finance Championship). With a second-round scoring average of 72.29, the 24-year-old from Birmingham, Ala. has only recorded one sub-70 score on Friday this season (68 – Rust-Oleum Championship).

Johnson entered the week No. 142 on the money list after finishing T8 at the Qualifying Tournament this past December.

* With a first-round scoring average of 73.00, Albin Choi posted a first-round 6-under 66 on Thursday. The last time Choi posted a 66 on day one was at the BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by SYNEX Corporation in late May. Choi carded three rounds under par to tie his highest finish on Tour (T5). Choi has played in 12 events, made four cuts and sits No. 89 on the money list. In 2015, competed on Mackenzie Tour – PGA TOUR Canada and won the Bayview Place Island Savings Open presented by Times Colonist.

Bogey Free Rounds:

R1 – Xinjun Zhang (64), Adam Long (65), Jeff Gove (65), Anders Albertson (66), Albin Choi (66), Jarin Todd (67), Rob Oppenheim (68), Nick Rousey (68), Dawie Van der Walt (69), Armando Favela (69), Nicholas Thompson (69), Nick Flanagan (69), Andrew Yun (70), Dan McCarthy (70), Ben Kohles (70),

Scoring Average for the Upper Course for the week:

	Front (35)	Back (35)	Total (70)
Round 1:	35.891	35.295	71.186

* **NEXT WEEK:** The Web.com Tour heads west to Farmington, Utah for the Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank contested at Oakridge Country Club July 13-16. Last year, Nicholas Lindheim held off a late charge by J.J. Spaun and Xander Schauffele to take home the crown and moved inside the top 15 on the money list after starting the week No. 83.

**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

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* 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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