



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Alex Wood
(850) 691-6756

Second-Round Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Derek Ernst	68-63-131 (-11)
2	Will Claxton	68-65-133 (-9)
3	Daniel Summerhays	70-64-134 (-8)
4	Brett Drewitt	67-68-135 (-7)
	Alex Prugh	69-66-135 (-7)

Derek Ernst grabs 36-hole lead at Web.com Tour's Knoxville Open

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. – The temperature wasn't the only thing heating up in Knoxville on Friday. After opening with a 3-under 68 on Thursday at the Knoxville Open, University of Nevada – Las Vegas alum Derek Ernst came out Friday firing on all cylinders, posting an 8-under 63 to take the outright lead heading into Saturday, the first 36-hole lead of his Web.com Tour career. Sitting two back of Ernst is Will Claxton, followed by Daniel Summerhays at 8-under 134.

Success at Fox Den Country Club is nothing new for Ernst, who picked up a T15 in his first tournament appearance last year. The prior experience here isn't what's fueling the 27-year-old's performance this week, though. In fact, with the event moving up to May from August on the schedule, the greens are firmer than usual, causing the track to be almost an entirely new beast. A beast that Ernst feels he was ready for heading into the week.

"Coming off of the last two weeks at Victoria National Golf Club and then going Quail Hallow [for the Wells Fargo Championship]," Ernst said when asked his secret this week, "these greens are still just as firm as those and you're still trying to land just in front... They were two good courses to kind of prep leading into this tournament."

Ernst began the second round slow and steady, paring the opening five holes. He picked up birdies on Nos. 6 and 8 to make the turn at 2-under 33 for the round. It wasn't until the back nine that the California native began to pick up steam, birding the first four holes of the back. The birdie streak set a new career record for Ernst, who had yet to make more than three in a row on either the Web.com Tour or the PGA TOUR. Two more birdies to close out with a 6-under 30 on the back nine would move Ernst up the leaderboard into solo command.

"I was just having fun," He laughed. "I didn't know what anyone was at behind me. I just knew I was leading so I kept putting the pedal down."

It's been a long and bumpy road for Ernst since winning the 2013 Wells Fargo Championship on the PGA TOUR. He made just 12 cuts in 28 starts on TOUR in 2014, failing to pick up a top-25 along the way. His exemption on TOUR ran out during the 2016 season, and after finishing at No. 186 in the FedExCup Standings, he looked to the Web.com Tour as the path back to the top.

"There are a lot of guys [that have done that]," He remarked on seeing the success of players such as Chesson Hadley after spending time back on the Web.com Tour. "I'm playing with Brandon de Jonge. He's been on the PGA TOUR for at least seven or eight years, maybe even longer, he was out there forever it seemed like but now he's out here and

I'm playing with him. Guys just kind of go back and forth, so you just have to keep at it. There's a lot of good players out there now, so you just have to keep fighting."

Fighting is exactly what Claxton is doing as well. The Auburn University alum made his last start on the PGA TOUR at the 2014 AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am. After missing the cut, Claxton took time off from the game to have surgery on a torn labrum in his hip that he had been dealing with for some time.

"It had gotten so bad I could barely walk at times," Claxton recalled, "so I decided to have surgery. A year into recovery I started pushing it, trying to get back out on the golf course, and ruptured two discs in my back. It's kind of been one thing after another."

The back injury sidelined him for another six months, as the off-and-on pain sent the doctors to the drawing board to work out a game plan to get him back out on the course.

The 36-year-old is making his return to professional golf this season, with his first start in four years coming at the North Mississippi Classic. Claxton also competed in the United Leasing & Finance Championship two weeks ago but failed to make the cut in either event, carding just one sub-par round in the four he played.

"You know," he said, "the first two events back I knew I would struggle with some things mentally, physically and how that might affect me mentally and it's just kind of working out all of the bugs. Obviously I've hit balls at home, I've played, but in a golf cart – playing out here is a little different. It's just working out some bugs and I think there's still some to work out so I'm trying to be patient with myself and keep getting better."

The bugs seem to be working themselves out this week, as Claxton has put together two sub-70 rounds to enter the weekend at 9-under 133, in a prime spot to make a run at his first Web.com Tour title. But, whether he ends the week donning the coveted orange champion's jacket or not, the father of two will be leaving Knoxville confident in his choice to keep fighting rather than throw in the towel on his professional career.

"It's just nice to know that I think we're on the right track." He said, leaving the course with a smile.

FRIDAY NOTES:

- * Friday weather: Mostly sunny to Partly cloudy, High 90, Winds W/SW 6-10 mph.
- * This week's purse is \$550,000, with \$99,000 going to the champion.
- * The lowest second-round score in tournament history sits at 10-under 61, which was carded by Grayson Murray in 2016. Murray's 61 also stands as the lowest 18-hole score in tournament history, along with the 61 Keith Mitchell recorded during the first round in 2016.
- * The largest 54-hole lead occurred in 2017, when Ken Looper brought a five-stroke lead into Saturday. Through nine events in the 2018 season, the largest second-round lead sits at two, held by Ben Taylor at the Country Club de Bogotá Championship.
- * Friday's cut came at 1-under 141, with 72 players making it to the weekend. The highest cutline in tournament history sits at 2-over 144, occurring in both 1994 and 2005. The cutline has gone as low as 5-under 137 three times: 2009, 2011 and 2016.
- * In the history of the Web.com Tour, only five players have gone on to win an event after making the cut on the number. The most recent champion to accomplish this feat was Lanto Griffin, who won the 2017 Nashville Golf Open Benefitting the Snedeker Foundation in such fashion. Twenty-two players made the cut on the number this week.
- * With a missed cut, Michael Hebert snapped his eight-event streak of made cuts in 2018, previously the longest on Tour. Ben Kohles extended his seven-event streak to eight to overtake the statistical category.
- * After earning a spot in this week's field via a top-25 at the United Leasing & Finance Championship, Max McGreevy played his way into contention Friday, carding a 4-under 67 to sit T6 heading into the weekend.
- * Wake Forest University alum Kyle Reifers birdied five of his last eight holes Friday to make the cut on the number. Reifers is chasing his first Web.com Tour win since the 2006 Chattanooga Classic.
- * Mito Pereira was the biggest mover of Friday, jumping 93 spots from T101 to T8 with a second-round 6-under 65.

* Ben Taylor (Country Club de Bogotá Championship) and Julian Etulain (Savannah Golf Championship) are the only two players who have been able to convert their 36-hole lead into a victory this season.

*After Monday qualifying into the Knoxville Open last year, PGA Professional Casey Flenniken is making his second Web.com Tour appearance, competing in this week's field as a sponsor's exemption. The two-time Tennessee PGA Professional of the Year Award winner followed up an even-par opening round with a 1-under 70 Friday to make the cut and sit T51 heading into the weekend.

* University of Tennessee alum Rick Lamb posted a 5-under 66 during the second round to move up to T8. Lamb is staying with a friend's family this week in Knoxville and has been practicing at the University of Tennessee's golf facility, as well as visiting with old teammates and college friends. He hopes the good vibes pay off during the weekend as he chases his first top-25 of the season.

* This week's field features nine Tennessee residents, five of whom are Knoxville locals (Eric Axley, Jonathan Hodge, Wes Roach, Casey Flenniken and Andrew McCain). Of the Tennesseans, three made the cut, with Wes Roach in the best position heading into the weekend. Roach sits at 3-under 139, T23.

* Fox Den CC Scoring averages:

	Front (35)	Back (36)	Total (71)
R1	35.723	36.006	71.729
R2	35.503	35.183	70.686

* NEXT WEEK: The Web.com Tour travels to Greer, South Carolina, for the BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by SYNEX Corporation.

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