



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First-Round Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Rhein Gibson	62 (-9)
	Carlos Ortiz	62 (-9)
3	Jamie Arnold	64 (-7)
	Cameron Champ	64 (-7)

Rhein Gibson and Carlos Ortiz share clubhouse lead at Lincoln Land Championship

Springfield, Ill. – Australian Rhein Gibson saw fellow Aussie Jamie Arnold finish at 7-under 64 and wanted to beat him by one. He did one better than he anticipated after a closing birdie on the 18th hole. Gibson signed for a 9-under 62 and took sole possession of the lead at the Lincoln Land Championship presented by LRS.

After the round, Gibson made a bold prediction.

“I’m sure someone will match it,” he said. “There’s a few guys with a few holes left that can get there.”

One of those guys was three-time Web.com Tour winner Carlos Ortiz, who was two back when Gibson made his prophetic statement. Ortiz birdied holes five and nine to match Gibson at the top of the leaderboard to take a share of the clubhouse lead as the first round was suspended for the day at 4:05 p.m. due to impending storms.

On Thursday, Gibson recorded his lowest opening round on Tour since the 2015 Chitimacha Louisiana Open presented by NACHER. The 32-year-old from Lismore, Australia made nine birdies, an eagle and a double-bogey. Gibson isn’t a stranger to posting low numbers, recording 62 three previous times on Tour.

“I’ve been known to shoot some low rounds,” says Gibson, who shot a 16-under-par 55 at River Oaks GC in Edmond, Oklahoma, that was later recognized by the Guinness Book of World as the lowest of all time. “I haven’t really shot any recently, so it was good to get a low one.”

Gibson posted back-to-back top three performances to open the season and hasn’t cracked the top-10 since. The Oklahoma Christian University graduate has missed the last few cuts but believes his game his starting to show signs of returning to the form he displayed in The Bahamas.

At No. 25 on the money list, Gibson knows that he is a few good finishes away from earning his PGA TOUR card.

“I had a really good start to the year,” he said. “It’s been a bit of a lull lately. I’m taking every week as an opportunity to play well and move up the money list. Whether it’s this week or next, I’m just trying to play good golf and see if I can keep that yellow bib until the end of the year.”

Before stepping away from the Tour for the birth of his daughter, Sofia Isabel, Ortiz missed four straight cuts. The 27-year-old from Guadalajara, Mexico posted a T8 at last week's Wichita Open Supporting Wichita's Youth and continued to build off that in his first round at Panther Creek Country Club.

"Days like this are easy to enjoy," said Ortiz, who bested his first-round score from the 2017 Lincoln Land Championship by two strokes. "Everything was going well. I was hitting it close and putting good. It's hard to play bad that way."

Ortiz went a month without making a cut and dropped from No. 8 to No. 17 on the money list before rebounding in Wichita. Believing in the process, the 2014 Web.com Tour Player of the Year never got discouraged and continued to work knowing that the scores would eventually improve.

"I've been playing great all year," said Ortiz, who has recorded four top-10s in 2018. "Somehow, I wasn't scoring well, but I've been playing great all year. Last week, it was easier to think and play freely. I feel great about the game so it's time to let it happen and hopefully have another good week."

Perhaps Sofia, who was born on May 28th, is turning into a good-luck charm for Ortiz. Rather than focusing on the birdies and bogeys after a round, Ortiz can't wait to FaceTime with his wife, Haley, and hear about what their little one is up to.

"It's hard to describe," said Ortiz, about becoming a father. "I want to call my wife all the time, so she can show me the baby. I'm excited to talk to her after the round and see what the baby is doing."

"Golf gives me a rush," he continued. "I'm excited to play well and want to win. But this is big and different. I haven't had this feeling before. It's a completely different feeling than I've ever had. It's life changing."

Thursday Notes:

* Thursday weather: Mostly sunny. High: 88. Winds: S-SE 6-12 mph. Afternoon thunderstorms.

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

* Play was suspended at 4:05 p.m. local time, with the first-round slated to restart on Friday morning at 7:30 a.m.

* In his last five starts, Cameron Champ has finished T32 (Knoxville Open), T24 (BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by SAYNEX Corporation), T11 (Nashville Open benefitting the Snedeker Foundation), T4 (Rust-Oleum Championship) and 7 (Wichita Open). In that span, Champ has gone from No. 74 to No. 36 on the money list., he continued his good play on Thursday with a first-round 7-under 64.

* Former Illini golfer Nick Hardy opened with a 6-under 65. Hardy, who just turned pro, was a first-team All-American this season and was also named Big-Ten Player of the Year. His pro debut on the Web.com Tour came at the Rust-Oleum Championship, where he ended the week T33.

* Web.com Tour money leader Sungjae Im carded a 4-under 67 in the first round. Im (\$301,288) leads Scott Langley (\$253,733) by a little less than \$47,000. Langley carded a 6-under 65 on Thursday.

Scoring Average Panther Creek Country Club for the week:

	Front (36)	Back (35)	Total (70)
Round 1:	34.171	34.153	68.324*

*first-round is still in progress

* **NEXT WEEK:** The Web.com Tour heads north to western New York for the LECOM Health Challenge where Chesson Hadley edged out Beau Hossler by one shot for the win, his third career Web.com Tour victory.

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