



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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First-Round Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Matt Ryan	65 (-7)
2	Seven players at	67 (-5)

**Matt Ryan takes early first-round lead at
The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay**

GREAT EXUMA, Bahamas – Californian Matt Ryan felt like he had nothing to lose heading into The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay. The 31-year-old from Van Nuys was reminded by a friend that he needed a 61 in the final round of the Web.com Tour Qualifying Tournament just to be eligible for the first event of the 2018 season.

Ryan struggled on the range before the round, never forgot what his friend said and went out and carded a 7-under-par 65 to take the lead halfway through the first round.

“Well, I’m playing with house money, so just go try and do the best you can,” said Ryan, who recorded five birdies and an eagle in his Web.com Tour debut.

Ryan started Thursday’s round with five straight pars before his first birdie. He quickly jumped up the leaderboard when he holed a wedge from 94 yards on the par-5 ninth. The eagle to go out in 33 came after an hour delay due to the threat of lightning.

“I didn’t have that good of practice the last few days,” said Ryan. “I felt like I was shaking off some rust, and I got in a rhythm with a plan ‘B’ swing and rode it all the way today.”

Ryan cruised home with four birdies on the back nine to take the outright lead in the clubhouse.

This is Ryan’s first true season on Tour, as his T30 finish at Final Stage of the Qualifying Tournament secured him eight guaranteed starts. In 2013, the former Fresno State Bulldog finished tied for 103rd at Final Stage and didn’t get a single start in 2014. After finishing tied for 30th this past December, Ryan feels like he has his Tour card for the first time.

“I’ve watched friends play great and get their Web.com Tour card,” said Ryan. “I feel like I’ve spoken to so many people about it, it’s almost like I’ve been here before.”

One person who has mentored Ryan in his quest to reach the PGA TOUR is longtime friend and seven-time Tour winner Jason Gore. The pair play golf together whenever they are both back home and over the break, they competed against each other to prepare for 2018.

“Jason and I played a lot of golf together,” said Ryan, when asked about how he spent his off-time. “Over the years he’s been a good mentor for all of us that come from Valencia.”

Kramer Hickok is one of seven players in the clubhouse two back of Ryan. The 2017 Mackenzie Tour – PGA TOUR Canada Player of the Year turned in one of six bogey-free rounds during the morning wave.

After graduating from the University of Texas in 2015, Hickok advanced to Final Stage of the Qualifying Tournament and finished tied for 108th place. He was able to participate in six tournaments during the 2016 season, but never got into any rhythm.

This past year, Hickok collected two victories in Canada and won the Mackenzie Tour Order of Merit to become fully exempt on Tour. The 25-year-old from Austin, Texas is trying to employ the same strategy in 2018.

“Last year, I had no expectations,” said Hickok, who played 12 events and recorded six top-10s. “I just tried to go out there and compete, and when I played well I wanted to see where I stacked up. I’m just learning from each event. This is a different field and more competitive. I want to see how I stack up if I play well. Going forward I’ll be able to adjust my expectations and goals. For now, I’m just playing against myself and the course.”

THURSDAY NOTES:

* Thursday weather: Scattered thunderstorms, high of 78.

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

* The first round was delayed for a little over an hour due to thunderstorms in the area early Thursday morning. Play was halted from 10:41 a.m. to 11:50 a.m., and was suspended for the day at 5:31 p.m. ET. The first round will resume at 7:30 a.m.

* With a first-round scoring average of 80.405, the Sandals Emerald Bay course played the most difficult on Tour last season.

Bogey-free Rounds

R1 – Matt Ryan (65), Conner Arendell (65), Brett Drewitt (67), Kramer Hickok (67), Justin Lower (67), Sung Jae Im (69).

Sandals Emerald Bay GC	Front (36)	Back (36)	Total (72)
R1	35.554	35.913	71.467

* **NEXT WEEK:** The Web.com Tour goes to Bogota, Colombia for the Club Colombia Championship presented by Claro. Last year Patrick Rodgers shot a bogey-free, 6-under 65 in the final round to erase a four-stroke deficit and force overtime with Steve Marino. Both players birdied the 72nd hole and finished at 17-under at the end of regulation. With more rain in the forecast and darkness looming, the playoff did not take place at the par-5, 18th hole. Instead officials elected to use a rotation of the par-3 12th and the par-4 ninth holes for convenience and proximity. Rogers rolled in an eight-foot birdie putt on the second playoff hole to defeat Marino at the weather-delayed event to earn his first professional win.

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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