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**First-Round Leaderboard**

**Freedom 55 Financial Open**

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| **Pos.** | **Name** | **Scores** |
| 1 | Chris Williams (U.S.) | 31-34—65 (-7) |
| T2 | Jordan Niebrugge (U.S.) | 33-33—66 (-6) |
| T2 | Cody Blick (U.S.) | 32-34—66 (-6) |
| T4 | Matthew NeSmith (U.S.) | 34-33—67 (-5) |
| T4 | Tyler Salsbury (U.S.) | 34-33—67 (-5) |
| T6 | Charlie Kern (U.S.) | 33-35—68 (-4) |
| T6 | Michael Gellerman (U.S.) | 33-35—68 (-4) |
| T6 | Andrew Buchanan (U.S.) | 35-33—68 (-4) |
| T6 | Alex Springer (U.S.) | 33-35—68 (-4) |
| T6 | Zach Zaback (U.S.) | 34-34—68 (-4) |
| T6 | Jack Newman (U.S.) | 33-35—68 (-4) |
| T6 | Greg Eason (England) | 34-34—68 (-4) |

**Williams feels at home in Vancouver in round one**

VANCOUVER, British Columbia, Canada—Having played collegiate golf in Seattle, Chris Williams is no stranger to playing in the Northwest, showing off his acclimation with a tournament-leading 65 in the first round of the Freedom 55 Financial Open on Thursday.

Though it may feel like home, Point Grey Golf and Country Club hasn’t always been kind to the 26-year-old, who missed the cut last year after a tie for 41st the year prior. So, what gave this year?

“Since it’s such a short season here in Canada I would only start playing well the sixth, seventh or eighth event of the year,” said Williams. “This season I went down and played in Latinoamerica, so I basically played a full schedule and felt really comfortable with my game rather than coming to this as the first event of the year.”

Williams comes into the event not only comfortable, but also playing some of the best golf of his professional career. The Idaho native capped off his prelude venture on PGA TOUR Latinoamerica circuit with a tie for third earlier this month at the Puerto Plata DR Open, firing a final-round 66.

Williams took a while to heat up Thursday. Starting on the back-nine, he made his first birdie on the fourth hole before adding another on the par-5 18th to make the turn at 2-under. Another birdie at the first set the stage for a hole-out from the fairway on 5, catapulting Williams up the leaderboard.

“I started off slow, hitting it in the trees and making some good pars, but then I found something,” said Williams. “On the back I made a few putts and the eagle on five and it snowballed from there. All of a sudden I was 7-under.”

Playing in the morning wave Thursday, Williams led a crowded leaderboard by just one with half the field still left to play. He noted that with the amount of talent on the Mackenzie Tour, he envisioned an afternoon player potentially claiming the lead. That would never come to fruition as the sixth-year pro headed to his hotel as the lone leader.

On Williams’ heels is Jordan Niebrugge, craving a victory after three top-threes in 2017, and Cody Blick, a self-proclaimed lover of the BC Golf Swing, who came just a stroke away from a 59 in Victoria last season.

**Key Information**

* There are 11 players within three strokes of Chris Williams’ lead going into Friday. Nearly all those chasing are American, with the lone exception Englishman Greg Eason.
* Andrew Funk and Jimmy Jones are co low-Canadians after Thursday, each shooting 69. Funk made six birdies on his way to a 3-under total, and Jones birdied his last hole of the day in his first professional event.
* Jack Newman, who sits in fifth place after an opening 67, holds the course record of 61 at Point Grey, a number he managed in the third round of the 2014 tournament.
* Tyler Salsbury took full advantage of his first round as a professional, making birdie on his first hole and proceeding to make six more en-route to a ho-hum 67.
* Jordan Niebrugge played the middle 11 holes of his round today 8-under, driving the green on the short par-4 fourth hole before making a 25-footer to get him to 7-under, holding a brief lead before signing for a 66 after two bogeys and another birdie.
* In 2017, Jordan Niebrugge played the par-5 12th at Point Grey Golf and Country Club in 3-under, with three birdies and a par. Thursday, he birdied the hole again. The par-4 14th hole has also been productive for Niebrugge. He was 2-under overall on the hole in 2017, and Niebrugge birdied it Thursday. He’s 17-under overall during his last five rounds at this tournament.
* Going back to last season’s events in Victoria and Kelowna, Cody Blick’s last eight tournament rounds in British Columbia look more like Drake lyrics than golf scores: 69-60-66-66-68-66-66-66.

**Quotable**

“It could always be better, everyone who ever interviews in golf always says ‘yeah I left some out there’, and I did. But the Golf Gods evened things out. I had a few good breaks early on and made some good pars, but it can always be better.” **– Chris Williams**

“I live in Seattle, so this is a home event for me this week and again next week for sure. The courses are good, it’s kind of what I grew up playing: short, tight with really good greens, so there’s definitely a comfort level coming up here, and I’m just going to let it ride.” **– Chris Williams**

“I like the course, I feel like it sets up well for me because I’m a good ball striker. Out here you really have to place your ball in the fairways and really attack from there. I did a good job of that today and I was hitting some good shots into the green, and I ended up getting a few to drop.” – **Jordan Niebrugge**

“I thought it might play a little tougher this year because the greens are a little more firm than last year, but they’re rolling great. I know I’m capable of getting to the top and just putting rounds like this together is key.” **– Jordan Niebrugge**

“I guess I just feel at home out here, it’s easy travel and the first three courses are pretty cool. It’s a putting contest these weeks, you get out to Thunder Bay and guys like Johnny Ruiz last year just bomb it and they have a big advantage. Out here, I was hitting lots of drivers and this course really suits me.” **– Cody Blick**

“You have some thick forest around here, and these greens are quick and undulated, so A) you better be on the right side of the whole and B) you gotta make putts. You don’t shoot 7-under, Chris Williams, without making putts.” – **Cody Blick**

**Tournament Fast Fact**

Joel Dahmen, playing on the PGA TOUR this season, won the Freedom 55 Financial Open in 2014. Last season’s winner Lee McCoy ran away with the competition, finishing at 20-under to win by eight strokes.

**First-Round Weather**: Sunny. High of 18. Wind at 6 kmh.