



**2018 Corales Puntacana Resort & Club Championship**  
(The 2<sup>1st</sup> of 44 events in the PGA TOUR Season)

**Punta Cana, Dominican Republic**  
**Puntacana Resort & Club (Corales Course)**

**March 22-25, 2018**  
**Par/Yards: 36-36—72/7,670**

**Purse: \$3,000,000**

**First-Round Notes – Thursday, March 22, 2018**

**Weather**

Partly cloudy and humid with a high of 84. Wind ESE at 8-14 mph.

**First-Round Leaderboard**

Brice Garnett	63 (-9)
Corey Connors	64 (-8)
Jonathan Byrd	66 (-6)
Brendon de Jonge	66 (-6)
Steve Wheatcroft	66 (-6)
Denny McCarthy	66 (-6)
Keith Mitchell	66 (-6)
Xinjun Zhang	66 (-6)
Troy Matteson	66 (-6)

**Brice Garnett**

Following an opening-round 9-under 63, Brice Garnett holds the first 18-hole lead/co-lead of his career at the inaugural Corales Puntacana Resort & Club Championship, the first official PGA TOUR event in the Dominican Republic. Only one previous time has Garnett held at least a share of the lead after any round on TOUR. He was the 36-hole leader at the 2014 Fort Worth Invitational, eventually finishing T30.

Thursday's 63, which included nine birdies and nine pars, bettered Garnett's previous career-low round (255 total rounds) by two strokes. Of five previous 65s on TOUR, his most recent was in the first round of The RSM Classic in 2017. Garnett hit 13 of 14 fairways, 14 of 18 greens in regulation and required 24 putts in Thursday's 63.

Garnett, a Gallatin, Missouri native, missed the cut with rounds of 73-67 at last year's Web.com Tour event played at Corales Puntacana.

In 12 previous starts this season, Garnett posted two top-25 results (T17/Safeway Open, T25/OHL Classic at Mayakoba) and sits No. 110 in the FedExCup standings.

Two Web.com Tour wins last season (Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank, WinCo Foods Portland Open presented by Kraft-Heinz) contributed to Garnett's No. 2 position in the final priority-ranking order. He secured his PGA TOUR card for the 2017-18 season with a first-place finish on the 2017 Web.com Tour Regular Season money list.

Garnett is seeking his first PGA TOUR victory in his 88<sup>th</sup> career start. He owns four top-10 finishes (6<sup>th</sup>/2014 OHL Classic at Mayakoba, 7<sup>th</sup>/2015 OHL Classic at Mayakoba, T7/Houston Open, 9<sup>th</sup>/2015 Sanderson Farms Championship).

**First-Round Lead Notes**

Through 19 events this season, five first-round leaders/co-leaders have held on for the win, most recently Jon Rahm at the CareerBuilder Challenge.

In the two Web.com Tour events contested at Corales Puntacana, 65 (-7) was the leading first-round score. Last year, Jamie Arnold held the solo lead after the opening round. In 2016, three players (-7) shared the first-round lead (Blake Adams, Ryan Brehm, Jin Park).

The low first-round score on the PGA TOUR this season is 62, shared by Jon Rahm (10-under/CareerBuilder Championship) and Patton Kizzire (9-under/OHL Classic at Mayakoba). Both players went on to win those events.

### **Corey Conners**

In his 66<sup>th</sup> career round on the PGA TOUR, Canada's Corey Conners' 8-under 64 marked his career-low round, bettering his previous-best 66 (-4), which he posted in the second round of the 2018 Sony Open in Hawaii. Conners hit 12 of 14 fairways, 15 of 18 greens in regulation and required 26 putts. His round included nine birdies and a lone bogey at No. 5.

After rounds of 70-69-68-73—280 (-8), Conners finished T53 in the Web.com Tour event at Corales Puntacana last year.

In his rookie season on the PGA TOUR, Conners has made 10 cuts in 11 events, with a T16 at the Valspar Championship two weeks ago being his best finish. Conners held the first-, second- and third-round leads at the Copperhead Course at Innisbrook Resort after coming into that week as third alternate. He received his spot in the field when Kyle Stanley withdrew. He learned of his spot in the field after shooting a 71 in the Monday Qualifier, which would not have been enough to play his way in. A final-round 77 contributed to the T16 finish.

Conners sits No. 116 in the FedExCup standings.

### **Tony Romo**

Former Dallas Cowboys quarterback and current NFL on CBS analyst Tony Romo made a nervous start with two opening bogeys, shooting 5-over 77 while playing on a sponsor exemption. Romo, one of two amateurs in the field, mixed three birdies with three bogeys in an even-par front-nine 36, before coming unstuck on the back nine, dropping five strokes in a four-hole stretch (Nos. 13-16) to sit T127.

Romo hit 8 of 14 fairways, 9 of 18 greens in regulation and needed 30 putts. He got up-and-down four of nine times when he missed a green.

Romo's comments following his round: "I kind of knew that the most difficult part really would be the opening holes just in the sense of getting yourself comfortable and acclimated to the environment. Then in some ways it's as simple as just getting the speed of the greens down. I just left too many putts short today. Usually putting is a strength of mine. We'll be more aggressive tomorrow. Just a couple of swings as I got to the back nine that you want back, but I'll be more committed, I'll know the lines a little bit better and hopefully I come out and go low."

### **Additional Player Notes**

Jonathan Byrd's 6-under 66 marked his low round this season (24 rounds) and his lowest-round since 66 in the final round of the 2017 Wyndham Championship. Last year, Byrd opened with 69 at the Web.com Tour event at the Corales course. Four sub-70 rounds in that event resulted in a T30 finish. Byrd said watching his 11-year-old son, Jackson, win a golf tournament last week inspired him to try to win after missing the Florida swing tournaments due to a poor re-rank position.

Former Presidents Cup International Team member Brendon de Jonge posted a bogey-free 66 in round one. In his fifth start this season, de Jonge is seeking to make the cut for the second time (T54/The RSM Classic).

After a T59 finish at the Safeway Open and T74 at the Sanderson Farms Championship to begin the season, Steve Wheatcroft missed seven consecutive cuts. A bogey-free, opening-round 66 in Punta Cana sets up an opportunity to end that streak.

Maryland native and Jupiter, Florida resident Denny McCarthy posted 6-under 66 while paired with Tony Romo in the first round. This marked the second time in 13 career starts on TOUR that McCarthy, a PGA TOUR rookie, has begun a tournament with a round in the 60s (68/2017 The RSM Classic).

Former University of Georgia golfer Keith Mitchell bogeyed his first hole (No. 10) before reeling off eight birdies in a 12-hole stretch (Nos. 14-7) to reach 7-under. After a double bogey at No. 8, Mitchell added a final birdie at the par-3 ninth to shoot 6-under 66, one stroke shy of his career-low 65 (R4/2017 OHL Classic at Mayakoba).

Xinjun Zhang (66) earned his 2017-18 PGA TOUR card by finishing 20th on the Web.com Tour Regular Season money list. Zhang, 30, is a two-time PGA TOUR China winner. He is also a six-time runner-up on PGA TOUR China and is that Tour's all-time leading money-winner. At the Safeway Open to start this season, Zhang finished T37, becoming the first-ever full PGA TOUR member from China to play all four rounds in a TOUR event. His T20 at the 2017 OHL Classic at Mayakoba is his best career result on the PGA TOUR.

Troy Matteson (66) is making his second start this season (MC/Sanderson Farms Championship). The 38-year-old owns two PGA TOUR titles, both victories at the Safeway Open in 2006 and 2009. Matteson also claimed two Web.com Tour wins in 2005. With 22 top-10 finishes from 273 starts on TOUR, Matteson seeks his first top-10 since a T5 at the 2013 Shriners Hospitals for Children Open.

This week marks Seungsu Han's third PGA TOUR start and seventh career round on TOUR. Thursday's 67 is his first round in the 60s. In 2010, he finished T39 in the Barracuda Championship in Reno-Tahoe (before the modified Stableford format). He missed the cut at the 2003 Travelers Championship while making his TOUR debut as an amateur. Last year, Han won the Casio World Open on the Japan Golf Tour, one of seven top-five finishes that saw him finish No. 4 on the Japan Golf Tour money list. The 31-year-old recorded a T5 result at the European Tour's Oman Open earlier this year, five shots behind winner Joost Luiten. He sits at No. 85 in the Official World Golf Ranking. Han, a former UNLV Rebel golfer, is also a black belt in tae kwon do. Although born in South Korea, he represents the United States.

Augusto Núñez (70), a 25-year-old from Argentina, aced the 167-yard, par-3 17<sup>th</sup> hole with an 8-iron. With a 334-yard drive at No. 7, Núñez also claimed the longest tee shot of the opening round. Last year, Núñez finished runner-up to Nate Lashley in the Corales Puntacana event on the Web.com Tour.

In his PGA TOUR debut, Tyler McCumber included two eagles (No. 4 and No. 7) in a 5-under 67. McCumber was one of four players who Monday qualified for this event at the International Links Miami Melreese CC in Miami, Florida on March 12, 2018. The former Florida Gator golfer is the son of 10-time PGA TOUR winner Mark McCumber. He turned professional in 2013 and owns three wins on PGA TOUR Latinoamerica. McCumber played the Web.com Tour in 2015, where his lone top-10 was fifth in the Colombia Championship.

Emiliano Grillo, a Puntacana Resort ambassador and the highest-ranked player in the field at No. 75 in the Official World Golf Ranking, fired an even-par 72 to sit T73. Should Grillo advance to the weekend, his streak of consecutive made cuts would increase to 10. The two players with the most consecutive made cuts (10) are Adam Hadwin and James Hahn, both competing in this week's World Golf Championships-Dell Technologies Match Play.

Irishman Paul Dunne (67) and 49-year-old Omar Uresti each hit 18 of 18 greens in regulation, while Retief Goosen (70), Harris English (71) and David Hearn (69) all hit 14 of 14 fairways in regulation.

Ten major champions teed it up this week; Angel Cabrera (73), Retief Goosen (70), John Daly (73), Jim Furyk (72), Trevor Immelman (69), Davis Love III (71), Graeme McDowell (70), Shaun Micheel (74), Geoff Ogilvy (69) and Mike Weir (72).

Five players from the Dominican Republic are in the field this week; Rhadames Pena (71), Willy Pumarol (76), George Riley (74), Julio Santos (70) and Hiram Silfa (71).

Sam Ryder (72), who competed in two previous Web.com Tour events at this venue, finishing T2 in 2016 with rounds of 70-64-65-69, and T12 in 2017 with four sub-70 rounds (69-67-69-68) sits T73. Ryder's first-round 72 continues his streak of par-or-better rounds at Corales Puntacana.

Kyle Reifers, the last alternate to get into the field, bogeyed his final hole to shoot 2-under 70 and sit T36.

#### **Miscellaneous Notes**

The low 18-hole score at Corales Puntacana is 10-under 62. Three players recorded 62s in the 2016 Corales Puntacana Resort & Club Championship when it was a Web.com Tour event (Stephen Jaeger/R2, Scott Harrington/R2, Alexandre Rocha/R3).

Scoring Averages:

	<b>Front 9</b>	<b>Back 9</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>
R1	34.742	36.583	71.326	--

The 244-yard, par-3 11<sup>th</sup> was the hardest in round one with an average of 3.311. The easiest hole was the par-5 7<sup>th</sup> hole, which played to an average of 4.417.

Bogey-free rounds:

R1 – Brice Garnett (63), Brendon de Jonge (66), Paul Dunne (67), Martin Flores (68), Michael Kim (68), Kelly Kraft (68), Julio Santos (70), Steve Wheatcroft (66), Xinjun Zhang (66).