**Saxon posts clubhouse lead as Haikou Championship first round suspended**

HAIKOU, China—Charlie Saxon’s bid for a second consecutive PGA TOUR Series-China victory started strongly as the American posted the clubhouse lead with a bogey-free, 6-under 66 before officials suspended play on the first day of the Haikou Championship.

Saxon compatriot Trevor Sluman was 6-under after 17 holes at Sunac Haikou 3KM Golf when the first ended at 12:20 p.m., due to severe thunderstorms, with 35 of the 144 players yet to start.

Japanese teenager Yuwa Kosaihira shot 67 and was among only 24 players to finish their first rounds. Play will resume at 8 a.m., Friday, with the second round scheduled to start at 1.15 p.m.

China’s Weiyu Zhu (13 holes), American Corey Shaun (15 holes) and Australia’s Corey Hale (16 holes) were at 3-under, while England’s Callum Tarren, Korea’s Woojin Jung and Canada’s Justin Shin each shot 70 to finish 2-under.

Saxon, who won the weather-delayed Changsha Championship on Monday morning, teed off on No. 10 and birdied his opening hole, adding birdies at Nos. 13 and 14.

On the front nine, the 25-year-old picked up further shots at Nos. 3, 5 and 9 before signing for his card just minutes before the suspension of play, unaware of the incoming rain.

“I played great, drove the ball really well and it was just a solid round of golf. If you drive the ball well out here, it’s a lot of wedges and short irons, and I was able to do that. I hit a couple close and capitalized by making a few putts,” said Saxon, currently second in the Order of Merit behind Jeffrey Kang, who only played one hole on Thursday.

“It was a nice day. You couldn’t really ask for a much prettier day. The wind wasn’t up too much, the course was playing soft, the greens are playing perfect and the layout is set up to shoot some good numbers,” Saxon added.

Sluman, 24, evacuated the course on the 18th and will re-start in a good position on the 595-yard par-5.

Boosted by a hole-in-one in his Tuesday practice round, Sluman fired nine birdies, a bogey and a double bogey in 17 holes as he also enjoyed the stunning weather before the thunderstorms arrived.

“I’m playing well. I was struggling on the greens on Monday and Tuesday, and I figured something out after my round on Tuesday. I was really feeling the speed well and hit a lot of close wedges, so feeling good,” said Sluman, who tied for sixth at the Chongqing Championship in March, a month after securing his card at Q-School in Haikou.

“This course is fantastic. I really enjoy it. It has a lot of variety off the tees, a lot of irons, a lot of drivers, so lots of ways to play it. The greens are also just perfect and luckily for me, I felt the speed perfectly so I was really able to make a lot of putts today.”

Kosaihira, eighth on the Order of Merit, suffered two early bogeys, but seven birdies put the 19-year-old just one behind the two Americans at the close of play. The Japanese bogeyed Nos. 1 and 5 either side of a birdie on No. 3 but picked up the pace from No. 9, with six birdies in his last 10 holes.

“I played very good. I didn’t miss the fairway once today, so it was my lucky day,” said Kosaihira, who headed straight to the practice green following his round.

“I’m going to practice another hour on my putting, and then hopefully I can do the same tomorrow and have some nice putts.”