

First-Round Notes – Thursday, April 1, 2021

Course Setup: Par 70 / 6,891 yards

Media Contact: Zach Dirlam – ZachDirlam@pgatourhq.com, (517-262-5109)

First-Round Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Andrew Novak	62 (-8)
T2	Hayden Buckley	66 (-4)
	Austin Smotherman	66 (-4)
	Josh Hart	66 (-4)
T5	Eight Tied	67 (-3)

Quick Links

- [Leaderboard](#)
- [Tee Times](#)
- [Tournament Media Site](#) (interviews and other resources available for download)

Andrew Novak rides hot putter to first-round lead at Emerald Coast Classic at Sandestin

MIRAMAR BEACH, Fla. – Andrew Novak compared his 8-under 62 in Thursday’s opening round of the Emerald Coast Classic at Sandestin to a shooting performance by fellow Wofford College alumnus Fletcher Magee, the all-time NCAA men’s basketball leader for made three-point field goals; he simply could not miss.

Novak, an avid basketball fan and accomplished intramural player at Wofford, made practically every putt he stood over. The Raleigh, North Carolina native ended his round at Raven Golf Club with 24 putts, highlighted by 12 one-putts and long-range makes at No. 14 (for birdie) and No. 17 (for eagle). When Novak collected his ball from the cup at the par-5 17th, he shook his head in disbelief.

“It was eight feet out and (I knew) it was going in the hole,” Novak said of his eagle putt, which he practically walked in. “There was nowhere it was going to go other than in. At that point, it was just silly. They were going in from everywhere.”

This is the second time in Novak’s three-season Korn Ferry Tour career he is leading after 18 holes. Novak previously held a one-stroke lead at the 2018 Rust-Oleum Championship following a 7-under 65.

Novak also tied the lowest round of his career, matching his 8-under 62 from the second round of the 2019 Country Club de Bogota Championship.

Novak earned his first career Korn Ferry Tour victory at last year’s LECOM Suncoast Classic, his final start prior to the COVID-19 pandemic hiatus. When Novak returned to Tour play four months later, his game was far from sharp. He missed cuts in 12 of his 16 starts after the restart, opened 2021 with a missed cut at the very event he won a year prior, and finished outside the top 30 the last two weeks.

Novak spent much of the offseason working on his swing and is pleased the results are starting to show.

“My short game was still good and I was making some putts, but I couldn’t play golf the way I was hitting it the last few months,” Novak said. “Offseason came at a really good time. I like how I’ve been playing. The last few weeks, scores haven’t been as low as they could’ve been, but I was executing shots how I wanted to.”

One of those shots? A hole-in-one at last week’s Club Car Championship at The Landings Club. Novak hit a 6-iron from 188 yards for his first hole-in-one since high school, when he hit the same club from the same yardage.

“It was a little into the wind last week,” Novak said. “It had been a while. I was due.”

Novak holds a four-stroke lead over Hayden Buckley, Austin Smotherman, and Monday qualifier Josh Hart, who carded 4-under 66s in the afternoon wave. It is the largest 18-hole lead since Conrad Shindler led by four after a 10-under 62 at the 2017 Simmons Bank Open for the Snedeker Foundation.

Only three of the eight 3-under 67s came from the morning wave, which battled sustained winds of more than 20 miles per hour, gusts over 30 miles per hour, and temperatures in the 40s.

Second-round tee times will run from 6:50 a.m. to 1:50 p.m. local time Friday off the first and 10th tees.

Thursday Notes

- Thursday’s weather: Windy with a high of 62 degrees and wind N at 22-28 mph, with gusts up to 30-38 mph
- Novak projects to jump from 30th to 11th in the Korn Ferry Tour points standings with a win; he is also looking to become the fifth 18-hole leader/co-leader to go on to win this season
- Last week’s Club Car Championship at The Landings Club winner, Adam Svensson, sits T5 after a 3-under 67, his eighth consecutive round in the 60s
- There were three bogey-free rounds carded Thursday – Hayden Buckley (66), Wade Binfield (67), Brandon Crick (68)
- Buckley (T2 / -4), who won the first Korn Ferry Tour event of the calendar year, shot his lowest score (66) since his second-round 6-under 65 at February’s LECOM Suncoast Classic
- Austin Smotherman (T2 / -4) rebounded from a missed cut last week with a 4-under 68
- Josh Hart (T2 / -4) was the only one of the eight Monday qualifiers who broke par Thursday; he is making his second career Korn Ferry Tour start, with the other coming at the 2008 Miccosukee Championship
- The lowest round of the morning wave was a 3-under 67 carded by Binfield, Rico Hoey, and Stephan Jaeger
- Binfield (T5 / -3) missed the cut in the first three Korn Ferry Tour events of 2021, and has missed 12 of 14 cuts dating back to last year; he earned extra money as a substitute teacher at his former high school (Our Lady of Mercy Catholic High School) early in his mini-tour career
- Jaeger (T5 / -3), who played on the PGA TOUR last week at the Corales Puntacana Resort & Club Championship, has five top-10s in his last eight Korn Ferry Tour starts
- Chandler Blanchet (T115 / +5) played college golf at University of West Florida in Pensacola
- This week’s purse is \$600,000 with \$108,000 going to the champion; the champion will also receive 500 Korn Ferry Tour points

- The Emerald Coast Classic at Sandestin is the fourth event of 2021 and the 27th of the 2020-21 combined season
- The combined 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour schedule will conclude with 25 PGA TOUR cards awarded in August at the 2021 Pinnacle Bank Championship presented by Aetna, with an additional 25 cards awarded at the conclusion of the 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Finals

First-Round Course Statistics

- Toughest Hole – No. 9, Par 4, 460 yards (4.551 – 13 birdies, 34 bogeys, 29 double bogeys or worse)
- Easiest Hole – No. 17, Par 5, 546 yards (4.667 – three eagles, 77 birdies, 21 bogeys or worse)
- Scoring Average (Front 9) – 37.385
- Scoring Average (Back 9) – 35.526
- Scoring Average (Total) – 72.910