

First-Round Notes – Thursday, April 29, 2021

Course Setup: Par 70 / 7,118 yards

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First-Round Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
T1	Carl Yuan	64 (-6)
	Nick Hardy	64 (-6)
T3	Six Tied	65 (-5)

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Hardy, Yuan share lead at Huntsville Championship

HUNTSVILLE, Ala. – Nick Hardy worked a slight kink of out his swing, while Carl Yuan improved his short game and recalculated his approach from the fairway during the offseason. Those adjustments have Hardy and Yuan tied atop the leaderboard with nearly all the first round completed at the Huntsville Championship.

Play was suspended due to darkness with three players still on the final hole of their opening round.

Hazards and ridge lines at The Ledges make for intimidating tee shots, but Hardy stayed out of trouble. The Northbrook, Illinois native hit 11 of 13 fairways and carded a bogey-free 6-under 64. Only two other players posted a bogey-free round Thursday.

“I was just able to be aggressive from the fairway,” Hardy said. “I don’t think I made a putt outside of 10 feet. It was just a solid day. I had a couple good up and downs early from off the green, but other than that I was able to keep my momentum going by driving it good. My game is rounding into form in general, and I’m controlling myself really steadily out there mentally and emotionally.

“I’ve got my swing dialed in to where I want it to be,” continued Hardy, whose only other lead in a Korn Ferry Tour event was after 18 holes at the Nationwide Children’s Hospital Championship last August. “I just wasn’t hitting it great in any of the first few events (of 2021). I know, when I’m a little off, how to fix myself on the road. That’s a big advantage.”

Hardy has been on a tear since the final round of the Emerald Coast Classic at Sandestin earlier this month. The University of Illinois alumnus flirted with a 59, but ultimately settled for a 10-under 60. He followed the stellar round with a T5 finish at the MGM Resorts Championship at Paiute, and opened last week’s Veritex Bank Championship with three consecutive rounds in the 60s.

Hardy also has some extra motivation to perform well this week. His father woke up at 1:30 a.m. for the 8.5-hour drive from Chicago to ensure he arrived for Hardy’s 1:22 p.m. tee time.

“He was ready to go,” Hardy said. “It’s special. It means a lot. There are people willing to sacrifice to watch me play. It’s pretty cool.”

Yuan has a share of the lead for the first time in his three years on the Korn Ferry Tour. Yuan’s 6-under 64 also tied the second-lowest round of his Korn Ferry Tour career, only trailing the 7-under 63 he posted at the 2019 Ellie Mae Classic.

Thursday was the fourth time this year Yuan shot 65 or better, and he rode the previous three rounds to top-15 finishes, including a T5 last week at the inaugural Veritex Bank Championship.

“This Tour is getting tougher. You’ve got to shoot some low scores,” Yuan said. “I’ve got to try to make a lot of birdies to be able to finish higher. I took the first two years to change my mindset and change my game around to be able to do that.”

One of the biggest changes Yuan came after he made improvements to his putting. With more confidence than ever in his mid-range putting, Yuan can take a more conservative approach into greens and still come away with birdies.

“I know if I hit it to mid-range, I have a pretty good chance of making it,” Yuan said. “It changed my strategy around to give myself more birdie looks instead of par saves.”

Yuan played three seasons at the University of Washington, then played in four PGA TOUR China events as an amateur in the summer of 2018. Yuan, a native of Dalian, China, won his third start, turned professional after the fourth, and played five more PGA TOUR China events before he garnered conditional status on the Korn Ferry Tour for the 2019 season via Q School.

Prior to Thursday, Yuan had never been higher than T15 after the first round of a Korn Ferry Tour event.

Second-round tee times will run from 6:35 a.m. to 1:56 p.m. local time Friday off the first and 10th tees.

Thursday Notes

- Thursday’s weather: Mostly cloudy & breezy with a high of 82 degrees and wind SW at 10-16 mph, with gusts up to 25 mph
- Play was suspended for fog at 10:47 a.m., and play resumed at 11:18 a.m.
- Yuan projects to jump from 45th to 17th in the Korn Ferry Tour points standings with a win, while a win for Hardy projects to move him from 18th to 7th
 - Only four 18-hole leaders/co-leaders have gone on to win this season
- Yuan entered the calendar year with two rounds of 65 or better in his Korn Ferry Tour career; he already has four this year
- Thursday’s three bogey-free rounds belonged to Hardy, **Will Cannon** (5-under 65 / T3) – a University of Alabama-Birmingham graduate and Birmingham resident – and **Jack Maguire** (4-under 67 / T9)
- **Zack Sucher** (T3), a Birmingham resident who played collegiately at UAB, is back on the Korn Ferry Tour after a PGA TOUR start last week at the Zurich Classic of New Orleans
- **Will Wilcox**, who graduated from Pell City High School just outside Birmingham, Alabama, sits T9 after a 4-under 66 highlighted by seven birdies

- University of Alabama alum **Davis Riley** (T22) birdied his final two holes and carded a 2-under 68
- **Lee Hodges** (T39), who was born in Huntsville, grew up in nearby Ardmore, and played collegiately at both UAB and University of Alabama, shook off a triple bogey and posted a 1-under 69 with five birdies
- Riley and Hodges are 5th and 6th, respectively, in the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour points standings
- **Bobby Bai's** (T3) best finish in his 19 career Korn Ferry Tour starts is a T24 at the 2020 El Bosque Mexico Championship by INNOVA last March
- At last week's Veritex Bank Championship, **Paul Barjon** (T3) shot the tournament course record (a 9-under 62) and posted his first top-25 finish since last September's Evans Scholar Invitational
- **Joey Garber** (T3), who matched Yuan's field-leading eight birdies Thursday, is seeking his first top-20 finish since a T8 at last September's Wichita Open Benefiting KU Wichita Pediatrics
- **David Lipsky** (T3) sits inside the top five of the leaderboard for the fifth time in his last nine rounds; he finished T2 (MGM Resorts Championship at Pauite) and solo second (Emerald Coast Classic at Sandestin) in his last two starts
- **Jamie Arnold** made the first hole-in-one of his Korn Ferry Tour career at the 197-yard, par-3 11th
- 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 Huntsville Championship is the seventh event of 2021 and the 30th 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 (updated after players concluded first round)

- Toughest Hole – No. 2, Par 4, 436 yards (4.413 – 19 birdies, 47 bogeys, 16 double bogeys or worse)
- Easiest Hole – No. 10, Par 5, 548 yards (4.432 – 5 eagles, 92 birdies, 8 bogeys or worse)
- Scoring Average (Front 9) – 35.335
- Scoring Average (Back 9) – 35.019
- Scoring Average (Total) – 70.355