

Partial First-Round Notes – Thursday, June 3, 2021

Course Setup: Par 71 / 7,257 yards

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

Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Andrew Novak	61 (-10)
2	Mito Pereira	-8 [16*]
3	Charlie Saxon	64 (-7)
T4	David Kocher	-6 [17]
	Zach Wright	-6 [14]
	KK Limbhasut	-6 [14]

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Andrew Novak cards career-low 61 as storms suspend first round of REX Hospital Open

RALEIGH, N.C. – It seems fitting for Andrew Novak to stand atop the REX Hospital Open leaderboard. Novak, a Raleigh, North Carolina native who was born at REX Hospital, carded a career-low 10-under 61 and took the lead prior to the suspension of Thursday’s opening round.

Before play began Thursday, first-round tee times were delayed one hour due to rain. Play was then suspended at 1:21 p.m., with only 30 players officially posting a score. The first round will resume Friday at 8 a.m., with tee times beginning again at 8:11 a.m.

Novak carded the sixth round of 61 or better on the Korn Ferry Tour this season, with the most recent being a pair of 9-under 61s from Greyson Sigg and Seth Reeves three weeks ago at the Visit Knoxville Open.

A hot putter carried Novak to a 7-under 29 on the front nine, highlighted by a 30-footer for eagle at the par-5 fourth. The 26-year-old birdied four of his next five holes (to go along with another birdie from the par-3 second), but put himself in an awkward position at the par-4 10th. Novak’s wedge shot into the green came up well short and landed in a bunker.

“I hit my drive way farther than I had been thinking it would go. I was on this downslope to that pin, and I couldn’t really stop it,” Novak said. “I tried to hit a higher shot and essentially just fatted a wedge right in the front bunker. It was a pretty terrible shot. I did the best I could, but I was probably 15 feet from the back fringe and made that for par. Huge momentum par. Big putt there to keep it going.”

After a tap-in birdie at the par-4 11th, Novak barely missed a trio of quality birdie looks, seemingly ending his pursuit of a sub-60 round. An easy birdie at the par-5 15th and tap-in birdie at the par-3 16th brought golf's magic number back into play.

Novak, however, had no idea.

"I forgot it was par 71," Novak said. "On No. 17 tee, they moved the tee up and it kind of threw me off. I just hit a 4-iron to be smart. I could've hit 3-wood, hit it down the hill and had a wedge in like my playing partners. They both had birdie. I had 220 (yards) in and had a 5-iron.

"My caddie is on thin ice right now," Novak joked. "He failed to remind me it was a par 71, so I had 59 out of my head."

Novak nearly rolled in his 25-footer for birdie at the 17th, then hit an approach inside of 10 feet at the par-4 18th, but he settled for par on both occasions.

"I just knew I was swinging it well and was going to go attack," Novak said. "I knew some of the pins were gettable. The conditions... ball in hand with softer greens, I knew I could get after it if I could get some putts going in. Got the putter going, and that helped to get the round going with positive momentum."

Novak, who lived in Raleigh until he was 7, took a week off prior to what he regards as his home tournaments – this week, and next week's BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by SYNEX Corporation in Greer, South Carolina, which is less than 25 miles from his alma mater, Wofford College. The rest was much deserved after a run of five consecutive top-10 finishes from the first week of April through the second week of May, and much needed after missed cuts in the two starts thereafter.

The string of top-10s took Novak from 30th to 15th in the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour points standings, and he entered this week ranked 19th, still in prime position to earn a PGA TOUR card come August.

"I'd been doing great for the first part of the stretch, and the last two weeks the weather was so bad I just got worn out," Novak said. "I really needed that week off to reset, mentally refocus."

Charlie Saxon's 7-under 64 was the second-lowest score among players who completed their first round Thursday. Mito Pereira turned to the front nine and made six birdies in seven holes prior to the suspension of play; he will resume his round at the par-4 eighth at 8-under par.

Thursday Notes

- **Andrew Novak's** career-low round on the Korn Ferry Tour prior to Thursday was an 8-under 62, which he shot at April's Emerald Coast Classic at Sandestin (first round) and the 2019 Country Club de Bogota Championship (second round)
- Four bogey-free rounds were posted – Novak (61), **Charlie Saxon** (64), **Nicholas Lindheim** (66), **Grayson Murray** (69)
- Despite having two holes remaining in his round, **Mito Pereira** already has 10 birdies, two more than he's ever recorded in a Korn Ferry Tour round; his previous career high on the Korn Ferry Tour was eight at The King & Bear Classic at World Golf Village last June
- Weather: Scattered showers and thunderstorms, high of 78 degrees, wind S/SW at 3-14 mph



- This week's purse is \$650,000 with \$117,000 going to the champion; the champion will also receive 500 Korn Ferry Tour points
- The REX Hospital Open is the 12th event of 2021 and the 35th 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