

### First-Round Notes – Thursday, August 5, 2021

**Course Setup:** Par 71 / 7,045 yards

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

#### Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
T1	Joshua Creel	63 (-8)
	Mark Blakefield	63 (-8)
T3	Erik Barnes	64 (-7)
	Derek Ernst	64 (-7)
	Brett Stegmaier	64 (-7)
	Steven Alker	64 (-7)

#### Quick Links

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

---

#### Mark Blakefield, Joshua Creel share 18-hole lead at Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank

**FARMINGTON, Utah** – The two men tied atop the leaderboard after the first round of the Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank previously enjoyed a high point in their respective careers at this event. Joshua Creel and Mark Blakefield carded matching 8-under 63s Thursday for a one-stroke lead on the field at Oakridge Country Club. Both have a share of an 18-hole lead for the first time in a Korn Ferry Tour event.

Making his 66th career start on the Korn Ferry Tour, with 61 coming since the start of 2019, Creel recorded his second-lowest round and second-lowest score to par, only trailing a 9-under 62 from the 2021 Live and Work in Maine Open this past June. Creel's first-round 63 was highlighted by an eagle at the par-5 seventh, and a string of four consecutive birdies on the back nine (Nos. 13-16).

One of those birdies was a near-ace at the par-3 14th. Creel's ball landed roughly two yards from the pin and rolled within an inch of the cup.

The 31-year-old Cheyenne, Wyoming native finished June's Live and Work in Maine Open solo second, matching the best finish of his career. The other solo second came at the 2019 Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank, where he lost a sudden-death playoff to Kristoffer Ventura. It was Creel's first top-five on the Korn Ferry Tour.

"I've got some pretty good memories here. Just one bad one in particular I think about daily," Creel said. "The bad memory is the 8-footer I missed on the first playoff hole (in 2019), and I think about it a lot."

Creel is currently 64th in the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour points standings, leaving him in comfortable position to make the Korn Ferry Tour Finals. His finish this week, though, will determine whether he tees it up in the regular season finale.

“Unless I win this week or finish solo second, I will probably skip next week and just get ready for the Finals,” said Creel, who finished 29th in the 2019 Korn Ferry Tour regular season points standings. “If I finish fifth or something, I don’t really have a chance to get a (PGA TOUR) card through the regular season, so I’ll take next week off to rest and prep.”

Blakefield finished T8 at the 2020 Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank last summer. A native of Maysville, Kentucky, Blakefield entered this week with three top-10s in 75 starts on the Korn Ferry Tour.

The University of Kentucky alum never stood higher than fourth after the first round of a Korn Ferry Tour event, and his 8-under 63 marked a career-low round. Blakefield also matched his career-low score to par, tying his 8-under 64 from the 2015 BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by SYNEX Corporation.

Blakefield made the turn at 2-under par and carded a 6-under 29 on the back nine with birdies at Nos. 17 and 18.

“I’m pretty comfortable on this course for whatever reason,” Blakefield said. “I can’t explain it, but I’ve always felt pretty comfortable around here.”

Blakefield earned status for what became the 2020-21 season with a T7 at the 2019 Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament’s Final Stage. He sits 126th in the points standings, leaving him in need of a high finish one of the next two weeks to play his way into the Korn Ferry Tour Finals.

“I know what I need to do, but I’m just trying to see how many birdies I can make,” Blakefield said. “Pressure is pressure, and you react however you want to react to it. It’s always going to be there. No matter where you’re at, there’s always something. You’ve just got to accept it and go with it.”

Blakefield turned 39 Tuesday, and his parents flew in from Kentucky Wednesday evening to spend the week with him.

“They couldn’t let me be out here on my birthday week without some family,” Blakefield said. “I’m sure I’ll talk with (his wife) Bri and the (two) boys in a few minutes. Neither one of them have any idea where I’m even at. It’s nice to let go of the golf stuff for a little while.”

Second-round tee times will run from 7 a.m. through 2:15 p.m. local time off the first and 10th tees.

#### Thursday Notes

- **Joshua Creel** projects to jump from 64th to 31st in the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour points standings with a win, while a victory projects to move **Mark Blakefield** from 126th to 63rd
- Creel’s highest standing after 18 holes prior to this week was T2 at the 2020 The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay last January
- Creel first earned status on the Korn Ferry Tour with a T34 at the 2018 Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament’s Final Stage; he came off a three-win season on the All Pro Tour, which netted him the mini-tour’s player of the year honor

- Creel began his collegiate career at the University of Colorado, then transferred and played his final two seasons at University of Central Oklahoma, where he was a two-time All-American and won the individual national title at the 2012 NCAA Division II Championships as a senior
- Blakefield's highest 18-hole position on the Korn Ferry Tour prior to Thursday was fourth place on four different occasions, with the most recent being T4 after a first-round 6-under 64 at the 2020 Wichita Open Benefitting KU Wichita Pediatrics last September
- Blakefield's highest finish in a Korn Ferry Tour event was a T4 at the 2018 LECOM Health Challenge
- Three players on the bubble forming at the back end of the top 25 of this season's points standings – **Erik Barnes** (T3), **Roberto Díaz** (T7), **Peter Uihlein** (T7) – are in the top-10 after the first round
  - In the points standings, Díaz sits 24th, Barnes is 28th, and Uihlein is 30th
- **T.K. Kim** paced the eight Monday qualifiers with a 5-under 66 and sits T18; he is a Boise State University alum making his second Korn Ferry Tour start (he previously missed the cut at the 2019 Pinnacle Bank Championship presented by Aetna)
- There were 12 bogey-free rounds recorded Thursday
- Weather: Hazy, sunny, and hot, high of 99 degrees, wind SSW at 3-12 mph
- 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 Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank is the 19th event of 2021 and the 42nd of the 43-event 2020-21 combined regular season
- The combined 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour schedule will conclude with 25 PGA TOUR cards awarded next week 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. 10, Par 4, 517 yards (4.329 – seven birdies, 41 bogeys, eight double bogeys or worse)
- **Easiest Hole** – No. 15, Par 5, 547 yards (4.310 – 12 eagles, 89 birdies, four bogeys or worse)
- **Scoring Average (Front 9 – Par 36)** – 34.497
- **Scoring Average (Back 9 – Par 35)** – 34.439
- **Scoring Average (Total)** – 68.935