

Third-Round Notes – Saturday, February 12, 2022

Course Setup: Country Club de Bogota (Lagos) – Par 71 / 7,237 yards

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Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
T1	Joey Garber	69-64-64—197 (-15)
	Ben Griffin	68-61-68—197 (-15)
T3	Taylor Montgomery	66-70-62—198 (-14)
	Brandon Matthews	67-65-66—198 (-14)
5	Ryan McCormick	61-69-69—199 (-13)

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Joey Garber, Ben Griffin share 54-hole lead at Astara Golf Championship presented by Mastercard

BOGOTA, Colombia – A former mortgage loan officer in the midst of a career revival, and a past Korn Ferry Tour champion share the 54-hole lead at the Astara Golf Championship presented by Mastercard, as Ben Griffin and Joey Garber both reached 15-under par Saturday at Country Club de Bogota.

With the full post-cut field playing Country Club de Bogota’s Lagos course for the third round, Garber carded a bogey-free 7-under 64, tying the second-lowest score of his career and marking his best since firing a career-low 8-under 63 last June at the 2021 BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by TD SYNEX. Griffin, the outright 36-hole leader, followed up a career-low round from Friday with his second 3-under 68 this week on the Lagos course.

Garber birdied the par-4 first and parred the next six holes. From just short of the green at the par-5 eighth, Garber chipped in for eagle, and backed it up with a lengthy putt for birdie at the par-4 ninth. Four pars later, the University of Georgia alum sank back-to-back birdies at the par-4 14th and par-3 15th. Two more pars preceded a closing birdie at the par-5 18th, solidifying one of two bogey-free scorecards turned in Saturday.

“Any time you can stay clean around this golf course, you’re doing something right,” Garber said. “I’ll look to build on that and try and repeat it tomorrow, and hit as many similar shots as I can. I’ve been putting well, and that’s usually my strength. That’s a good thing to do on Sunday, and that’s what I’ll look to do tomorrow.”

Garber, a Petoskey, Michigan native, holds a share of the 54-hole lead for the first time in what is his 78th Korn Ferry Tour start. Prior this week, Garber's highest 54-hole position at a Korn Ferry Tour event was T2 at the 2018 REX Hospital Open, where he earned his first and only Tour win.

The victory helped Garber secure his first PGA TOUR card at season's end. And while Garber's 2018-19 TOUR season was inconsistent (12 missed cuts in 22 starts), it was not without high points, as he logged a T10 at the 2019 Puerto Rico Open and a T7 at the 2019 3M Open. A final ranking of 170th in the FedExCup Standings, however, sent Garber back to the Korn Ferry Tour.

"I love the Korn Ferry Tour, the guys that are here," said Garber, who finished No. 72 in the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour Regular Season Points Standings for fully exempt status this year. "I feel comfortable out there. I love being out there. We're having a good time, and I'm just trying to enjoy myself on the golf course. I love Bogota. We've gone out to dinner a couple nights and explored the city, and I look forward to doing that again tomorrow. Restaurants, the people, the climate is incredible, the trees are beautiful. We're very fortunate to be here."

Griffin struggled early in his third round, bogeying the par-4 first and parring his next 10 holes, including a three-putt par at the par-5 eighth. Birdies at the par-3 12th and par-4 14th finally generated some momentum, which culminated in back-to-back birdies at Nos. 17 and 18.

"Couple holes starting out were playing a little more difficult than I thought," Griffin said. "I was patient again, just like yesterday, and just waited. I was still focusing on myself and just trying to play my game, waiting for the birdies to come. Hit one close on (No. 12) and started rolling in a few bigger putts... put myself back at the top where I want to be."

Griffin's return to professional golf is proving to be an inspiring story.

A highly-touted junior golfer and two-time All-America Honorable Mention at the University of North Carolina, Griffin turned professional in 2018 and enjoyed immediate success on PGA TOUR Canada.

In his first event, roughly a week after the 2018 NCAA Championships concluded on May 28, Griffin finished solo fourth. A month later, Griffin won the Staal Foundation Open presented by tbatyel and eventually ended the year ranked No. 8 on the Order of Merit, which earned him an exemption to the Final Stage of the Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament.

Things took a downward turn shortly thereafter.

A T100 finish at Final Stage left Griffin without guaranteed starts for the 2019 Korn Ferry Tour season. Buried in the priority ranking, Griffin split the year between Korn Ferry Tour (six missed cuts in eight starts) and PGA TOUR Canada (three missed cuts in four starts), combining for less than \$4,000 in official money across both tours. A failed run on PGA TOUR Latinoamérica (four missed cuts in as many starts) for the 2020-21 season drove Griffin out of golf.

"I was burnt out," Griffin said. "Golf was hard and I wasn't making enough money to support myself. My parents have always been supportive of me, but I never wanted to ask them for any help. I wanted to start making some financial decisions on my own, and that's kind of why I had to go to work. It was one of those things... I wasn't confident in myself to make it all the way to the (PGA) TOUR back then. I didn't see myself doing it. It was really weird, but I was going through one of those times. It was dark."

The Monday after a two-man event in April 2021, Griffin went to his father's office and filled in for an employee who resigned. Griffin worked in property management for a few weeks, trying to figure out what he wanted to do with professional golf now in the rearview.

"My mom was a loan officer; she told me I would be good at it, so I went ahead and accepted a job mid-April," Griffin said. "I had to spend a little time studying to get my license. By beginning of May, I was in the office starting to work a little bit, grinded all through May, June."

Throughout last July, Griffin mulled a comeback as he worked as a mortgage loan officer in his hometown of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. At first, it was entirely subconscious. After a [successful Monday qualifier](#), it became a mission.

"I never had to wear a jacket and tie when I worked, but I liked to," Griffin said. "I dressed up one day and started driving to work and accidentally drove to the golf course. I was like, 'What am I doing?'"

"A couple days later, my grandpa had been battling with some things from a health standpoint and he passed away," Griffin continued. "He was one of the big people involved in me getting into golf, along with my dad. And in his obituary he said, *hit them long and straight*. When I saw that, and after I had accidentally driven to the course, I was like, 'Maybe I need to give this another run.'"

"It was hard," Griffin said of the decision to quit his job as a mortgage loan officer. "I had really good co-workers... and they wanted me to be very successful in the business. I want to thank them for everything. One person in particular, Karen Lorbacher, she taught me a lot. When I decided to leave, I mean, it was disappointing because she had spent probably a month and a half really training me. It was hard, but I had a couple things telling me I needed to go back."

A return to Final Stage last November resulted in a T29 and eight guaranteed starts. In the first two events this season, Griffin finished T8 and T12. In the nine Korn Ferry Tour starts Griffin made prior to 2022, his best finish was T57. Griffin's best round in those nine starts was a 4-under 67. Through 13 rounds this year, Griffin has four 67s, along with Friday's 9-under 61 on Country Club de Bogota's Pacos course.

It's safe to say Ben Griffin is back.

"For a while, kind of had lost my dreams," Griffin said. "I'm just so fortunate to have so many people on my side, and I'm just hoping to continue to do my thing."

"Hopefully I can make a nice run tomorrow."

Taylor Montgomery will join Garber and Griffin in the final group of Sunday's final round. A Las Vegas, Nevada resident in his second Korn Ferry Tour season, Montgomery broke the course record with a 9-under 62 and rose all the way from T39 position to T3. Montgomery finished No. 26 in both the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour Regular Season Points Standings and Korn Ferry Tour Finals, leaving him one position shy of a PGA TOUR card on both occasions.

Final-round tee times will run in groups of three from 7-11:15 a.m. ET off the first tee of the Lagos course.

Third-Round Notes

- **Taylor Montgomery** (T3 / -14) broke the course record for Country Club de Bogota's Lagos course with a 9-under 62; the previous record of 8-under 63 was shared by **Ivan Camilo Ramirez** (2022, Round 2), Will Zalatoris (2020, Round 3), and Alex Cejka (2014, Round 3)
 - Montgomery equaled his career-low round in PGA TOUR-sanctioned play, a 9-under 62 from the third round of the 2021 Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank
 - Montgomery leads the field with 22 birdies, in addition to an eagle from his first round, but only six of the 71 players who made the cut have more bogeys or worse than Montgomery (10)
 - Montgomery enters the final round at T3 or higher for the third time in his 47 Korn Ferry Tour starts; he was T1 (and finished T2) last August at the 2021 Utah Championship presented by Zions Bank, and T2 (finished T16) at the 2020 Wichita Open Benefitting KU Wichita Pediatrics
- **Joey Garber's** (T1 / -15) 7-under 64 was one of two bogey-free rounds recorded Saturday, with the other belonging to **Ryan Brehm** (T8 / -11), who shot a 6-under 65
 - There were six bogey-free rounds on the Lagos course in the second round, and four in Thursday's first round
- Garber's only lead in his 77 previous Korn Ferry Tour events was an outright 36-hole lead last spring at the 2021 Huntsville Championship
- Garber's 15-under 197 matches his career-low 54-hole score, a 16-under 197 from the 2020 Orange County National Championship presented by Knight 39
- Prior to this week, **Ben Griffin's** (T1 / -15) highest 54-hole position on the Korn Ferry Tour was T21 at the season-opening 2022 The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay
- For the second consecutive week, **Brandon Matthews** (T3 / -14) established his highest 54-hole position on the Korn Ferry Tour; this week marks his 50th Korn Ferry Tour start
 - Prior to being T5 after last week's third round of The Panama Championship, where he finished T2, Matthews had never been higher than T9 after three rounds across 48 Korn Ferry Tour starts
 - Matthews has fully exempt status on the Korn Ferry Tour this season as the 2020-21 PGA TOUR Latinoamérica Order of Merit winner
- Playing out of the final group, **Ryan McCormick** (5th / -13) reached his career-high 54-hole position in his 52nd Korn Ferry Tour start; his previous career-high 54-hole position was T6 at the 2020 Nationwide Children's Hospital Championship
 - Earlier this week, McCormick held a share of the 18-hole lead for his first lead of any kind in a Korn Ferry Tour event, and posted a career-high 36-hole position (T2) Friday
 - McCormick enters the final round bidding for his first top-five on the Korn Ferry Tour, as his previous career-high finish is a trio of T6s, with the most recent coming last May at the 2021 AdventHealth Championship
- **Jay Card III** (T8 / -11), the seventh-to-last player who gained entry into the field via his priority ranking number, carded a 5-under 66 and climbed 16 spots on the leaderboard
 - Card's missed cut at last week's The Panama Championship marked his first PGA TOUR-sanctioned start
- Colombian **Nicolas Echavarría** (T15 / -9) was among the four players who made multiple eagles in the third round, with the others being **Sam Saunders** (T6 / -12), **Conner Godsey** (T15 / -9), and **MJ Maguire** (T15 / -9)

- Prior to Saturday's round, there were only two instances this season of a player making two eagles in the same round, as Jimmy Stanger and Brandon Crick both accomplished the feat at The Bahamas Great Abaco Classic at The Abaco Club
 - Echavarria's eagles came via a hole-out from the fairway at the par-4 13th, and a one-putt at the par-5 18th
- Echavarria, a Medellin native, continues to lead the Colombians in the field, though only he and **Ivan Camilo Ramirez** (69th / -1) survived the 36-hole cut
- **Chip McDaniel** (T49 / -4), the only one of the four open qualifiers who made the cut, climbed eight spots on the leaderboard with an even-par 71
- The Astara Golf Championship presented by Mastercard is the fourth of 23 regular season events on the 26-event 2022 Korn Ferry Tour schedule; the first set of 25 PGA TOUR cards will be awarded at the regular season finale, the Pinnacle Bank Championship presented by Aetna (August 11-14), and an additional 25 TOUR cards will be awarded following the three-event Korn Ferry Tour Finals, which conclude with the Korn Ferry Tour Championship presented by United Leasing & Finance (September 1-4)
- This week's purse is \$750,000, with \$135,000 going to the champion; the champion will also receive 500 Korn Ferry Tour points
 - All 2022 Korn Ferry Tour regular season events feature a minimum purse of \$750,000, a 25 percent increase from last season, and will boast minimum purses of \$1 million in 2023 for a [total increase of 66.7 percent](#) from 2021 to 2022