

First-Round Notes – Thursday, March 24, 2022

Course Setup: The Country Club at Golden Nugget (Par 71 / 6,940 yards)

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Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Will Gordon	65 (-6)
T2	Curtis Luck	66 (-5)
	Braden Thornberry	66 (-5)
	Rhein Gibson	66 (-5)
	Vince India	66 (-5)
T6	Eight Tied	67 (-4)

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Will Gordon takes solo lead at inaugural Lake Charles Championship

LAKE CHARLES, Louisiana – Will Gordon opened the inaugural Lake Charles Championship with a bogey-free 6-under 65 in windy conditions Thursday, taking a one-stroke lead over four players who finished the opening round 5-under par at The Country Club at Golden Nugget.

Gordon, a 25-year-old Davidson, North Carolina native, drove the green at the 304-yard par-4 first and two-putted for the first of his six birdies. Gordon made four more birdies on the front (Nos. 3, 4, 6 and 9) for a 5-under 31, the lowest score on the front nine by anyone in the field.

“The front nine has a couple par 5s and a couple drivable par 4s,” Gordon said. “All my birdies on the front nine were inside 5 feet, and that’s just because of par 5s and some short par 4s you can take advantage of.”

On the back side, Gordon’s birdie came at the par-5 14th. An up-and-down par from just off the green at No. 18 solidified one of four bogey-free rounds completed Thursday.

“With the wind today, [the course] played how it’s supposed to,” Gordon said. “It was hard to get super comfortable today out there with the wind. It helps you stay in the moment every shot. You have to be on your game every shot with the wind the way it was. I think that helped me get into a better mentality today. I hit it better off the tee today than I have been lately. My iron game has been good, so I knew if I could get it in play off the tee, I’d have some good opportunities.”

Gordon turned professional in the summer of 2019 following a successful collegiate career at Vanderbilt University, where he was the 2019 Southeastern Conference Player of the Year and a 2019 All-America First Team honoree. Following a relatively successful run on PGA TOUR Canada which featured two top-10s across nine starts, Gordon was awarded sponsor exemptions for the 2019 RSM Classic and 2020 Travelers Championship on the PGA TOUR.

Gordon parlayed a T10 at The RSM Classic and T3 at Travelers Championship into Special Temporary Membership for the remainder of the 2019-20 TOUR season. By season's end, Gordon had enough non-member FedExCup points for TOUR membership in 2020-21. After a No. 159 finish in the 2020-21 FedExCup Standings, Gordon played the 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Finals as he attempted to regain TOUR membership, but he missed all three cuts and was relegated to Final Stage of the 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament.

With a T19 at Final Stage last November, Gordon earned guaranteed starts for the first eight events of the 2022 Korn Ferry Tour season. His best finish this year was a T6 at last month's LECOM Suncoast Classic.

"It's been a little bit of a rollercoaster," Gordon said. "Getting PGA TOUR status for a year and a half, being back here, but I feel like I'm right where I'm supposed to be, and I've just got to embrace where I am. I'm enjoying it right now."

Making his 62nd PGA TOUR-sanctioned start, Gordon holds an 18-hole lead for the second time in his career. The only previous occasion was a PGA TOUR Canada event, the 2019 Lethbridge Paradise Canyon Open, where he opened with an 11-under 60.

"It's not a very big deal to me," Gordon said. "There's so much golf left, just continue to play my game and see where we are late Sunday. I'm just trying to better myself right now and see where I am at the end of the year."

Play was suspended due to darkness at 7:43 p.m. local time, with four players opting to complete the final hole of their round Friday morning. Second-round tee times will run from 7:20 a.m. through 2:30 p.m. off the first and 10th tees.

First-Round Notes

- **Will Gordon** (1st / -6) carded one of four bogey-free completed rounds Thursday, with the others belonging to **Rhein Gibson** (T2 / 5-under 66), **Brandon Harkins** (T6 / 4-under 67) and **Matt McCarty** (T37 / 1-under 70)
 - Open qualifier **Matthew Picanso** has a 1-under par bogey-free round through 17 holes
- **Braden Thornberry** (T2 / -5), **Connor Godsey** (T6 / -4), and **Jeremy Paul** (T6 / -4) all led the field with seven birdies in their opening rounds
- **Curtis Luck** (T2 / -5) and Thornberry (T2 / -5) played in the first group of the day off the first tee, going off at 7:20 a.m. local time; the two are both former No. 1-ranked players in the World Amateur Golf Ranking
 - Prior to Thursday, Luck's highest 18-hole position in 70 previous Korn Ferry Tour starts was T4 at the 2018 Visit Knoxville Open (he went on to miss the cut)
 - Thornberry co-led last week's Chitimacha Louisiana Open presented by MISTRAS after 18 holes, which marked the first time he stood inside the top five after the first round of a Korn Ferry Tour event; he made his 63rd career Korn Ferry Tour start last week

- Luck, 25, won the 2016 U.S. Amateur, notably defeating 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour graduate (and runner-up at the PGA TOUR's Valspar Championship last week) Davis Riley in the Round of 32, another 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour graduate, Cameron Young, in the Round of 16, and 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Finals graduate Sahith Theegala in the quarterfinals
- Luck, a 2018 Korn Ferry Tour Finals graduate, earned his first career Korn Ferry Tour victory last season at the 2020 Nationwide Children's Hospital Championship
- Thornberry, 24, is in his third season on the Korn Ferry Tour and second consecutive season as a fully exempt member; he was co-medalist at Final Stage of the 2019 Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament for fully exempt status last season, and finished 57th on the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour Regular Season Points List for fully exempt status this season
 - Thornberry [turned pro in December 2018](#) after a standout collegiate career at University of Mississippi; he placed T74 as an amateur at Final Stage of the 2018 Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament for conditional status and forfeit his remaining college eligibility
 - In three and a half seasons at Ole Miss, Thornberry tallied a school-record 11 victories, including the individual national title as a sophomore at the 2017 NCAA Division I Championships; he also earned the 2017 Fred Haskins Award, one of three national player of the year awards, and spent numerous weeks at No. 1 in the World Amateur Golf Ranking, netting him the 2017 and 2018 Mark H. McCormack Medal
- Gibson (T2 / -5) is a two-time Korn Ferry Tour graduate, as he earned PGA TOUR cards after the 2015 Korn Ferry Tour Finals and 2019 regular seasons; his lone Korn Ferry Tour win came at the 2019 BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by TD SYNEX
 - Should he remain T2 upon the conclusion of the first round Friday morning, it would mark Gibson's ninth time in T2 position or higher after 18 holes of a Korn Ferry Tour event in his 129th career start; he held six 18 hole leads / co-leads
- Should **Vince India** (T2 / -5) remain T2 upon the conclusion of the first round Friday morning, it would mark the sixth time in T2 position or higher after 18 holes of a Korn Ferry Tour event in his 139th career start; the last occurrence was the 2021 BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by TD SYNEX, where he stood T2 after the first round and finished T32
 - India finished No. 43 on the 2020-21 Korn Ferry Tour Regular Season Points List, earning fully exempt status (for 2022) for the first time in his career
- Covington, Louisiana resident and 2018 BMW Charity Pro-Am presented by TD SYNEX champion **Michael Arnaud**, playing via a sponsor exemption, stands T6 at 4-under par through 17 holes
- **Eric Cole** (T25 / -1) recorded his first hole-in-one in tournament play at the par-3 13; he hit a 7-iron from 214 yards
- The Lake Charles Championship is the seventh 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

First-Round Course Statistics

- Scoring Average (Total): 71.401 [+0.401]

- Scoring Average (Front Nine – Par 36): 35.510 [-0.490]
- Scoring Average (Back Nine – Par 35): 35.891 [+0.891]
- Toughest Hole: No. 10, Par 4, 500 yards – 4.397 [+0.397]
- Easiest Hole: No. 9, Par 5, 577 yards – 4.625 [-0.375]