



First-Round Transcripts | LECOM Suncoast Classic | Thursday, February 17, 2022

Thomas Walsh (-8, Solo Leader)

City Plays From: High Point, North Carolina | Turned Pro: 2019 | University of Virginia
Exempt Status: Qualifying Tournament Finishers 11-40 and Ties (thru 2022)

On his performance in the first round...

"It feels good. I played well. It was actually pretty easy, the wind died down towards the end. It was windy, the guys in the morning probably had the most wind. I just putted well all day today."

On if one shot from today stood out...

"No, one club though. I had three or four 4-irons today, especially on par 3s. I think I made four twos, or three twos today, but I was just hitting that 4-iron really solid today."

On how it feels playing in the U.S. after four consecutive international tournaments to start the season...

"It's the best thing that could've happened. It's a long four weeks down there."

On how the course suits his play

"It's nice to be back on really good greens. They're pure and they're Bermuda, and I live in Jacksonville so I get on this quite a bit with the (Dye's) Valley course. It's nice to be back here."

On his recent move to Jacksonville, Florida...

"We moved right after Final Stage (of the Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament), so getting status was nice. After that, it was hectic to get in, and it's been nice to have a stable place to go in between these tournaments."

On expecting a newborn niece soon...

"She was due yesterday but hasn't come yet so we're waiting for the news. We're all anxiously waiting. My dad's here, but my mom is up there waiting because that's way more important than this."

On his career in golf up to this point...

"I graduated in 2019 from University of Virginia and then played [PGA TOUR Canada] for four or five months, and then I've had conditional status on the Korn Ferry for two years. Then during the COVID year, I didn't get any starts. I finished (T114) in Final Stage, so that wasn't going to get starts, especially all the guys off the (PGA) TOUR coming down, so I just grinded Mondays for a year and that was just brutal, so I plan to never go back there again."

On his first Korn Ferry Tour event...

"Up in New York, the LECOM Health Challenge. I was a sponsor [exemption] there."

On one thing that is better in his game this week than the last few tournaments...

"Quite a lot. I feel like I played really well down there but I didn't get anything out of it. I putted, I thought, fantastic. But I struggled on those greens down there, and here, they just run pure. So I was sitting on my money lines and they were going in. Down there, I think I was getting in my own head."



On why he moved to Jacksonville...

“(TPC) Sawgrass is pure. I'm from North Carolina, so the weather is okay, but the winters are still tough. Jacksonville has a lot better weather.”

On learning from his time playing in Monday qualifiers...

“I learned I have to get out of the gate as fast as possible. I haven't carried that into this year. I've gotten out of the gate extremely slowly and my caddie, Nate, and I actually talked about that quite a bit last week. Instead of trying to press the issue, just relaxing into the middle of the greens and letting some putts roll. They were rolling early and then we just kind of kept with that all day.”

On what it means to be leading the field today...

“It's a lot better than chasing from behind.”

On his plans tonight ahead of the second round tomorrow...

“I'll probably grab dinner somewhere with my dad and go to sleep and just get after it again tomorrow morning. Hopefully put up another good score.”



Zack Fischer (-7, T2)

City Plays From: Benton, Arkansas | Turned Pro: 2011 | College: University of Texas-Arlington
Exempt Status: 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament medalist (thru 2022)

On shooting a 7-under 64 in the opening round...

"I played really, really well today... bookend fives [on No. 1 and No. 18] kind of hurt a little bit, but I can't complain. The wind is really picking up a lot and for the first time this tournament season I putted really well and hopefully I can carry it on."

On his frustration with putting prior to this week...

"I've made some putts, don't get me wrong, but it almost feels like luck. It's like, 'Oh, it happens to go in,' but today the stroke felt really solid, and the putter-face felt like it stayed really square and stable, and I rolled it really, really well."

On how he was able to shoot a 64...

"I hit it pretty well all day, but definitely the putting. I made a lot of really important putts that kept the round going and credit to my caddie, Grayson, because he found out what we were doing last week in Bogota. I played really well in the final round there and I knew that this week if I could get it going that it was going to be a good week, and hopefully I can continue."

On his keys to improving...

"My shoulders had gotten really, really open and my feet were closed and so the lines were crossed up. I knew something was wrong. [Grayson] noticed it because my shirt actually has lines on. He's like, 'Your shoulders are wide open.' Now I feel like I'm putting with my stance just amazingly closed. As long as it starts on line, I'm fine."

On his birdie putt at No. 17...

"Theo [Humphrey] was on the same line as me, which definitely gave me a good read and just happened to catch the right line, and he gave me a good look at the speed. I knew if I could get the right line I'd have a chance, and it just happened to go in."

On setting his schedule for the season...

"I'm one of those people that I can't really go more than about five or six events straight without melting down, mentally... I learned that in 2017. I played 13 in a row and didn't play bad, but I was just, I had the mental attitude of a five-year-old. I'm not going to play more than five or six at a time and more than likely three or four at a time. I've got a pretty good idea of what my schedule looks like and probably going to stick with that."

On being in the top 25 of the standings despite not feeling like his game has peaked yet...

"This is the first time I've ever had one of the green bibs. They were gold when I was playing (in 2017). It was really cool to have a number on the back. I feel like I'm really playing well. I've had a lot of swing issues in my life and career, and I finally feel like I've kind of understand what I need to do to fix it on the fly. My caddie, his dad is my swing coach, so it definitely helps. We can talk about what I'm feeling, and he can give me some thoughts on what to do to clean some stuff up on that as well."



On his plans for the afternoon and preparation for tomorrow...

“Grayson and I were going to talk about it. I like American food, may go do some Chick-fil-A, may go eat inside. I'm not really sure. Probably going to work on some lag-putting because I left myself some good 10-12 foot two-putts, which wasn't very good. That was kind of why I felt like I putted well, because I just had those saves and were trying to get the speed down but the wind has really picked up, so there's no point in hitting balls or anything like that. So maybe hit some chips, take it easy.”



Byeong Hun An (-6, T5)

City Plays From: Seoul, South Korea | Turned Pro: 2011 | University of California-Berkeley
Exempt Status: Next 25 from 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Finals Priority Ranking (thru 2022)

On his performance in the first round...

“Well I was bogey-free, so that means I hit it pretty decent. Until the last hole, I don't think I had to make any up-and-downs from anywhere. I hit it pretty solid – a lot of fairways, a lot of greens – and made some putts, although I didn't putt that well to shoot 6-under. I putted good enough and didn't make any mistakes, took advantage of these par 5s, so I was able to shoot that 6-under today.

On whether any single shot stood out to him...

“Maybe the second shot on the last hole, because that was my miss of the day, probably only miss. The rest of the shots I hit pretty decent. Didn't really mishit it until the last hole, so that always stands out, the misses. But I was very happy with all of the shots that I hit. I hit it pretty solid and I was committed on every shot. It doesn't really stand out but, like I said, most of the shots were pretty good. It's hard to pick out one of the shots, but definitely the miss on the last hole.”

On having success on the PGA TOUR and now playing on the Korn Ferry Tour...

“It's my first year playing the Korn Ferry Tour. It may be the Korn Ferry Tour, but I see it as I still have somewhere to play. I loved playing on the PGA TOUR for five years, but I didn't have a good year last year and I believe every player goes through that moment where they struggle a little bit. But I worked hard enough in the offseason to expect to have a good year and then, hopefully, this will be my first and last in the Korn Ferry Tour. We'll see. It's still early in the season and we have a lot of golf left to be played.”

On his parents table tennis careers...

“They're pretty good. They won the medals at Olympics, so they're pretty decent at table tennis. There's no chance I can beat them in table tennis, but in golf, I've got the upper hand. They're Olympians, both of them, and we still play a little bit when they're home. We still have a table at our home. When they're not here, it's hard to play by myself so we always try to play a little bit when they're here.”

On if he took anything away from his parents' table tennis careers...

“It's a completely different sport. One is indoor and you play against others, only a single opponent. But they always tell me what it takes to be the medalist or the champions. You have to work hard. You have to be patient. The other aspects that all of the athletes share, we all need dedication to work so that's what they always told me. Although they never taught me how to play golf, they actually told me what it has to be to be an athlete. So there's definitely some help.”

On how he got into golf

“My dad played a little bit of golf, just for fun on the range. I can't remember when I first played but I used to play with his golf clubs when I was 5, 6 years old. That's when I started to play.”

On his familiarity with Lakewood Ranch, Florida...

"I lived here for four or five years I think. Not here, but Bradenton, like 30 minutes away. I used to practice at The Concession Golf Club, just across the road from here. It's changed a lot since I left and I left in 2010, 2011-ish. It's been about 10, 11 years. Me and my wife drove to some of the restaurants down in Sarasota Monday and it was like, 'Oh yeah, I've driven this road before.' It's pretty cool to come back here and unfortunate it's not at The Concession Golf Club like last year at the WGC (Workday Championship), but we're still here."

On if there are any local restaurants he wanted to go to...

"Not really because I was... well, we had a Chipotle back then. That's what I ate when I was in high school, and Smoothie King. So I don't think I'll go back, it's funny, Chipotle. Even the pro-am yesterday, I played with Steve and he used to play Concession, and he said he remembered me from 10 years ago. There were a few new people that I didn't know back then, but they kind of knew who I was, so it was nice to see them and say hello. I feel like I have a bit of a home support-ish, because I still saw a few people out there I know. It was nice to have that kind of support out here."

On if he had memories from high school pop up this week...

"Yes and no, because probably the weather. [Laughs] It's nice and warm. Like I said, this course, I've never played. It's hard to kind of comment much about it."

On the decision to move to the area in high school...

"I went to the IMG Academy first in Bradenton for a couple years because I was able to go to school and play golf at the same time which was a very hard thing to do in Korea, so that's why I moved over here to play golf and study at the same time."

On if someone recommended he move to the area...

"I remember I came here when I was 12 just for a couple weeks to try it out and see what it's like. I really loved it because of the practice facility and then the environment. You get to play golf and go to school at the same time, so that was a big thing for my parents. They always wanted me to not just play golf all day but still be out there and study and then make some friends off the golf course. I think that was a great decision to come over here and play golf and study over here."

Aaron Baddeley (-6, T5)

City Plays From: Melbourne, Australia | Turned Pro: 2000

Korn Ferry Tour Exempt Status: Next 25 from 2021 Korn Ferry Tour Finals Priority Ranking (thru 2022)

PGA TOUR Exempt Status: Past Champion beyond 150 in 2020-21 FedExCup (thru 2022)

PGA TOUR Wins (4): 2006 RBC Heritage, 2007 WM Phoenix Open, 2011 THE NORTHERN TRUST, 2016 Barbasol Championship

On his performance in the first round...

"I just hit the ball really well today. Didn't really do much wrong after I drove the ball. The fairways are a little bit wider here and this is a second-shot golf course, and I hit some really good iron shots out there to set myself up with some easy birdies. I hit three of the par 5s (greens) in two, which meant it's easier to just two-putt birdies. Those are always nice and easy."

On his play through the beginning of the 2022 season...

"I only played one in The Bahamas, I had to go home for having a tooth infection down there, so I was going to play two but unfortunately only played one. Played Pebble Beach, but didn't play well there. It could've been a blessing not playing great down there, because it made me look at a few different things in my game and I think that really helped me out this week and then going forward. I was close at Pebble, but I was off, so I'm pretty excited where it's at."

On bouncing between the PGA TOUR and Korn Ferry Tour over the last couple seasons...

"I probably am more out here than I am on the main tour this year. Last year, I still was in the reshuffle with the Korn Ferry [Tour] and the top 125 from 2018-19 with that COVID year. This year, running on past champions, I'll probably get six, maybe eight, out there [on the PGA TOUR] and then I'll play the rest out here. If you get off to a good start out here, maybe just focus on here and try to finish No. 1 on the list."

On being a previous PGA TOUR winner and his experience now...

"It's been a little frustrating at times, because I know what I'm capable of doing. I know how I can play the game. To have things not going the way I feel like they should... I feel like I've been putting in the work every day. The biggest thing for me is I haven't putted well, which, usually, that's the strength of my game. These last couple years, I haven't really putted great and I started working with Mike Adams in October, and that's really helped a lot. My ball striking is improving and improving and improving. He's really simplified a lot of things. Today, like I said, I drove the ball fantastic and then hit some great iron shots. If I can keep doing that - especially if it stays windy, hopefully - that'd be ideal."

On his response to having to improve his putting after it was previously a strength in his game...

"It's tough because I feel like I'm doing all the same things. I've got my checkpoints with my putting and I could never get it to look right. Setup was never where I needed it to be and just sort of frustrating, because I was a top-10 putter in the world for a long time. To go from that, down to dropping down, it's frustrating because the putter makes up for a lot of mistakes and you can capitalize on good shots. It's been a bit of a trial more than anything. I feel like I'm back into that now and pretty close in terms of putting really well again."

On whether his putting is something he uses as an example of how fickle of a game golf is...

"It's such a fine line. I'm sure it's the same in other sports, too. I don't think people understand how fine the line is being right there, having a chance to win most weeks, and missing the cut. It can be the difference between one shot a day and one putt a day. At the end of the week, even though the math doesn't add up, you might total four shots a round and honestly, that's 16 – say two to four shots a round – that's 10 to 16 shots a week. That's a lot. I think by hitting one more fairway and holing one putt, it's crazy. Golf's crazy."

On if home is Australia, or if he is living in the United States...

"I live in Arizona, in Scottsdale. That's where I've been. I haven't been able to get home [Australia]. The borders have been shut for a while. I think they're just opening up now back Down Under there."

On if he has any trip to Australia planned...

"I'm looking forward to getting back to Australia at some point. Not sure when that would be. I'm not sure what their requirements are to get into Australia right now, and then it can always change, too. If the Australia Open is played in November, December... from now to then, that's a long time for the requirements to change. Definitely am looking forward to getting home. I love playing back in Australia, it reminds me of being a kid and playing those events when I was young. I loved it, it was great."

On what he looked to improve after playing at Pebble a few weeks ago...

"I felt like my swing was in a good spot, but I just wasn't hitting it like I thought I should be and I was just really wandering with my stance. I was getting a little too closed with my feet and that made the club drop inside a little too much. So to just square that up a little bit and straight away, I noticed the strike was better just because the club was more in line. Then I had to look at my putting a little bit and that just didn't feel right. The setup wasn't where I needed to be and so I worked hard last week on that and then this week did the same thing. Just trying to get that setup in the right spot where I can just putt and not think about it."

On if he changed his setup...

"Just a little bit. I worked with a guy named Bruce Rearick. He gave me a few tips to work on. One of the main things he told me was to stand a little taller. That's sort of matched up with what I did when I was a youngster back when I was 18, 19. So we sort of did that a little bit and then a little bit with my grip, so the grip allows the arms and the hands to sit properly on the golf club."

Erik Barnes (-6, T5)

City Plays From: Marion, Indiana | Turned Pro: 2011 | College: Austin Peay State University
Exempt Status: Top 75 in 2020-21 Regular Season Points Standings (thru 2022)

On his first-round performance...

"I played really solid after about hole eight, actually, probably after seven. I didn't play very good early on, I was kind of hitting it all over the place, but the putter felt good in my hands all day long. I hit a really good tee shot on four, right into the middle of the green and two-putted and made birdie there but then I kind of was, to be honest, slapping it around a little bit. I hit a good tee shot on eight, kind of misjudged the wind there and hit it long and ended up making four which was nice, but hit two really good shots into nine just off the front left there and hooped it, so that was cool. It kind of jump started my round. Birdied No. 10 and then made another eagle on the second par-5 [No.14], I hit two really good shots to 20-feet and I guess that's about all. I played really solid after No. 7."

On being back in Sarasota...

"A lot of friendly faces, it feels like home. I actually went over and played nine holes Monday at the golf course I played when I was here. It wasn't that long ago. It hasn't even been three months since I've been gone, so it's nice to have some friends and family's going to be here today, so it feels like home here."

On how his game has felt overall...

"Really good. I've been lucky the last few years, I've played really well. I've said this before, but a coaching change and he kind of got me going down the right track and I've just kind of stuck to it so things have been good. I've been playing well."

On being back in the United States after four international events...

"It's great. Just being able to have a car, even if you just want to go walk around Walmart you can, you know? That part is nice... being at home, especially here for me. Like I said, I've spent a lot of years here. I mean I moved here in 2011 and I was away from the area a couple times but pretty much full time from 2011 to the beginning of this year."

On his mindset being in a familiar place as it relates to his game...

"I'm staying with a really good friend of mine and they're like family to us. I've got two or three groups of friends here that we're really close with. It does, it's nice to just kind of you know hang out with them and spend some time and not focus on golf so it's been nice."