

First-Round Notes – Thursday, February 17, 2022

Course Setup: Lakewood National Golf Club – Commander (Par 71 / 7,113 yards)

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Leaderboard

Pos.	Name	Scores
1	Thomas Walsh	63 (-8)
T2	Zack Fischer	64 (-7)
	Zecheng Dou	64 (-7)
	Albin Choi	-7 (15)
T5	12 Tied	65 (-6)

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Thomas Walsh leads LECOM Suncoast Classic upon suspension of first round

LAKWOOD RANCH, Florida – Thomas Walsh opened the LECOM Suncoast Classic with an 8-under 63 in Thursday’s partially-completed first round, securing the clubhouse lead at Lakewood National Golf Club. Walsh’s 63 marked his career low-round on the Korn Ferry Tour and put him one stroke ahead of three players tied at 7-under par upon suspension of play.

Play was suspended due to darkness at 6:35 p.m. ET, as nine players had holes remaining in the first round. One of the nine was Albin Choi, playing this week via Korn Ferry’s sponsor exemption, who recorded three eagles and was 7-under through 15 holes. Choi tied the 18-hole tournament scoring record last year with a 9-under par 62 in the first round.

The 25-year-old High Point, North Carolina native only made two pars on his first nine holes, the back nine of the Lakewood National Golf Club’s Commander course. Walsh began the day with consecutive birdies at Nos. 10 and 11, followed them with his only bogey of the day on the par-4 12th, and bounced back with three consecutive birdies on Nos. 13, 14 and 15.

Walsh notably birdied four of the five par 3s (Nos. 7, 13, 15 and 17) on the par-71 setup.

“It feels good,” Walsh said. “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. I had three or four 4-irons today, especially on par 3s. I was just hitting that 4-iron really solid today.”

After turning professional in 2019, Walsh went through the Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament, but a T114 at Final Stage left him without guaranteed starts and buried in the priority ranking. The 2020-21 season for Walsh consisted of Monday qualifiers and seven events on PGA TOUR Latinoamérica, where he logged three top-25s.

"I learned I have to get out of the gate as fast as possible," Walsh said of his time chasing Monday qualifiers. "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."

Walsh returned to Final Stage of the Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament last November and finished T14 for guaranteed starts in the first eight events this season. Through the first four events, Walsh's first made cut came at last week's Astara Golf Championship presented by Mastercard, where he finished solo 69th.

"I feel like I played really well down there, but I didn't get anything out of it," Walsh said. "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."

Walsh has one parent among the crowd this week cheering him on, while the other awaits a different kind of celebration: a new addition to the family, a baby niece.

"We're waiting for the news," Walsh said of his sister, Molly, who was due yesterday. "We're all anxiously waiting. My dad's here but my mom is up there waiting, because that's way more important than this."

The first round will resume at 7:45 a.m. ET, and second-round tee times running from 6:55 a.m. through 1:56 p.m. ET off the first and 10th tees.

First-Round Notes

- **Zack Fischer** (T2 / -7) carded a 7-under 64, his fifth round of 64 or better across 292 career Korn Ferry Tour rounds and his lowest round since a 7-under 64 in the final round of the 2017 Digital Ally Open
 - Fischer is roughly two weeks removed from a T5 at the Panama Championship, the fifth top-five of his Korn Ferry Tour career and first since the WinCo Foods Portland Open presented by Kraft Heinz in August 2016
- **Zecheng Dou** (T2 / -7) shot a 7-under 64, his fifth round of 64 or better across 283 career Korn Ferry Tour rounds and his lowest round since a 7-under 63 at the third round of the 2020 Wichita Open Benefitting KU Wichita Pediatrics
 - Three of the four previous tournaments where Dou shot a 64 or better, he finished top-10, including his first win at the 2017 Digital Ally Open
- **Albin Choi** (T2 / -7) will be the first Korn Ferry Tour player this season with three eagles in the same round (five players made three eagles in the same round across the 46-event 2020-21 season); he eagled the par-4 fourth, par-5 ninth, and par-5 10th
- Choi is also the first Korn Ferry Tour player with back-to-back eagles this season (there were 12 instances from 10 players across the 46-event 2020-21 season)

- Choi, who Monday qualified into the 2021 LECOM Suncoast Classic and tied the 18-hole tournament scoring record with a first-round 9-under 62, is playing this week via Korn Ferry's sponsor exemption
- Choi was the 2013 Atlantic Coast Conference Player of the Year and 2013 All-America Second Team selection as a junior at North Carolina State University, where he won nine individual titles
- Across seven years (2013-19) and 110 starts, Choi had just six top-10s and lost Korn Ferry Tour status following the 2019 season, leaving him financially unable to continue his career; he quit professional golf and caddied six days a week (oftentimes 36 holes per day) at Old Palm Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida
- Choi caddied for Sungjae Im, who he'd befriended in their 2018 season together on the Korn Ferry Tour, at the 2020 Honda Classic, Im's first PGA TOUR win, and remained on the bag until the 2020 BMW Championship, after which Choi resumed his own playing career
- **Aaron Baddeley's** (T5 / -6) 6-under 65 was his individual lowest round in PGA TOUR-sanctioned play since a 7-under 65 at the 2021 MGM Resorts Championship at Paiute, a Korn Ferry Tour event last April
 - Baddeley is a four-time PGA TOUR winner with victories at the 2006 RBC Heritage, 2007 WM Phoenix Open, 2011 THE NORTHERN TRUST, and 2016 Barbasol Championship
- Six bogey-free rounds will be recorded in the first round – **Byeong Hun An** (T5 / -6), **Erik Barnes** (T5 / 6-under 65), **Scott Harrington** (T5 / 6-under 65), **Chad Ramey** (T5 / 6-under 65), **Charlie Saxon** (T5 / 6-under 65), **Nicolas Echavarria** (T17 / 5-under 66)
- **Peyton White** (T121 / +1) made the first albatross of the 2022 Korn Ferry Tour season (there were eight across the 46-event 2020-21 season)
- The LECOM Suncoast Classic is the fifth 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