

2023 The Panama Championship
(3rd of 26 events on Korn Ferry Tour 2023 Schedule)
[Tournament Media Site](#) | [Interview Transcripts](#)

Partial First-Round Notes – Thursday, February 2, 2023

The first round was suspended due to darkness at 6:41 p.m. ET, as 15 players had yet to complete the round. The first round will resume at 7:30 a.m. Friday. Second-round tee times will run from 6:40 a.m. through 1:40 p.m. off the first and 10th tees.

Weather: Partly cloudy with a high of 90. Wind N/NE 8-18 mph, gusts up to 28 mph.

First-Round Leaderboard

Ryan Gerard	64 (-6)
Christopher Petefish	65 (-5)
Brandon McIver	66 (-4)
Jimmy Stanger	66 (-4)

Things to Know

- Korn Ferry Tour rookie Ryan Gerard cards a bogey-free 6-under 64 and is in line for his first lead of any kind
- Christopher Petefish rolls in nine birdies, three more than any other player, and sits solo-second
- Brandon McIver (T3) and Rico Hoey (T5) join Gerard as the only three players without a bogey in the first round
- Ten players sit T7 at 2-under, including Cody Blick who is coming off of back-to-back runner-up finishes

Charting the Leader (stats entering the week)

Category	Ryan Gerard
Age	23 (August 2, 1999)
2022 Korn Ferry Tour Points List	n/a
Starts – wins – top-10s in Korn Ferry Tour (Career)	3-0-0
Starts – wins – top-10s in Korn Ferry Tour (2023)	2-0-0
Starts – wins – top-10s at The Panama Championship	0-0-0

Ryan Gerard (Leader / -6)

- In his rookie season on the Korn Ferry Tour, sits atop the leaderboard for the first time in his career
- Posted a bogey-free 6-under 64 Thursday; rolled in six total birdies, including four in a row on Nos. 10-13
- Marked the lowest round of his young career, topping his previous best of a 3-under 69 last week during The Bahamas Great Abaco Classic at The Abaco Club
- Making the fourth-ever Korn Ferry Tour start this week
 - Missed the cut in his previous three starts (two in 2023, one in 2022)
 - Made his Korn Ferry Tour debut last year by Monday qualifying for the Live + Work in Maine Open; rounds of 72 and 73 resulted in a missed cut
- Earned conditional status this season by finishing No. 5 in 2022 PGA TOUR Canada Fortinet Cup standings
 - Played in eight PGA TOUR Canada events last year and logged five top-25 finishes with three finishes of T4 or better
 - Earned his maiden professional victory at the 2022 Québec Open, [winning in wire-to-wire fashion](#)
- 23-year-old who plays from Raleigh, North Carolina, where he was born and raised; now resides in Jupiter, Florida
- Turned professional in 2022 and was a co-medalist at a U.S. Open qualifier; competed in the 2022 U.S. Open at The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts
- Played collegiately at the University of North Carolina (2017-22) where he earned All-ACC honors in his final year
 - Joined fellow Tar Heel Ben Griffin, a 2022 Korn Ferry Tour graduate, as the only players in school history with multiple seasons among the top-10 single-season averages (Gerard, 3rd and 7th; Griffin, 6th and 8th)
 - Picked up his only college win at the 2021 Rod Myers Invitational in Durham, North Carolina

- Amateur honors include being named a 2016 AJGA Rolex All-American, as well as 2017 USA Today All-American

Quotables

- **Ryan Gerard** on his first-round 6-under 64: "I just really tried to stay patient out there. This course is pretty tough. It's a long course, pins are tucked with firm greens. So I just tried to stay patient from the get go. Hit a few really good shots early to almost kick in range and kept hitting it on the fat side of the green making my life easy. Got a few putts to go on the back, which was really nice. Held on at the end when it got really windy."
- **Ryan Gerard** on the course difficulty: "It's a long golf course, it's 7500 yards or so. It is getting firm out there, but the fairways are still soft so you're hitting long clubs off the tee, whether that's drive, 3 wood on a lot of the holes. You're hitting short irons, mid irons, wedges into the greens, but the greens are really firm and the way they have the undulations and the slope, they can tuck the pins really nicely towards the edges and above bunkers and swales, you just really have to be precise into the greens."
- **Ryan Gerard** on his putting performance Thursday: "I was really hitting good putts today. I grew up on kind of grainy bermuda like this in North Carolina and a lot of time spent hitting balls on putts with or balls on greens with grain and having to read that in addition to the break. So I feel really comfortable on greens like there and grass like this. That kind of just helps feed the confidence. But, I mean, once you see a couple go in the hole, you just keep rolling it and yeah, eventually if they all go in it's a great day."
- **Ryan Gerard** on his rookie season on the Korn Ferry Tour: "I mean, there's always a learning curve. I'd say for the most part it's gone kind of how I wanted it to go. My goal coming out of college last year was find myself on the Korn Ferry Tour this year and to get a PGA TOUR card for next year. That's still the goal. I'm playing this week, I'm playing next week and just got to keep going and hopefully reshuffle in and keep playing. I'd say professional golf is different than college and there is a big jump, but I do enjoy it just because I don't have to worry about anything besides me and my golf. It's something I've wanted to do and dreamed of since I was a little kid, so I'm living the dream every single day that I get to come out here and tee it up. I'm just really thankful for that and trying to make the most of it."

Notes

- **Christopher Petefish** (2nd / -5) tallied a field-leading nine birdies in the first round (no other player had more than six) against two bogeys and one double bogey
 - Petefish, who is in his second season on the Korn Ferry Tour, is making his 2023 debut this week, playing out of the Finishers 76-100 on 2022 Korn Ferry Tour Points List / Additional Qualifying Tournament Finalist (thru 2023) category
 - In 14 starts last year, recorded three top-25 finishes, highlighted by a T3 at the NV5 Invitational presented by Old National Bank
- **Brandon McIver** (T3 / -4) carded a bogey-free 4-under 66 with birdies at Nos. 1, 5, 7 and 12 and currently sits T2
 - McIver is in his rookie season on the Korn Ferry Tour and earned status by placing T39 at the 2022 Korn Ferry Tour Qualifying Tournament
- **Jimmy Stanger** (T3 / -4), who is making his 109th Korn Ferry Tour start this week, is in line to sit inside the top five after 18 holes for the 10th time ever and second time this season (T2 after the first round of The Bahamas Great Exuma Classic at Sandals Emerald Bay)
- **Brandon Harkins** (T5 / -3) and **Rico Hoey** (T5 / -3) are both in line to sit inside the top five after 18 holes for the first time since the 2021 Emerald Coast Classic at Sandestin where both players sat T5; Harkins eventually finished T26 while Hoey placed T37
- **Cody Blick** (T7 / -2) sits in a 10-way T7 after carding three birdies against one bogey in the first round; Blick, who finished runner-up in each of the past two events, has sat solo-sixth or higher after every round entering this week