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### **Third-Round Leaderboard**

<b>Pos.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Scores</b>
1	Michael Johnson	67-65-65-197 (-16)
2	Sebastian Muñoz	64-66-70-200 (-13)
	Joey Garber	66-65-69-200 (-13)
4	Five tied at	201 (-12)

### **Michael Johnson leads by three entering Sunday at Web.com Tour's Rex Hospital Open**

RALEIGH, N.C. – Five-consecutive missed cuts. No professional golfer wants to experience it, especially during a season that started off with two top-20 finishes in three starts. It can be easy for a player to get discouraged in the midst of a string of missed cuts. They can start to force shots and change their approach, which can often lead to even more of a rut. Auburn University alum Michael Johnson is not most, though, so when he was hit with a string of five missed cuts beginning in April, he remained patient and focused, knowing his time would come.

At last week's Nashville Golf Open Benefitting the Snedeker Foundation, Johnson's patience was repaid with a made cut – and a T15 finish. Now, just a week later, Johnson is in the mix once again, posting a third-round 6-under 65 to take the solo 54-hole lead at the Rex Hospital Open, the first of his Tour career. The 25-year-old enters Sunday three strokes ahead of Sebastian Muñoz and Joey Garber, both of whom played alongside Johnson in the final threesome on Saturday.

Johnson started Saturday slowly, carding two birdies and seven pars on his front nine. Johnson remained in the mix as the leaderboard became more and more bunched around him, with as many as five players tied for the lead at one point. The Birmingham, Alabama, native didn't let the rest of the field shake him, however, remaining calm despite a bogey on the par-3 12<sup>th</sup>. It wasn't until the end that Johnson truly heated up, making birdie on all three of his closing holes.

"I probably need to be more patient than ever tomorrow," Johnson remarked. "Today I did a great job, I think. I was 2-under through three, but still two back of the lead and the whole day I was just trying to play well, I wasn't trying to get the lead. So, I'm just going to try and do that again tomorrow and if I go out there and play well and lose, then somebody earned it and I'm fine with that. So I'll just go out there and try and do the same thing."

While Johnson has been in the hunt heading into Sunday before, Raleigh will mark the first time he finds himself in the final pairing. Prior to this week, the best position the newly-engaged third-year pro found himself in entering the final round was T6 (2017 Pinnacle Bank Championship presented by Heartland Chevy Dealers and 2018 Chitimacha Louisiana Open presented by NACHER). Both events turned into a top-5 finish for Johnson, the only two of his career.

Despite not finding himself in this position on Tour before, Johnson will have plenty of prior experience to draw from. He won five times while at Auburn, the second most in school history. He also set the school's single-season stroke average (70.37) and the single-season win record (three).

“This what we play for,” he said of being in the final grouping, “to be in the final group on Sunday and have the crowd follow you. It was fun out there today. I didn’t get off to a hot start, but I played well and I was patient. I’m glad to have a little bit of a cushion tomorrow. Like I said, this is what we play for. You sign up to be a little nervous on the first tee and have a chance to win.”

Nerves will serve as fuel for Johnson on Sunday as he chases his first Web.com Tour title and a chance to move into The 25 and lock up a spot on the PGA TOUR in 2018.

“Nerves are a good thing,” Johnson laughed. “I think if you’re a little nervous, then you’re doing the right thing. It should be a lot of fun. I have a chance to win and I haven’t really had a chance to win out here yet ... so it’ll be fun to get out there and try to play well again.”

**SATURDAY NOTES:**

- \* Saturday weather: Partly cloudy with scattered showers, High 86, Winds N/NW 5-10 mph.
- \* This week’s purse is \$650,000, with \$117,000 going to the champion.
- \* The best third-round score in tournament history was carded in 2015 when Harold Varner III posted a 9-under 62. Varner went on to finish T6.
- \* The Rex Hospital Open champion has overcome a five-stroke deficit to claim the title three times in tournament history: Glen Hnatiuk (1996), Chris Anderson (2004) and Chesson Hadley (2013). Through 12 events in the 2018 season, the largest come-from-behind victory sits at six strokes, which occurred at both the Panama Championship and the Nashville Golf Open Benefitting the Snedeker Foundation.
- \* Since the tournament’s inception in 1994, nine 54-hole leaders/co-leaders have gone on to win the event: Michael Christie (1995), John Maginnes (2001), David Morland IV (2003), Eric Axley (2005), Brenden Pappas (2006), Kyle Thompson (2007), Kevin Johnson (2009), John Riegger (2010) and Byron Smith (2014). Four third-round leaders have gone on to capture the title in 2018, with the most recent being Sam Burns at the Savannah Golf Championship.
- \* Raleigh residents Cameron Percy and Albin Choi both enter Sunday at 13-under 200, just four shy of the lead (T4). Choi is seeking his first Tour title, while Percy seeks his first victory since the 2014 Price Cutter Charity Championship presented by Dr Pepper.
- \* After entering the second round in Raleigh T140, Tour rookie Hank Lebioda has continued his charge up the leaderboard, posting the round of the day for the second day in a row. Lebioda’s third-round 6-under 65 has him T4 heading into Sunday, just four back of the lead.

\* TPC Wakefield Plantation Scoring averages:

	Front (36)	Back (35)	Total (71)	Cumulative
R1	35.301	34.494	69.795	
R2	35.058	34.903	69.961	69.878
R3	34.759	34.614	69.373	69.710

\* NEXT WEEK: The Web.com Tour travels to Ivanhoe, Illinois, for the Rust-Oleum Championship before taking a week off.

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