INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: NICK SCHREIBER, OLD BARNWELL
FROM: JOHN MCCARTHY
SUBJECT: TWENTY GOOD QUESTIONS
DATE: FEBRUARY 25, 2025

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1. What are some early influences that may have led to your decision to build a world class golf course?

It began simply with a love for the game of golf itself. I was introduced to golf almost by accident when I went to a tennis camp in grade school that also had a sister camp for youth golfers. As my father will tell you, I was jealous of the golfers who didn't have to get up early and run laps, so after a week of tennis, I asked my parents if I could switch sports. I never excelled as a player, but when I began caddying at some fantastic courses in suburban Chicago as a teenager, I was introduced to a part of the game that really became a passion for me when I no longer harbored illusions of being a great golfer: golf course architecture. By the time I was in my mid-20s, I spent more time reading about golf courses than I did playing them, and what began as an obsession with Tom Doak's "Confidential Guide to Golf Courses" developed into an unhealthy habit of reading any book or article I could find about (or by) the so-called "Golden Age" golf designers from the early 20th century (Donald Ross, A.W. Tillinghast, Alister MacKenzie, et al).

All that reading, along with the opportunity to visit and play many "world class" golf courses as I got older led me to realize that many people assume that the most "exclusive" or "fancy" golf courses are also the "most interesting" or "best". Luckily, that isn't true, and some of the best examples of Golden Age architecture can be played for less than $60 (e.g. Kankakee Elks outside of Chicago, or the public Aiken Golf Club near Old Barnwell). All that to say, my interest in golf course architecture led me to believe that even someone like me could help facilitate the building of a truly exceptional golf course if I could work with like-minded individuals.

The other early influence that came from caddying was my awareness of just how much one could benefit by simply *being* on a golf course. Within the first few weeks of caddying, I had an opportunity to carry the bag for a guy named

Chris Galvin, who at the time was the CEO of Motorola. I also regularly caddied for a Chicago pharmaceutical giant named D.C. Searle. In what other setting does a young teenager have access to such incredibly successful and talented people? Those experiences, and the experience of enhancing my own professional prospects on the golf course as I progressed in my career convinced me that we could create a golf course that could provide opportunities and make an impact on those groups and individuals generally underrepresented in the game.

2. You are not alone in looking back at caddying as a positive formative experience. Many golfers got into golf by caddying and recall it fondly. Why do you think this is?

There are so many reasons former caddies look back so fondly at their earliest days on course: they're outside, they're independent of their parents, and they're making money! At Old Barnwell, you can tell who the first-time caddies are because when the member hands them their payment in cash, they look like they've robbed a bank! I vividly remember the pile of ten and twenty dollar bills I put in my mini safe during my first summer as a caddie – it's a pretty empowering feeling for a 13 or 14-year-old!

And, to your point, caddying lends itself to learning the game. You must understand the basics to be a decent caddie: where danger lurks on a specific hole; the types of clubs to hit, and when; the different breaks on greens, etc. And the best caddies can't help but learn about the deeper strategy or the technical aspects in play for the better golfers. And if you spend four hours following around someone playing a game, chances are you'll have an itch to try it yourself!

3. It takes a lot of creative and/or entrepreneurial energy to start up an effort like this with a clean slate. Have you always had this creative energy, or did you acquire it over time?

No! Like a lot of folks, I had no idea what I wanted to do after college, which led to several years of aimlessness, even if during some of that period I was gainfully employed. For me, the creative/entrepreneurial energy came in my early 30s when I was part of a start-up that grew quite rapidly. That experience taught me that I really enjoyed working with others to build something from

the ground up. With Old Barnwell, I've been able to add a missing element: building something I am truly passionate about.

4. Golf was in decline for many years, in terms of rounds played per year, and the pandemic was "good for golf" in that it was outdoor exercise. How can golf keep or grow these recent gains?

In a word: inclusion. Golf is more than just playing 9 or 18 holes on green grass outdoors. It can be hitting balls on a driving range, at an indoor simulator, at TopGolf with colleagues after work. Heck, it can even be playing mini golf with your toddlers! By expanding the definition of what golf can be, we can introduce so many more people to the game. My seven-year-old son Henry is currently enrolled in First Tee, a national, youth development organization that uses golf as a trojan horse for teaching kids life skills. Each week he comes home and tells me about the games he played… and though he usually has a golf club in his hand during these exercises, it's a far cry from golf. In some cases, he doesn't even connect what he's doing with the game itself, and yet each week he becomes a little more interested in going out to the golf course or driving range to hit balls. Inclusion also means creating affordable and accessible ways to play, and these alternative forms of golf will be central to expanding the sport's audience and participation numbers.

5. Many would argue that golf is more accessible in Europe and has a history of exclusivity in America. Assuming this is generally true, what can be done to get more people golfing?

This is a really complicated question, and I'll assume you're asking about making it easier and cheaper for more people to play golf at 9 and 18-hole courses (both public and private)… but I need to set the stage before I can provide an answer.

To begin, golf in the UK remains remarkably accessible – but that's not exactly true in the rest of Europe, so I'll focus on the British Isles. Many clubs in the UK have separate memberships for tradesman and locals, and almost all the "most exclusive" clubs allow for outsider / public play occasionally. It would be easy to say, "Well, why can't clubs in the US do that?" But there are two important factors as to why it can't be replicated here: history and expectations.

The history of golf in the UK has a lot of the same issues of class you see in the U.S., but it really began as a working-class hobby on common land. Indeed, if you go to St. Andrews (the "home of golf") on a Sunday, you can't even play

golf – it's closed to golfers. But you *can* walk the entire golf course with your partner or your dog. It's public land open and available to all. It reverts to a golf course Monday – Saturday. This notion is foundational for golf culture in the UK, whereas culturally, private golf in the US is much more about exclusivity and a gated community mentality. Members are paying for the exclusive right to a course and its infrastructure.

The second reason is golfers' expectations. In the UK, the earliest golf courses were "found" on linksland - rough, sandy terrain next to the sea that drained quickly and required very little maintenance other than by grazing sheep and rabbits. That same rugged look, though aided by some modern maintenance equipment and practices, is still acceptable (and sought after in some cases) at even the most acclaimed courses in the region. It doesn't hurt that those courses often don't need expensive irrigation or manufactured drainage systems. But here in America, we like our grass green, our fairways mowed tight, and our greens to roll at ridiculous speeds. We see The Masters on TV and demand that our own courses look like Augusta National. As a result, clubs on our side of the pond feel the need to keep up with their neighbors, creating an agronomic arms race that costs millions of dollars *each year*. This means clubs must charge their members more to join and more in annual dues. When you charge members more, they're much less likely to be open to the idea of public access – why would they join at a huge price tag if they can just play it occasionally for a fraction of the cost as a member of the public?

With all that in mind, how can we create cheaper public golf and more accessible private golf across the board in the US? Candidly, I don't think we can. We're too entrenched in our ways, and private golf has become a huge business in America. But, in a perfect world I'd try to educate golfers about maintenance and its costs. Try to show them that a perfectly manicured course isn't necessarily the most interesting or fun course. If we can change expectations around maintenance, operators can save a lot of money, and pass that along to their customers or members.

6. Golf is often seen as a good "youth development" sport. Assuming you see it this way, why so?

I do see it this way because golf, like all sports, teaches us about ourselves and how to coexist and interact with others. But golf is a solitary pursuit that exposes or reveals our personality in short order. Words like "integrity" or "honor" get thrown a lot in the game because, for the most part, it is up to the individual to follow the letter (and spirit) of the rules. As such, young

participants are often given autonomy to handle mistakes or challenges in a way that those playing team sports are not. There are no coaches or referees on the golf course. It's up to you to call a penalty on yourself, and there is nobody to turn to when you get an unlucky break (and there are plenty of those!).

More than that – and I think this is a huge part of why I believe golf can be a game-changer for individuals in their professional lives – golf provides an opportunity to engage with your competitors or playing partners in a way that no other sport allows. Over the course of a four-hour round, you're likely walking in between shots for more than three of those hours. You fill that time by speaking to the other people in your group, which can lead to the building of one's network. I've been told that the most powerful words an ambitious young person can hear are, "You know who you should talk to?" That phrase is not something young people are going to hear on the basketball court or on the soccer pitch. That is unique to golf.

7. Old Barnwell's motto is "For All Who Love It". How did that come about?

All credit for that motto goes to SDCO Partners, the design firm here in Charleston that we partnered with to develop our brand. SDCO has an incredible list of clients, mostly hospitality and CPG brands that (with SDCO's guidance) exude a cool confidence in their identity. Old Barnwell was a novel client in that they hadn't worked with a golf club before, which was a huge plus from my perspective. But when they mentioned coming up with a tagline for the club, I was resistant – golf courses and clubs don't have marketing taglines… or if they do, they've either kitschy or have been earned it over time. My resistance, gratefully, did little to discourage them. Our initial conversations centered around the oxymoronic nature of Old Barnwell: *an inclusive private club? That doesn't make any sense!* But in developing key words to serve as guideposts for our mission and culture, they understood and distilled what we were aiming to create: a private club where everyone could and would feel welcome, regardless of skill level or background. A club *for all who love it*.

8. Old Barnwell is committed to including underrepresented people or communities who are historically underrepresented in the game of golf. How have the members responded to this mission?

We've been very fortunate to have created a community of members who are bought in to what we're trying to do. Even in this current environment they understand that when we talk about inclusion or diversity, we're not talking about politics, we're talking about people. Not just folks of color or women, but beginners, families, etc. The fact that we built our membership from the ground up gave us the opportunity to be very up front about our mission and its importance to our identity. We didn't bat 1.000, but we didn't extend an invite to any member unless we felt they were committed to participating in the mission, whether that be by taking a youth caddie every now and then, volunteering to work with one of our partner organizations, or just saying hello to a stranger in the clubhouse.

The positive response to the golf course has made this endeavor slightly more complicated. Once the course opened and began to build a reputation amongst golf course architecture geeks like me, we saw an influx of applicants who could speak convincingly about what the mission meant to them, but over time it became clear they were mainly interested in joining a top golf club, not participating in the mission. As a result, we've had a dozen or so folks who were once members but no longer are. And all future prospective members must be referred by a member and/or one of our partner organizations.

9. You have made partnerships with youth competitors such as NCAA, HBCU, Evans Scholars, Annika Sorenstam Foundation. You can offer a great golf course, which you must have, but otherwise what do these types of organizations want or need to grow in their missions?

In the early stages of conceptualizing what Old Barnwell could or would be, my thinking was that the best golf clubs have two things at their disposal that can make a positive impact on their surrounding community: a great golf course and a group of members with personal and professional experience that can be shared for the benefit of others.

The value of a great golf course can be viewed in many ways. At the most basic level, it is a physical space where the game can be played and relationships can be built. But the better the golf course, the easier it will be to attract exceptionally talented people who we can introduce to our mission partners.

The better the golf course, the more money or awareness we can raise for our mission partners via charitable events or competitions. I'm incredibly biased, but I believe our designers/builders Brian Schneider and Blake Conant have created an exceptional golf course. As a result, our members and guests are much more willing to support our partnership with the Evans Scholars Foundation by spending $50-$100 each round on a youth caddie, who they can essentially mentor for four hours. We can also attract the best college women's teams in the nation to compete at Old Barnwell in partnership with the ANNIKA Foundation, or we can convince Steph Curry and his team at the Underrated Golf Tour that Old Barnwell is a worthy host for one of their four annual tournaments that expand access for minority youth golfers.

The membership component is even more powerful. Our ANNIKA Development Program at Old Barnwell is aimed at providing the resources to assist four aspiring female pros each year in their pursuit of a career on the LPGA. We have members who are not only interested in bolstering that financial support on their own, but they are also interested in getting to know these young women on a professional basis, which can lead to opportunities off the golf course should their ambitions shift. The same professional networking opportunities are at the heart of our partnership with Voorhees University, a historic HBCU in Denmark, South Carolina. In other words, we have 350+ members who can get to know individuals associated with our mission partners and say those all-important words: "You know who you should talk to?"

10. Why build a Kid's Course? (Is it really Kids only?)

I wish I could take credit for the Kids' Course idea. I always knew I wanted to develop two golf courses as part of Old Barnwell, with the second being a bit more family friendly and "sporty", to use our designers' terms. But it was Brian and Blake who brought up the specific idea of the Kids' Course based on the tradition setting aside practice areas for the "wee ones" at many prominent clubs in Scotland (e.g. North Berwick). The idea just sparked a snowballing response from me and our team. Of course we should build a kids' course! It was so much fun to brainstorm ideas about how to make it really serve as welcoming place for young people or beginners: should we create separate member numbers for the kids? Should they have their own logo? Should we require all players to be accompanied by someone under the age of 16?

In the end, Brian and Blake built 15 holes that range in yardage from 75 to 325. The greens are absolutely wild – some fun but difficult, others that act like punchbowls where most balls will find their way close to the hole. We decided it wasn't feasible to follow through with all our ideas, but a few ended up working really well. If you want to play the Kids' Course before noon on Saturday or Sunday, you need to be invited by a child. That is both fun, but also functional. It creates space (literal and figurative) for families to spend time together on the weekends without worrying about it being too crowded or overwhelming. And we did have a design contest for the children of members for the last hole on the golf course. The ideas were hilarious. One of my favorites was a kid who wanted waffle-shaped bunkers and a Waffle House situated behind the green. The winner, Alex Lenz, drew a hole that had a couple of bunkers shaped like penguins and a grass ramp that allowed the player to use a putter to sail over those penguins and land on the green. He said he liked to see his ball in the air, even if he couldn't get it off the ground! And so that hole was actually built, and it's a fan favorite, along with another hole that allows players to hit through a giant drainage tunnel onto a green like an oversized mini golf hole!

11. When you were looking for land, what were you looking for?

My knowledge of what to look for was very basic. I wanted at least 400 acres to accommodate two courses, but more important was finding sandy soil and interesting topography. Sandy soil allows for better drainage and playing conditions, and the right type of land movement can create unique features and diverse landscapes. I paid for a map app that allowed me to click on parcels across South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina and see the main facts: how many acres, who owned it, what the soil types were, and what the elevation changes looked like across the property.

If I found something I thought was good, I would reach out to the owner and ask them if they would consider selling. Almost all of them said, "No, but you can go take a look at it." Which told me that everything was for sale. I ended up looking at around 60 sites in person, it just had to be within a 6-hour drive of our home outside Charleston. If I thought the land was interesting and it fit the other criteria, I'd ask Brian and/or Blake to come and check it out. In nearly every case that they visited land on my behalf, they were quick to explain why it wasn't very good for golf. The sand was too shallow, or the elevation changes were good in theory, but they all went down to one corner of the property, etc.

12. When you walked around the Old Barnwell land for the first time, did you envision holes immediately?

Not at all. Honestly, Brian and Blake visited several properties that did not deserve their attention, so when I found what ended up being Old Barnwell, I went back several times before I asked them to visit. I couldn't visualize any golf holes – I still don't understand how they do, especially when its covered in trees! But walking all over the original parcel, I came across obvious expanses of wonderful sand, a central valley with lots of interesting tendrils, and some towering longleaf and loblolly pines. But the original parcel had limitations. It was shaped like three blades of a fan that came together at a single point, so routing a good golf course through that pinch point would be a challenge. But Brian, who visited first, immediately told me to get the land. He was confident we could acquire some neighboring parcels to alleviate that concern. And we did. Of course, it didn't help when they started routing golf holes on land we didn't own, but that provided the impetus for reaching out to our neighbors and seeing what it would take to purchase parts of their land.

13. There seem to be many journalists who are passionate about golf. Why do you think people like to write and read about golf?

This is a great question, and I would guess it is because there are a few components that make golf unique among the sports we enjoy reading or writing about. First, it's something we can all play as we age, making it far more relatable than, say, football. Even the most talented among us are usually done with our football careers before we reach adulthood, but golf courses are filled with octogenarians. Secondly, the individual pursuit of excellence on the golf course, and the challenges we face along the way, is more readily analogous to our pursuit of excellence in life. Stated differently, the phrase, "sports are a metaphor for life," is particularly true in the case of golf. The central component of solitude in golf is likely the same reason boxing has long been a favorite topic for some of America's most talented writers, from Norman Mailer to Ernest Hemingway. Sure, boxers and golfers are battling their competitors, but at the core of the sport is a battle against oneself. That battle can generate some compelling (and relatable) content!

14. There seems to be demand for "classic" golf courses. Such traits are often seen in Scotland, such as no trees, no water hazards, lots of natural sand, lots of natural undulation. If true, why do you think this is?

I do think this is true, but the definition of "classic" will likely change over time just as trends in fashion or music do. Andy Johnson of the media outlet Fried Egg Golf has compared the increased interest in golf course architecture to the rise of the craft beer movement. Information is so readily available that even a dunce like me can find resources online or via social media about golf course architecture (or a weird brewery in Asheville, North Carolina). And that knowledge breeds greater interest that goes beyond the superficial. To mix metaphors, just as reading a biography of Bob Dylan might help you appreciate the nuances of his songwriting, passionate golfers are likely to become more discriminating in their tastes because they can read about and view videos of these "classic" courses with just a few clicks.

But I think a lot of golf course afficionados forget that taste is often cyclical. The brutish championship tests of Robert Trent Jones (whose heavy-handed renovations of classic courses in the 1940s – 1970s were all the rage) are no longer in vogue. The glut of bland, featureless courses developed in the 1990s to sell residential real estate or cash in on the explosion of interest in golf (thanks Tiger!) are now going out of business.

Those trends within golf course design may not become fashionable again, but housing-first golf developments are on the rise, and the heather-lined bunkers and wide fairways that serve as the hallmarks of the current "renaissance" of golf course architecture are increasingly ubiquitous. I'd venture that we are entering a transition period in design. Not surprisingly, builders like Brian and Blake (and their regular boss, Tom Doak) are constantly thinking about how to employ classic design principles in new and invigorating ways.

I guess I could have answered this question much more succinctly by simply stating this: Tastes have, and always will change, but most great courses across generations share some of the underlying principles of golf course architecture developed and expanded upon by those classical designers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

15. Golf courses have been controversial from an environmental perspective: lots of plant life, but also high water usage, fertilizers, pesticides, altered drainage systems. How do you see this?

I see this as generally accurate and very much tied to American golf's obsession with manicured fairways and greens. The number (and amount) of inputs required to keep grass green into the shoulder seasons, or to prevent the spread of certain strains of grass from creeping onto separate playing surfaces (e.g. fringe to green), is insane. If we could change the expectations of American golfers, we could reduce those inputs dramatically, especially around water usage. The United States Golf Association (USGA), to its credit, spends oodles of money each year studying how to reduce the amount of water required to maintain a golf course, and they share their findings broadly at no cost.

We're guilty of some of these same transgressions at Old Barnwell, but having the benefit of relatively sandy soil and a willingness to let the grass go dormant (instead of overseeding in the winter) allows our team to create exceptional playing conditions (i.e. firm and fast fairways) without the same amount of chemical inputs as others. We're much less concerned with how the course looks versus how it plays.

Not to throw a whole category of golf courses under the bus, but ask anyone who has flown into places like Phoenix or Palm Springs and has seen the jarring and unnatural presence of incredibly green golf courses in a sea of desert from their airplane window, and they can tell you that those courses probably shouldn't exist. It's estimated that the average golf course uses over 2 million gallons of water each year. That's enough to provide water for nearly 2,000 households annually. To pick on Arizona, which has about 400 golf courses, that equates to more than 800,000 households!

16. How do you and your team prioritize maintenance and improvements for the physical golf course?

We don't really know yet because we're still so young, and the team is just as busy working on the initial maintenance infrastructure and baseline elements as they are on the actual conditions of the golf courses. For example, the greens on the Kids' Course, which only opened in September of 2024, were constructed in a very different manner than the greens on the big course. So, our agronomy and maintenance teams will have a much better sense of how

the Kids' Course is coming along from a sustainable maintenance perspective when temperatures rise in the spring and the grass begins to grow again.

But what they want more than anything is for the course to play as the designers intended. That means lots of tightly mown areas around greens and native grasses that are intimidating, but not so treacherous you'll lose a golf ball in them. It also means continuing to identify those spots on the course where water might be more of a pain than others. It's a learning process for sure, and quite frankly, one that I am ill equipped to describe!

17. You have assembled a staff that have come from near and far. What kind of traits do you look for in building your team?

As someone with zero background in golf course development, the traits I needed more than anything were experience and generosity. Everybody says they want to hire the best and brightest, but to do that you need to be willing to invest heavily in talent, and I think we've done that, not just at the leadership level, but across the board. The resulting team is one that I have full faith in, a group of individuals who I can trust to tell me the good, the bad, and the ugly. Given the scope of our project and my glaring lack of knowledge about development, that honesty has paid huge dividends. And no egos were injured along the way.

The second trait I stumbled on as key to Old Barnwell's future was generosity. To live up to the previously described tagline of *for all who love it*, we needed to build a culture that was welcoming to **everyone** who stepped foot onto the property. Creating culture is a tall order in any situation, but we had the benefit of building it from the ground up. And the easiest way to succeed in building culture is to hire a team who represent that ideal culture in their daily lives. And so we hired people who are kind. We hired people who want to be a part of something a bit different. The result has, so far, been a fantastic success. But we have many hires that remain ahead of us, and with each additional team member comes another opportunity to stray from our north star. So, we are mindful that culture is a living, breathing thing that needs to be tended to regularly.

18. You carefully watch other clubs or management teams in hospitality. What are some traits of management teams at clubs/courses/sports facilities you admire?

First and foremost, I admire a place that has happy employees. My experience managing sales teams in my previous life tells me that a happy employee is one who is generally treated well and has ownership over their role. An employee who has autonomy is usually one who will take greater pride in their work. And an employee who is proud of the work they do will strive to get better on a daily basis. It's a virtuous cycle that must begin with leadership.

I had the opportunity to return to the Bandon Dunes resort on the coast of Oregon last year after not having visited since 2001. I was absolutely gob smacked by the genuine and friendly nature of everyone who works at the resort – from Bob "Shoe" Gaspar (the octogenarian "director of outside happiness" who greets every group) to the men and women serving coffee in full rain gear at halfway houses stretched across their many golf courses. The word "spectacular" is a word that fails to do justice when describing the golf courses at Bandon Dunes. But I've had the good fortune of playing other "spectacular" places, and none of them have had the effect on me that Bandon did last year. In my opinion, the best way to elevate an experience at a great golf club is to hire the best people and give them a long leash to do what they do best.

19. Some estimates put hours on golf simulators as far exceeding hours on actual golf courses. Is this good, bad, or neutral for the growth of golf?

It's undoubtedly good in my opinion. The more people who are exposed to the game, the better its chances of surviving in a world of so many alternative activities – the tyranny of choice is real! As someone who has almost no experience hitting into a simulator screen, I'm learning just how integral that experience is for golf clubs to provide these days. It keeps members happy on rainy days. It helps instructors create instant feedback for their students. And, perhaps most importantly, it's a way for beginners and youngsters to play the game of golf without the burden of exorbitant pricing or huge time commitments.

I think those who fear that simulators or Top Golf will eventually reduce the number of players on green grass golf courses don't fully appreciate what the

outdoors brings to the experience of golfing. Sure, treadmills are and will likely always be popular. But most people will always prefer to walk, run, or hike outside on a beautiful day. I think the same is true for golf.

20.If you were to start over, what would you do differently?

There's not enough space in the world for me to answer this question in a deservingly detailed manner. I would do many, many things differently. But that's only because I have the experience to know what went wrong and what didn't, which outcomes could be improved, and which ones couldn't, no matter how much money or time we threw at them.

I realize this is not the answer you're looking for, but one of the things I'm most proud of in this entire endeavor is the general approach we took from the beginning. From day one I had a good grasp of my limitations and lack of experience in this realm, which meant finding the right people to work with. People I could trust to do what they do best without me interfering. I asked a lot of questions along the way, and when given different choices at key junctures in the process, I made several decisions I regret. But I don't regret for a minute keeping my nose out of the decisions I had no business being a part of.

The big question is whether I'll be able to maintain this approach as we continue to expand the club and its community of members. After working on this for five years, I now know just enough to think I know a lot, and I can already feel myself wanting to be a part of conversations I avoided when we built the first course. We recently started the planning process for the second 18-hole golf course, and I find myself wanting to voice opinions in situations where I previously knew my opinion shouldn't be considered! Will I make better decisions when presented with different options by our leadership this time around? I hope so. But I better let the folks who know this world far better than I do be the ones who are presenting me with those options.