Golf Demand Is Not the Strategy Anymore

Part 1 of Golf's Reinvestment Era

The Demand Story Is Real

In 2025, the National Golf Foundation reported that **48.1 million Americans played golf** across on-course and off-course formats, including **29.1 million on-course golfers**. *(Source: National Golf Foundation, Golf Industry Facts)*

That is a strong number.

But to us, the more important question is not just how many people are touching the game.

It is where they are finding it, how they are experiencing it, and whether the facilities serving them are being built to last.

Golf was not always easy for me to access growing up. I found my way into the game through people, relationships, and opportunity — the same things that still make golf matter beyond the scorecard.

That is why this conversation cannot stop at participation numbers.

Golf facilities are not just inventory in a market report.

They are the places where people discover the game, come back to it, bring their families, build relationships, compete, learn patience, and stay connected to their communities.

And those places do not stay strong by accident.

Demand Is Not Readiness

The industry has spent a lot of time talking about demand, and for good reason. Demand is bringing people back to the game, introducing new players to different formats, and giving many facilities room to think bigger than they may have been able to think a few years ago.

But demand is only one side of the story.

The more important question now is what facilities are doing with that demand. Are they turning it into a better experience? Are they using it to make smarter capital decisions? Are they improving the path for new golfers to come back a second and third time? Are they addressing infrastructure while the market is strong enough to support investment?

That is where the conversation gets more serious.

A healthy market does not automatically create a healthy facility. It can create the conditions for one, but only if the decisions underneath are sound.

So maybe the question is not just whether your facility is benefiting from demand.

Maybe the better question is:

Are you listening to what your market is saying?

The Market Is Asking for Golf in More Ways

That question matters because the market is not speaking in one voice anymore.

For a long time, golf facilities could think about demand in a fairly traditional way: rounds, memberships, outings, leagues, lessons, and events. Those things still matter. They always will.

But the demand showing up now is more layered.

The USGA's 2025 Golf Scorecard showed nearly **15 million 9-hole scores posted in 2025**, the fifth consecutive year of record 9-hole score posting, with 9-hole scores up more than **46% since 2020**. The same report also showed more than **290,000 scores posted at short courses** across more than **470 short courses nationwide**. *(Source: USGA, 2025 Golf Scorecard)*

That data matters because it tells us something about how people are fitting golf into their lives.

Some golfers are asking for access. Some are asking for flexibility. Some are asking for a better beginner pathway. Some are asking for practice environments that feel less intimidating. Some are asking for technology. Some are asking for shorter formats. Some are asking for a place that fits their family, their schedule, their budget, or their season of life.

That is the part we think facilities have to take seriously.

The market is not simply saying, "We want more golf."

It is saying, "We want golf to meet us in more ways."

That does not mean every facility should chase every trend. In fact, that is probably where a lot of mistakes will be made.

The better facilities will not be the ones that try to copy every project they see somewhere else. They will be the ones that understand what their own market is asking for, what their property can actually support, and what investments will create lasting value instead of temporary excitement.

That is where reinvestment gets serious.

A simulator bay may be the right answer for one facility and a distraction for another. A short course may unlock new players in one market and make no sense in another. A clubhouse improvement may create real value if it changes how people use the facility, but become expensive decoration if it does not. An irrigation project may not be exciting to market, but it may be the most important investment the facility makes.

This is why listening matters.

Demand tells you people are interested.

Your market tells you what kind of facility you need to become.

Reinvestment Is Not the Same as Spending

That is why we think “reinvestment” is the right word for this moment.

Reinvestment is not the same as spending. Spending can be reactive. Spending can be cosmetic. Spending can chase whatever project is getting attention in another market.

Reinvestment should be more disciplined than that.

The numbers underneath the industry make that clear. USGA guidance has estimated that a new irrigation system can cost roughly **$3 million to more than $5 million**, depending on location and complexity. *(Source: USGA, Water Conservation Playbook: Irrigation System Maintenance)*

USGA has also noted that labor can account for **more than 70% of many maintenance budgets**. *(Source: USGA Green Section, Labor HYA: An Easy Way to Help You Match Expectations and Staffing)*

Those are not small line items. They are operating realities that shape what a facility can promise, what it can maintain, and what it can afford to become.

That is why the order of decisions matters.

A facility may need a better practice experience, but it may also be carrying irrigation risk. It may want a new amenity, but the labor model may already be stretched. It may be considering simulator technology, but without programming, staffing, pricing, and a clear use case, the project can become expensive square footage instead of a revenue engine.

That is the difference between spending and reinvestment.

Spending asks, “What can we build?”

Reinvestment asks, “What problem are we solving, and what has to come first?”

That is the discipline we think this era is going to demand.

When Urgency Starts Making the Decision

This is where the next phase gets uncomfortable.

The pressure to move is real. Industry commentary heading into 2026 points to a market that remains strong, but also more disciplined and less forgiving. Demand is still there, but operators are also dealing with rising expectations, cost pressure, technology decisions, labor realities, infrastructure needs, and customers who have more ways than ever to spend their time and money. *(Source: Golf Inc., The State of Golf Operations: 2026 Outlook)*

When that is the environment, action feels easier to justify. Boards want to see progress. Owners want to capture the opportunity. Municipalities want to show public value. Members and guests want visible improvement. Vendors are ready with solutions, and the market is full of examples that make movement feel urgent.

There is nothing wrong with urgency when the direction is clear.

The problem is when urgency starts making the decision.

That is where many facility plans become vulnerable. A project can look right on the surface and still be weak underneath. It can photograph well, attract attention, and create excitement, while the operating model, infrastructure needs, staffing reality, or sequencing logic remain unresolved.

That does not mean facilities should stop investing. Quite the opposite.

It means investment needs to be tied to a deeper understanding of what the facility is trying to become and what has to be true for that investment to hold up over time.

That is the difference we think matters most right now.

The strongest facilities will not be the ones that simply move first or spend the most. They will be the ones that understand the relationship between the market they serve, the assets they already have, the constraints they are carrying, and the experience they are trying to create.

That kind of clarity does not slow progress down.

It protects it.

Why We Call This Golf's Reinvestment Era

That is why we believe golf is entering a reinvestment era.

Not because facilities are spending money. Golf has always had cycles of renovation, repair, expansion, contraction, and renewal.

What feels different now is that the decisions are becoming more connected — and the dollars behind those decisions are significant. The National Golf Foundation has estimated that U.S. golf facilities spent about **$3.1 billion** over roughly the past year in significant discretionary capital investments to enhance their offerings, including work tied to the course, clubhouse, infrastructure, technology, amenities, and more. Importantly, that figure does **not** include necessary or mandatory expenditures such as replacing aging irrigation systems or cart fleets. *(Source: National Golf Foundation, Golf's Multi-Billion Dollar Investment)*

That is the part that should make people in the industry pause.

Because if billions are already moving into discretionary improvements before required infrastructure is even counted, then the real question is not whether golf is reinvesting.

It is whether that reinvestment is being aimed correctly.

A facility is not just deciding whether to renovate a clubhouse, replace irrigation, add technology, improve practice, rethink programming, or modernize the guest experience. It is deciding what kind of facility it needs to become for the market it serves.

That is a different level of responsibility.

A project is no longer just a project. It is a signal.

It signals what the facility believes about its golfers, its community, its operating model, its future revenue, and its role in the game.

That is why isolated thinking becomes dangerous in this environment. A facility can make several individually reasonable decisions that do not work together. It can improve one area while weakening another. It can create a better first impression without solving the repeat-visit problem. It can add capacity without improving flow. It can create excitement without improving resilience.

That is the difference between a good-looking plan and a durable one.

The next wave of golf investment should not be judged only by how much gets built, how new it looks, or how much attention it creates when it opens. It should be judged by whether the pieces work together and whether the facility is stronger after the excitement fades.

That is the higher bar of this reinvestment era.

And it is why this series matters.

What Is at Stake

When that much capital is moving through the industry, the stakes get higher.

Good reinvestment can strengthen a facility for the next decade. Poorly aimed reinvestment can consume capital, create new operating burdens, raise expectations the facility cannot consistently meet, and leave the underlying problems untouched.

That should concern anyone responsible for a golf property.

A project can be popular and still not be durable. It can be exciting and still not solve the real constraint. It can be approved with good intentions and still create pressure later because the staffing model, maintenance reality, infrastructure condition, or customer behavior was not fully understood before the decision was made.

This matters because golf facilities are not easy to replace.

Once a facility weakens, the path back can be difficult. Deferred maintenance compounds. Customer experience slips. Staff gets stretched. Capital gets harder to justify. Community confidence erodes.

And when a course closes, the loss is rarely limited to the operator.

A community loses access. Juniors lose a place to learn. Leagues lose a home. Families lose a place to spend time together. Older players lose a place to stay active and connected. The game loses another entry point.

That does not mean every facility can be saved by sentiment. The business still has to work. The operating model still has to make sense. The capital plan still has to be realistic.

But it does mean the decisions deserve more discipline.

At Tech2Turf, this is one of the reasons we care so much about this work. We are not interested in reinvestment for the sake of activity. We care about reinvestment that gives facilities a better chance to remain useful, financially sound, and connected to the people they serve.

Respect the tradition of the game, but do not hide behind nostalgia.

Listen to the market, but do not chase every signal.

Invest in the future, but make sure the facility is stronger after the excitement fades.

That is the kind of reinvestment golf needs now.

What Comes Next

That is why we are calling this series **Golf's Reinvestment Era**.

The first article is about the broader shift: demand is strong, capital is moving, and the facilities that win the next phase will be the ones that reinvest with discipline.

The rest of the series will go deeper into the decisions underneath that shift: municipal modernization, irrigation and water planning, amenities that earn their square footage, and technology that needs an operating model instead of just a purchase order.

But before any of those decisions work, one thing has to be right.

The sequence.

In the next article, we will go deeper on one of the biggest reasons reinvestment gets off track: sequencing. Because in golf, the project is rarely the hard part. The order of decisions is.

Each topic in this series deserves its own conversation.

But they all come back to the same idea:

Golf does not need reinvestment that simply creates activity.

It needs reinvestment that makes facilities stronger.

Stronger for the golfer.

Stronger for the operator.

Stronger for the community.

Stronger for the future of the game.

The demand is real. The opportunity is real. The capital is moving.

The question now is whether the decisions are strong enough to match the moment.

At Tech2Turf, that is where we want to be useful: helping golf facilities think clearly before they commit, so the next wave of investment does more than build new things. It helps preserve the places where the game is learned, played, shared, and passed on.

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